

Submission to the independent panel investigating the phase out of live sheep exports by sea

Dear members of the independent panel

My name is Bruce Harris. I live in [REDACTED] I am making this submission because I believe the live export trade subjects sheep to unacceptable conditions and treatment while at sea and at the countries of destination. Because of this I believe the trade should be halted as soon as possible.

In making this submission I want to specifically address the time-frame for the implementation of the phase out of live sheep exports by sea.

The Labor Government has committed to ending the trade, but not during its current term of government. This is not good enough. To ensure the live sheep export trade ends as soon as possible, legislation needs to be introduced to Parliament and passed before the next federal election.

Legislating the phase out of the live sheep export trade before the next federal election would give certainty to industry and the public, even if the actual implementation occurred at a later date. Industry would be able to plan in the knowledge that the phase out would become a reality. The public would be reassured that an unpopular and inhumane practice would come to an end.

I am making this submission with the knowledge that the majority of Australians want to see an end to the live sheep export trade.

In May 2022, RSPCA Australia reported that polling it had commissioned found that among a representative sample of 1,500 Australians more than 2 out of 3 (67%) of Australians want an end to the live sheep export trade.

According to RSPCA Australia ⁽¹⁾, "live sheep export is cruel, unpopular and unsustainable".

"Live sheep that are exported from Australia suffer," RSPCA Australia reports.

"Subjected to extremely hot temperatures that exceed their physiological tolerance, many sheep suffer from heat stress. Sheep are exposed to poor handling conditions, and stocking densities that prevent them from comfortably lying down to rest at the same time or easily accessing food or water. Confined to pens where they eat, sleep, urinate and defecate, live export sheep are also exposed to the risk of disease and infection due to stocking density and high ammonia levels resulting from urine and faeces.

"Not only do sheep suffer on live export voyages, but their welfare is often further compromised at the destination. Sheep may be subjected to extremely hot temperatures for weeks without shade and little access to food and water at destination ports and feedlots. And finally, subjected to slaughter practices that do not meet Australian standards, because Australian standards cannot be enforced overseas and pre-slaughter stunning is not mandatory in the Middle East."

Australia risks becoming an animal welfare laggard if the live sheep export trade is not phased out as soon as possible. New Zealand has banned all live animal exports. In April, a federal court in Brazil made an order to stop the export of live cattle from that country.

Australia needs to act as soon as possible to halt the live sheep export trade. Australians do not want to see another live export trade disaster. Since the year 2000 alone we have witnessed the MV Cormo Express incident (August to October 2003), the mistreatment of Australian sheep in Kuwait (December 2010), the rejection of sheep shipment by Kuwait and Bahrain (September 2012), the death of 4,000 sheep on the Bader 3 during a voyage from Adelaide and Fremantle to the Middle East (January to February 2014), the death of 3,000 on the Al Messilah during a voyage from Fremantle to the Middle East in July 2016, the death of 2,400 sheep during a voyage of the MV Awassi Express from Fremantle to the Middle East in August 2017.

Australians have been dismayed and at times shocked by the news reports of these and other incidents. The filmed footage of the conditions endured by the sheep onboard the MV Awassi Express was stomach-churning and stands out as an indictment of the live sheep export trade.

I believe the only way to stop the mistreatment of sheep is to end the live export trade as soon as possible. I also believe that the majority of Australians hold this view. Legislation to phase out live sheep exports by sea needs to be introduced to Parliament and passed before the next federal election. This would give certainty to industry and the public, even if the actual implementation occurred at a later date.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Harris

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1. <https://www.rspca.org.au/blog/2022/live-sheep-export-cruel-unpopular-and-unsustainable>