

**Ben Blackburn Racing submission
on the Australian Government's
Phase out of live sheep exports by
sea: Consultation Paper**



Wednesday, 5th April 2023

Phase out of live sheep exports by sea: Consultation Paper

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
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Emailed to: livesheep.phaseout@agriculture.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

PUBLIC SUBMISSION

I am extremely pleased to provide this public submission in response to the Australian Government's *Phase out of live sheep exports by sea: Consultation Paper* for public consultation with feedback sought until Wednesday 31st May 2023.

This discussion paper has been developed as part of a consultation process to assist the Australian Government. An independent panel will lead the consultation process, chaired by former chief executive of the Murray Darling Basin Authority and senior public servant, Phillip Glyde.

The panel also includes Western Australian agriculture expert Ms Sue Middleton, former Federal ALP Minister and former Labor Member for Lingiari in the Northern Territory, Mr Warren Snowdon, and former RSCPA CEO Ms Heather Neil.

Specifically, the expert independent panel driving this process is seeking input on:

- How the Australian Government should phase out live sheep exports by sea.
- The timeframe to implement the phase out.
- How the phase out will impact exporters, farmers and other businesses across the supply chain.
- Support and adjustment options for those impacted by the phase out.
- Opportunities, including options to expand domestic processing and increase sheep meat exports.
- Any other general comments.

The National Farmers' Federation policy concerns

The National Farmers' Federation notes the Minister's announcement that an Independent Panel will be established to advise on the proposed phase out of live sheep export.

The NFF stands with 24 other peak agricultural bodies and farmers across Australia in opposing the ban on live sheep export and does not support any process which aims to phase out the trade.

Cancelling an entire industry based on activist demands sets a dangerous precedent.

What industry will be next?

To wrench a key export market out from the Australian economy will have far reaching impacts on jobs and livelihoods in Western Australia, as well as our economy, agricultural systems and trade relationships.

Our customers in the Middle East rely on the live sheep trade – and a range of other products – to put food on the table. We saw in 2011 the damage it can do to a bilateral relationship when you pull the pin on a country's food supply. It risks compromising Australia's reputation as a reliable supplier of high-quality food and fibre.

We are an export orientated industry – if Government starts cancelling export markets this send a seriously bad message to farmers.

The policy is based on an outdated campaign by welfare activists that ignores the significant animal welfare improvements made through heavy investment in new infrastructure and practices. The industry has been open and transparent about the reforms it has made.

We need to be clear headed about what this actually means for animal welfare outcomes. If Australia steps back as a global leader in this trade, others with lower standards stand ready to take our place. A phase out would be a serious retrograde step for animal welfare.

We stand by our principles that wiping out an entire industry is not the answer and will not engage with the newly announced panel whose ultimate goal is to shut down live sheep export.

We're not interested in discussing a phase out with the government. We're ready to talk about the facts of the industry's positive welfare improvements, and the immense downsides for the economy, animal welfare, and our trading relationships if this activist-led agenda becomes a reality.

The Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia policy concerns

The Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia condemned the announcement and said it's time the minister started listening to WA producers instead of eastern states animal rights activists.

"Minister Watt's plan to ban WA live sheep exports comes from an ALP election commitment that arose as a result of a scorecard created by animal rights organisation Australian Alliance for Animals, and not through any consultation with Western Australian sheep farmers," Pastoralists and Graziers Association president Tony Seabrook said.

“For the minister today to stand up and tell Western Australian sheep farmers, who are the nation’s largest exporter of sheep, that they should accept the views of those who are not only opposed to the live export trade, but to all livestock production, shows a dazzling lack of understanding of the importance of the live sheep trade, and is an insult to those whose livelihoods depend on it.

“Live sheep exports are the cornerstone of the WA sheep industry, which contributes over \$1.4 billion to the Western Australian economy,” he said.

Mr Seabrook said there are about 5250 sheep farm businesses in Western Australia that employ tens of thousands of workers – including stockmen and women, shearers, transporters, feed suppliers, veterinarians, and stevedores.

“Shutting down this trade will only see a collapse in sheep values and would decimate producers and regional communities in WA.

“Any suggestion that the trade is on its last legs is misleading, as the only decline that the trade has suffered over the past three years comes not from a lack of demand from our overseas customers, but from high livestock prices, limited supply, COVID, and reduced shipping timeframes due to the current moratorium on exports during the northern hemisphere summer months,” he said.

“It is clear that Minister Watt and his eastern states animal activist supporters have little, if no understanding of the importance of the live sheep trade to regional Western Australia.

“And asking Western Australian sheep farmers to partake in this Clayton’s consultation process is insulting and akin to asking them to partake in their own execution.”

The Australian Livestock Exporters’ Council (ALEC) opposes live sheep phase out

The Australian Livestock Exporters’ Council (ALEC) opposes the Labor Government’s moves toward banning the live sheep trade in Australia, following recent comments in Senate Estimates by the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Senator the Hon Murray Watt. ALEC CEO, Mark Harvey-Sutton said the phase out policy was unwarranted and risked causing economic problems for Australia’s producers and their overseas trading partners.

“This policy is unnecessary, and we do not support it.”

“This is an industry that has reformed and supports thousands of workers in rural Western Australia and this move would threaten 3000 jobs within the supply chain locally.”

“This reform has been recognised by the Western Australian Premier and the Western Australian Agriculture Minister. The improvements the industry has made have been recognised and acknowledged by Minister Watt.

“There is clear evidence of this reform and Western Australian producers must be mortified that their industry is being dictated by an east coast agenda.”

“Stating that an industry should be shut down due to past social licence challenges is an alarming precedent that should concern every agricultural industry in Australia.”

“The industry’s performance has been outstanding and speaks for itself. The policy is unnecessary and fails to acknowledge the importance of the industry to the livestock supply chain of people and our trading partners,” said Mr Harvey-Sutton.

Forecasts for 2023 indicated that the industry would grow and that demand for high quality sheep meat will continue in emerging markets.

“The industry continues to grow and quite simply it cannot be transitioned into other markets or industries. Competition in the market is important for growing Australia’s national sheep industry which yesterday recorded it highest numbers in 15 years – reaching 77 million.”

“Those sheep need markets and our trading partners continue to have a preference for livestock ahead of chilled and frozen meat. It is natural that they look for alternatives given the uncertainty this policy creates, but our industry knows that their preference remains to import Australian livestock due their quality and disease-free status.

“To say otherwise fails to recognise the dynamics of those markets and Australia’s longstanding partnership with them.

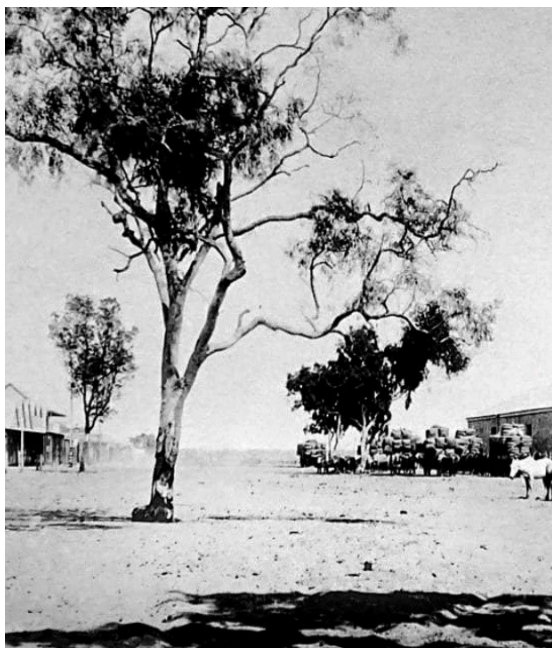
“We continue to have a constructive working relationship with Minister Watt and we acknowledge that the Minister has given a commitment to make a decision based on science and evidence and in consultation with industry. We will be presenting evidence that the policy is unnecessary and that a transition to other markets is not possible in the forthcoming consultation process.”

The formation of the Australian Labor Party

The 1891 shearers' strike is credited as being one of the factors for the formation of the Australian Labor Party. On the 9 September 1892 the Manifesto of the Queensland Labour Party was read out under the well-known Tree of Knowledge at Barcaldine following the Great Shearers' Strike.

How on earth can the Federal Minister for Agriculture Senator Murray Watt argue that the Labor Party in 2023 is still the ‘friend of the workers and shearers’ when he and the Albanese Labor Government are seeking to implement a set of proposals that will decimate WA farming communities, shearers, livestock agents, trucking contractors, hay contractors and bring down the curtain on the live sheep industry in Australia?

The brazen hypocrisy and double standards in that logic when you consider the history of the shearing industry in creating the Labor Party in Australia is pretty breathtaking.



Shearers Strike Monument

The WA Farmers reaction to the flawed policy proposal by Labor Agriculture Minister Murray Watt

The WA Farmers President, Mr John Hassell, sent a letter to Minister Murray Watt after the announcement asking him to reconsider.

In the letter, Mr Hassell said that a ban would negatively affect 3,000 people associated with the industry, which he said is worth about \$85 million a year.

“We think that the government’s live export policy was a dumb commitment,” he wrote.

“If there was ever a case study of improvement in an industry, then the live exports is it.”

Mr Hassell is himself a sheep farmer is about to export 1,000 sheep to the Middle East.

Group Letter signed by 25 Australian farming organisations opposing the proposed live sheep exports ban

A letter signed by 25 Australian farming organisations has warned Agriculture Minister Murray Watt that the Federal Government’s policy to ban live sheep exports is “a red line that cannot be crossed” and would be a dangerous precedent that would encourage activist pressure to mount against other legitimate agricultural industries.

Signatories to the letter include the National Farmers Federation, the Australian Livestock Exporters Council, Sheep Producers Australia, and the Australian Lot Feeders Association.

The Chairs and Presidents of dozens of peak livestock bodies, national farming organisations and state farming organisations have come together to release a letter to

emphasise that a policy to ban live sheep exports is not just a livestock export issue, but a “whole of sector” issue.

“We will never support legitimate agricultural industries being closed for political reasons, or to suit activist agendas,” the letter said.

While recognising the live sheep industry has had its challenges, it also recognises the industry has undertaken reforms which have been recognised internationally and also by the WA premier and Agriculture Minister.

“If the live sheep industry is phased out in spite of its reform and positive animal welfare outcomes, which can all be evidenced, then an appalling precedent will be set, one which alarms all of us,” the letter states.

The farming groups warn that banning the trade would set a “a dangerous and concerning precedent” for the government to prioritise activist agendas over recognising the overwhelming evidence of reform and improvement.

“Activists will not stop at just the live sheep industry. Any accession to their agenda undermines all of our industries and the work and investment we have collectively made to Australia being a world leader in animal welfare.”

The industry’s removal would penalise farming families and international customers, while costing approximately 3000 jobs in Western Australia.

Minister Watt has said he will be conducting a consultation process shortly about how the policy to transition out of live sheep exports will be implemented.

In the letter, the groups advise the Minister that they will continue to oppose the Australian Government policy to phase out live sheep exports and continue to advocate for a change in this policy based on evidence and contemporary experience.

“As far as we are concerned, the industry must be viewed on its current standing and improvements, not stuck in the past, and it remains a vital part of the Australian agricultural sector.”

LiveCorp

Livestock exports from Australia are highly regulated, and all the processes from the farm through to the point of slaughter have to meet – or exceed – international animal welfare standards.

Australia is the only country in the world that insists every facility that receives its livestock, such as feedlots and abattoirs, must first meet Australian regulations. Livestock exporters must provide training in areas such as animal handling and slaughter practices before a facility is approved, as well as ensure infrastructure is suitable, and carry out regular audits to maintain those standards.

LiveCorp works with the industry to support ongoing improvements in animal health and welfare, supply chain efficiency and market access, through investments

in research, development and extension (RD&E) and support in the countries that receive Australian cattle, sheep and goats.

Transporters

The Australian Livestock and Rural Transporter's Association is a federation of six State associations, representing around 850 transport businesses. It includes owner-drivers, small fleet operators and large fleet operators. The number of transport businesses heavily reliant on live sheep exports is only a small proportion of the total number of these businesses. In their submission to the discussion paper, LiveCorp advised that livestock transporters are specialised with purpose-built sheep trailers.

Industry groups state that road transport operators in Western Australia are highly dependent on the live export trade, averaging 25–50% of business revenue. According to LiveCorp, on average, the sale of sheep from farm to the live export trade requires 3.5 movements. In comparison, sheep sold to a WA abattoir would be moved just 1.5 times.

Sheep Producers Australia

As the Sheep Producers Australia said in its January 2022 submission to the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's *'Review of live sheep exports by sea to, or through, the Middle East during the Northern Hemisphere summer'*:

"Sheep Producers Australia is the voice on issues that affect Australian sheep production businesses. As the successor entity to Sheepmeat Council of Australia which formed in 1978, Sheep Producers Australia is the peak industry organisation representing the sheepmeat sector.

"The Australian sheepmeat industry has a long history of producing safe, quality sheepmeat for customers around the world.

"The industry continues to strive through strategic planning and collaboration to be the leading supplier of lamb and sheepmeat to global customers to meet growing demand for our premium product, the success of which has seen the total off-farm meat value grow to over \$7.2 billion.

"Sheep production is an integral part of Australia's regional landscape and communities, with lamb and mutton production contributing 8% to the total farm value of \$66.6 billion estimated in 2019-2020.

"Sheep Producers Australia works daily to enhance the industry's productivity, profitability and sustainability by representing all producers to industry decision-makers and stakeholders.

"Sheep Producers Australia and its state-farming organisation members share a commitment with the Australian Live Exporters' Council (ALEC) and its exporter members to high animal welfare standards that underpin Australia's reputation as a trusted supplier of high-quality livestock.

"The live export sector is essential to farming systems across Australia and is of critical importance to Western Australian producers."

“It plays a significant role in underpinning lamb and sheep prices by providing increased competition, is complementary to wool and boxed meat production systems and satisfies the needs of important markets that cannot be met through the export of chilled and frozen sheepmeat. It will continue to be a significant sector in Australia’s post-pandemic economic recovery and contribute positively to the overall value of Australia’s red meat industry.

“The live sheep export trade is the prime outlet for young and aged Merino wethers once pasture quality declines in spring and plays a crucial role in improving farm system resilience.

“The flexibility to sell into the live export market at any time throughout the year enables farm businesses to be more productive; it gives farmers the confidence to run optimum stocking rates, hold stock for longer during difficult seasons and manage pasture more effectively.

“The moratorium on the live sheep trade removes an important risk management tool available to sheep farmers in the sheep regions of Australia that experience a strongly Mediterranean climate with highly variable seasons and rely on access to this market during poor seasons.

“The Middle East is a region with particular strategic importance for the sheep industry. Our markets for Australian live sheep in the Middle East remain integral to the success of Western Australian sheep producers.

“The extant regulations present challenges for Australian producers to compete in an evolving global market, and for exporters to supply these markets economically and competitively.

“Our customers are being forced to procure livestock from alternative destinations such as South Africa, Romania, and Spain, which do not have equivalent animal welfare safeguards.

“For these reasons, Sheep Producers Australia supports a viable and successful live export trade to the Middle East”.

Pastoralists and Graziers’ Association of WA president Mr Tony Seabrook met with Senators Raff Ciccone, Slade Brockman, Jacqui Lambie, Pauline Hanson, David Pocock and the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, Madeline King’s senior staff in Canberra last week.

Mr Seabrook said the core reason for engaging with the federal independents was that if voting on any phase-out legislation was tight, they would be important to stop it proceeding.

“We’re not going to give up,” Mr Seabrook said.

“It was very clear from my meetings that there is not a great deal of support amongst the Senate crossbench for Labor’s decision to ban the live sheep trade.

“There are also divided opinions within members of the ALP over their election commitment to phase out the live sheep trade,” he said.

The Federal Government has promised not to end the trade in this current term, and Mr Seabrook said he discussed with the Labor Members how they could drop the phase-out policy from the ALP's policy platform.

"That's probably the best avenue we've got, because if they take it to the next election, then it will be really hard as we try to sway every single independent in the Senate to block it."

"There are a lot more pragmatic members in the Labor party than you might think."

He said a change in government at the federal level would be "nirvana", but he doubted that was a realistic perspective.

Mr Seabrook said senators Slade Brockman, Jacqui Lambie and Pauline Hanson were fully supportive of live sheep exports and recognised the importance of the trade to regional producers, regional families, and regional communities.

"They were also acutely aware that once live sheep exports are banned, the next target will be the live cattle trade."

"Senator Pocock was also very receptive and willing to accept an invite to come over to WA and meet with sheep producers who will be negatively impacted by the Albanese Government's disastrous decision to end this vital, humane, and legal trade," Mr Seabrook said.

Mr Seabrook said PGA would meet the "assassination squad" (independent panel) but only to avoid being labelled as unwilling to engage.

"We are going to go along and we are going to say 'We are only here for one reason: to advise the minister that after due consideration it is not possible to shut the trade'."

"That's it, end of story, finished, final; we are not prepared to discuss any issues around what you see as being the way you are going to wind it up, we're not even going to go there," he said.

Mr Seabrook said the panel is meeting with each body separately – "the old divide and conquer" – and all groups would be saying the same thing:

"Do not allow yourself to be dragged into this, because the minute they've got even the slightest agreement from you, they will exploit that."

Mr Seabrook said contrary to the comments made by Agriculture Minister Murray Watt, "this is a trade that is not dying and one that cannot simply be replaced with onshore processing."

"The only decline that the trade has suffered over the past three years comes not from a lack of demand from our overseas customers, but from high livestock prices, limited supply, and reduced shipping timeframes due to the current moratorium on exports during the northern hemisphere summer months."

"In Western Australia, the live export industry is a major buyer of our livestock, supports regional businesses, and provides much needed regional jobs, which in turn strengthens our regional communities," he said.

"Phasing out live sheep exports will only serve to destroy regional jobs, regional communities, regional businesses and hardworking Western Australian regional families."

In another extension of the campaign to retain the trade, live export lobby group Livestock Collective released a video on LinkedIn portraying the stages in shipping sheep live to Middle Eastern markets.

The Livestock Collective live sheep and cattle vessel tour in Fremantle was recently attended by several peak industry bodies to show their support for live export.

“The importance of the tour this week was to demonstrate how the live sheep and cattle industries work well side by side and are both upholding the highest standards of animal welfare.

“A strong live export market allows producers to specialise and produce sheep tailored to the market and correspondingly attract premium returns for their product.

“Live exports puts competition into the market, adding competition to domestic demand and supporting farm gate returns whether it’s sheep or cattle – one aspect of live export can’t be stopped as it will be detrimental to the other,” said Mr Geoff Pearson Livestock President.



WA Farmers President Mr John Hassell said that Labor’s insistence on shutting down the trade was “disappointing” and “an insult to everybody in the country”.

“The Labor Party was founded on the shearing industry, and in my mind, they’re pissing on their foundations,” he said.

“Apart from the fact that we have solved all the animal welfare issues, shutting down the trade is not based on sound reason and robust debate, it’s based on animal activism.”

WA Livestock Exporters' Association Chair Mr John Cunnington accused the Minister Murray Watt of "turning his back" on the agriculture industry, saying the live sheep export sector had "done everything and more" that had been asked of it to reform.



"For a government to come and want to transition out of a legal, well-functioning industry that asks nothing of the government is just incredible," he said.

"We're disappointed to hear that he's proceeding with this consultation period because we don't believe that a transition is a right approach, and we maintain that the policy is wrong.

"For the Minister to turn his back on a united agricultural industry is a very scary thought for producers and the agricultural supply chain around Australia."

Mr Cunnington was less critical of the panel itself, saying its membership appeared to be "balanced". "I think there was probably a better animal welfare expert that they could have used that doesn't have such a clear agenda as the RSPCA, with Heather Neil. But to be honest, I don't think there's realistically a panel that anybody would ever be happy with," he said.



The Australian Live Exporters' Council Chief Executive, Mr Mark Harvey-Sutton said the ban was "not a done deal yet" and the industry would continue to fight for its survival.

"I think the real concern for agriculture is that every single industry has had some form of social licence challenge, so who determines that you should be shut down?" he said.

"Particularly when an industry has recognised its challenges, it's addressed them, it's exceeded them, and it's become the best-performing industry in the world within that sector.

"Yet, because of this intangible concept of social licence, and for political expediency, it's been determined that it needs to shut down. That's why everyone's worried."



Mr Murray Frangs, General Manager of WA's biggest live sheep exporter, Rural Export and Trading WA, said that the policy was "confronting and devastating".

"The industry has spent years and years updating and improving the operating practices to the satisfaction of the government, the regulator and the general public," he said.

"It proudly stands as the best practice industry that is far superior to anywhere in the world — and well above any domestic requirement as well — but this is all ignored.

"Contrary to popular statements by the government, the industry has actually earned and maintained its social licence, and while the data and science validate our very existence, it is conveniently overlooked in favour of narrow political alliances and historical considerations.

"Now they want to backflip on years of improvement and operation in a legal and robust industry by just throwing it all under the bus in favour of a few votes."



Mr Steven Bolt, a merino breeder from Corrigin, two-and-a-half-hours' drive east of Perth in WA, sells surplus sheep to the live export industry and in 2019 he argued that it was vital it remained open.

"Most businesses that run sheep in Western Australia will use live export at some point and it's an important part of many businesses to have live export there and that market for those sheep," he said.

"They take a specific type of sheep and take them up to the Middle East and the Middle East highly values the product that comes out of Western Australia."

In 2017, WA was responsible for 86 per cent of Australia's live sheep exports.

"It contributes some \$250 million to the economy and without that it'll really change the balance of farming enterprises in Western Australia," Mr Bolt said.

"We'll lose shearing teams, we'll lose livestock agents, trucking contractors, hay contractors.

"Quite a significant impact will be felt by our regional communities."



Pilbara feedlot owner Paul Brown, who served one term as a Nationals MP in WA's Legislative Council, was angered that the panel's mandate appeared to indicate a ban was a foregone conclusion.

Mr Brown said the live sheep industry could contemplate action similar to that launched in response to federal Labor's 2011 ban on live cattle exports to Indonesia.

"I'm sure they'll be looking at what legal avenues they'll be able to take," he said.

He believed the Labor Government's position was the "thin edge of the wedge" for Australia's live export industries.

"When it comes to policy, it's all about the social licence," Mr Brown said.

"And eventually the inner-city votes will determine live export of cattle has a diminishing social licence, and they'll come knocking at our door in the live cattle industry as well next."

With his business also providing services to sheep producers in WA's south, Mr Brown said he and his staff felt particularly exposed.

"It concerns me that myself and my staff are facing an uncertain future," he said.

"It's a business that's been operating for the better part of 20 years."

Supporting the red meat industry in Australia

In April 2022, the Australian Government announced a \$827,860 grant to help boost beef, sheepmeat and goatmeat exports to the Middle East, North Africa, and South-East Asia by supporting market expansion and promoting Aussie meat exports.

The Minister for Agriculture and Northern Australian, Mr David Littleproud said the grant would help provide the red meat industry greater security.

“This project will ensure the continued success of Australia’s red meat and livestock exports by maintaining and expanding diversified export markets,” Minister Littleproud said.

“The coming decade presents significant challenges in the industry’s export markets through competition, changes to market access requirements and consumer preferences.

“It is only the Liberal and National Government that will support the red meat and provide the framework so the red meat industry has the opportunity to grow.

“The focus will be on technical market access, trade facilitation and capturing and maximising opportunities to grow export volumes and values in key export markets.

“A cross-sectoral partnership of Red Meat Advisory Council (RMAC) members will use the funds to support and promote the uptake of an electronic paperless health certification system to high growth markets and draw their attention to Australia’s strong regulatory export system for halal red meat exports.

“A new cultural exchange program for young cattle producers will also build stronger international relationships and the development of a sheepmeat export strategy will support producers to better understand market requirements to maximise returns.”

Red Meat Advisory Council CEO Alastair James said the Australian Red Meat Market Expansion Program would help capitalise on recent trade wins, such as the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, which sees sheep meat tariffs of 30 per cent eliminated, and the Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement.

“Our Red Meat Market Expansion Program will complement and build on Meat and Livestock Australia’s three new locally engaged business development consultants in South-East Asia and the Middle East/North Africa,” Mr James said.

“The grant will help reduce non-tariff trade barriers and increase understanding and recognition of the value of Australian red meat exports as we aim to double sales by 2030.

“The electronic certification rollout by Government, supported by industry programs will reduce the burdens to business including the loss of shelf-life waiting for paper certification.”

Fast Facts:

- **The Australian Red Meat Market Expansion Program is a partnership between the Australian Meat Industry Council, Cattle Council of Australia, and Sheep Producers Australia.**

- **Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) was also awarded a \$1.7 million ATMAC grant to expand export opportunities in Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Vietnam in 2021.**
- **The Australian Red Meat Industry will also benefit from a \$550,000 grant promoting premium Australian food and wine exports to South Korea and South-East Asia.**
- **\$19 million in grant funding has been committed through ATMAC, a component of the Australian Government's Agri-Business Expansion Initiative (ABEI).**

The reasons why sheep live export should stay and grow include:

Animal welfare

We are proud that Australia has some of the highest animal welfare standards. Australia is the only country that regulates animal welfare standards in other countries and invests in training and auditing to ensure those standards are met. If we lose market access, we can no longer have a positive global influence on animal welfare.

Contribution to communities overseas

Australian livestock supports communities overseas by providing food security and jobs. The demand for live animals is a complex international issue based on socioeconomics, religion, food security and sovereignty. Our animals help ensure families have safe, quality protein.

Regional Australia and Agriculture

Live sheep export is an important contributor to Australian agriculture and regional economies.

Removing it creates uncertainty for farmers and their families. It also impacts shearers, truck drivers, pelletmill workers, stock agents, industry professionals and regional business owners. This has detrimental flow on effects in local schools and sporting clubs.

It is what the Australian community wants

Independent research on community sentiment by Voconiq does **NOT** show that most people want to ban the trade. It does show there are areas the industry should continue to address and provide information.

The environment and sustainability

A strong sheep industry contributes to a more sustainable environment. The live sheep trade is essential for meeting carbon targets and managing land. Live export provides an important option for sheep, improving animal welfare and protecting our environment in our variable climate.

We can't replace it with domestic processing

The argument of replacement with more processing in Australia is flawed for many reasons. The sheep industry and local farmers in WA can't currently source the labour required for existing facilities. Australia having both a strong boxed meat and live animal export industry is synergistic for many reasons including market access and the flock and herd size.

Frequently Asked Questions About Animal Welfare include:

Are cattle and sheep looked after on live export ships?

Absolutely! There are strict regulations around the number and type of staff dedicated to looking after livestock on ships, and the welfare of the cattle and sheep is monitored both day and night.

All ships must have at least one LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson on board, and longer voyages will also have an Australian Accredited Veterinarian. They are supported by a number of competent stock handlers, and many of the ship's crew are there purely to look after the livestock.

The stock handlers and vets do several rounds a day to check on the cattle and sheep, and a crew member checks food and water through the night. Special 'hospital pens' are set up for animals that are injured or not eating, and there are medical supplies on board to treat common illnesses.

What food and water do cattle and sheep get on live export ships?

There is usually food and water waiting in the pens on the ships when the cattle and sheep are loaded, or it is provided shortly afterwards.

Water is provided constantly, with most ships having a desalination plant on board. The troughs are checked and cleaned several times a day.

Fresh food is distributed at least twice a day. It comes in pellet form, along with some chaff or hay. Sheep and cattle have a chance to get used to the feed before boarding the ships, as they spend several days in a feedlot called a Registered Establishment.

Many cattle and sheep actually put on weight during the voyage.

I see cattle and sheep on trucks – is it like that on live export ships?

No, it is quite different. Livestock are usually on trucks for relatively short periods. Being close together helps them to stay on their feet around corners, given they can't 'hang on'. It also stops them lying down, which could see them injured.

There is a lot more room on a ship, which provides the cattle and sheep with enough space to move around, get to the feed and water troughs, and lie down when they want. Live export ships are often called 'floating feedlots' as it is a similar set-up.

I hear a lot about heat stress in sheep. What is it?

Animals are at risk of heat stress when they become too hot and cannot lower their body temperature, which can affect their tissues and organs. If it goes on too long, they may end up with heat stroke, which can be fatal.

There are temperatures where cattle and sheep are more comfortable than others. Like humans, some feel heat and cold more than others do, so it is hard to put an exact temperature on when there is a risk of heat stress.

Sheep don't really sweat because of their wool, but still use evaporative cooling. As the temperature increases, they breathe faster to let more air pass over the blood vessels in their mouths, which draws the heat from their bodies. If it keeps getting hotter, they may open their mouths and even hang out their tongues – much like a dog panting.

Livestock export ships have huge ventilation systems to keep the air moving through the animal pens and help to draw away heat. Industry also manages the risk of heat stress in other ways, such as putting fewer sheep on a ship in hotter weather and changing their feed as temperatures rise so they're not producing as much internal heat through digestion.

What does the industry's Vet Handbook say about heat stress thresholds?

Some groups have quoted the live export industry's *Veterinary Handbook for Cattle, Sheep and Goats* when talking about the temperature at which heat stress occurs.

The handbook says that "Wet bulb temperatures approaching or exceeding 30 degrees Celcius indicate environmental conditions that favour development of heat stress in small ruminants and preventive measures should be considered under these conditions".

It also says research "suggests that sheep may be slightly more resistant to heat load and that wet bulb temperatures approaching or exceeding 30°C may be used as thresholds that favour development of heat stress for sheep."

In both cases, it does not mean that sheep will experience heat stress at a particular temperature – just that the risk is higher. Like humans, some animals feel the heat more than others, so it is hard to put an exact number on being 'hot' versus 'suffering heat stress'.

The temperatures mentioned in the handbook are an early warning of conditions that may lead to heat stress, so measures may be taken to mitigate the risk and monitor the health of the animals.

How long does it take livestock to reach different countries?

Livestock are exported from Australia to four main regions worldwide – South East Asia, North East Asia, the Middle East, and South-East Europe.

Voyages to South East Asia are the shortest, as it is closest to Australia. The majority of the livestock exported there are cattle from northern Australia to Indonesia, which may

spend as little as four days at sea. The average is around 8 days*, counting countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

Trips to North East Asian countries such as China and Japan take around 17 days* on average. Part of this is because the livestock are more likely to come from southern ports in Australia. Ships to the Middle East also generally come from southern ports such as Fremantle in Western Australia. Trips to Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) take around 18 days* on average.

Voyages into South East-Europe, to countries such as Turkey and Egypt, take closer to 25 days*.

Cattle, sheep and particularly goats are also exported on planes – either in the hold under passengers, or on specially chartered flights. This may put them at their destination less than 24 hours after leaving the farm in Australia.

**National livestock export industry sheep, cattle and goat transport performance report 2018.*

What is the difference between a short-haul and long-haul voyage?

A voyage is defined by the regulator as 'short haul' if it takes fewer than ten days. It is 'long haul' if it lasts ten days or more and becomes an 'extended long haul' voyage if it lasts 31 days or more.

Most trips to South-East Asia, which make up the bulk of the voyages, are short haul. Long haul voyages have additional requirements, including daily reporting of conditions on the ship to the regulator, more bedding for cattle and more veterinary supplies per animal. Extended long-haul voyages also must have an Australian Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) on board.

Do you fly livestock overseas on planes too?

All goats exported from Australia travel by air, as do many cattle and sheep. However, air freight accounts for just 3-4% of the total number of livestock exported. Livestock predominantly travel with other goods on cargo planes, or on specially chartered flights.

The livestock are loaded in small groups into specially crafted wooden crates to keep them safe and secure during the flight and are generally at their destination within less than 24 hours.

There are more details outlined in several of the info graphics provided by LiveCorp attached to this public submission.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a contribution through this public submission on the Australian Government's *Phase out of live sheep exports by sea: Consultation Paper*.

Mr Ben Blackburn
Managing Director
Ben Blackburn Racing



Wednesday, 5th April 2023

Phase out of live sheep exports by sea: Consultation Paper

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601

Emailed to: livesheep.phaseout@agriculture.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

I am extremely pleased to provide this public submission in response the Australian Government's *Phase out of live sheep exports by sea: Consultation Paper* for public consultation with feedback sought until Wednesday 31st May 2023.

This discussion paper has been developed as part of a consultation process to assist the Australian Government. An independent panel will lead the consultation process, chaired by former chief executive of the Murray Darling Basin Authority and senior public servant, Phillip Glyde.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read and consider this public submission and I give permission for this to be included on the website with the other public submissions received as part of this process.

I look forward to your reply.

Kind regards,

Mr Ben Blackburn
Managing Director
Ben Blackburn Racing

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