

## Phase out of live sheep exports by sea.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation process.

I believe the phase out of live sheep exports should happen in this term of government. This is a significant animal welfare issue that needs to be addressed now. This will end the suffering of thousands of animals and give farmers the certainty they need.

## Community concern

The 2018 Futureye report, “Australia’s Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare” commissioned for the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources surveyed 1,531 respondents.

- 95% viewed farm animal welfare to be of concern
- 91% wanted reforms to address this
- **66% wanted live exports banned**

In that year, any public confidence or even indifference to the export trade was shattered when images of what was really happening made their way to commercial television. Viewers saw panting, distressed animals, standing, lying and dying in pens of excrement - 2,400 sheep died of heat stress. The rest suffered intolerably cruel conditions.

I believe the live sheep trade does not have the public’s support. The industry has failed to meet community expectations and has therefore lost its social licence to farm.

Because of this the trade should be stopped in this term of government, producers should be compensated and assisted to diversify into other areas of production.

## Economic viability

The Federal Government’s recent ***“Review of live sheep exports by sea to, or through, the Middle East during the Northern Hemisphere summer”*** refers to some of the trends and future projections for the live sheep trade from our major exporter, Western Australia.

- interstate transfers overtook live sheep exports in 2019-20, for the first time in at least a decade, with the trend expected to remain in 2020-21
- live export sector provided around 30% of the turnoff options with this ratio declining to less than 20% in 2021
- In 2020-21, live sheep exports fell by 45% to 602,000 head
- Removal of the Qatar subsidy on sheep meat from imported Australian sheep locally slaughtered, came into effect from 31 December 2020. This change reduced demand for live sheep into the region and resulted in no sheep being exported to Qatar in 2021
- live sheep export volumes have declined outside of the prohibition period, indicating a **decline in the trade as a whole**

While some of those factors may fluctuate depending on demand, the overall trend is downwards. It’s time to end an industry that is becoming less viable each year while attracting increasing public

opprobrium. It is a cruel and unjustifiable trade. The ALP promised to end it if elected. Then, the time frame shifted to “not in this term of government”. Electors like me do not go to the polls to decide two-terms. The government has made much of its intention to keep its election promises. This is one of them. Why the delay?

## **The true cost of exporting live sheep**

There is a strong economic argument that domestically slaughtered sheep are worth more to the Australian economy than sheep exported live.

But the bigger question on cost/benefit, relates to what is supposed to be one of the government’s prime objectives – animal welfare.

It is impossible to significantly reduce the heat stress sheep will suffer on long-haul sea voyages.

Regulatory steps taken to mitigate heat stress – pen size, airflow etc – are not effective because all animals, not just sheep, cannot dissipate or shed heat load if temperatures are consistently high. This can only happen if temperatures fluctuate, decreasing in the short term (eg. overnight temp reductions compared to diurnal highs) and affording recovery time through longer cool periods.

That does not happen for the thousands of animals in pens on the decks of rolling ships. Their basic animal welfare needs include:

- Access to nutritious feed/ clean fresh water
- Ability to exhibit normal behaviours like lying down and moving freely
- Relief from extremes of weather
- Absence of fear

And then of course there is the inhumane treatment and cruel deaths these animals suffer when they meet their destination of slaughter. An end to live exports should NOT be delayed.

While the trade continues, our reputation as a fair, compassionate nation is harmed and our farmers are seen as cruel, irresponsible and unethical in their practices.

Sheep farmers who send their animals for export should be compensated for any proven loss. That compensation should be calculated based on projected future trends in the industry (trends are downwards). Diversification should be fully supported to ensure a future for those farmers. This should include sustainable future industries and plant-based options.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this consultation process. I wish you well in your deliberations and ask you to put the welfare of the animals above short-term economics.

Yours sincerely,

Debra McCoy

May 30, 2023

