

PHASE OUT OF LIVE SHEEP EXPORTS BY SEA Submission

I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission. My family and I have followed with horror the cruelty associated with live sheep exports for more than 20 years. The only reason we voted Labor was because it pledged in 2018 to end live sheep exports prompted by the 2017 disaster when 2400 sheep died from heat stress on an [REDACTED] ship – and it was not the first time. The then Coalition Minister Littleproud said he was ‘gutted’ by the images he saw. The litany of cruelty over decades is diabolical. But they are only the cases we know about, because brave whistle-blowers have filmed them. No doubt the real mortality toll and suffering over many years is much higher.

How should the government implement the phase out of live sheep exports by sea?

The phase-out must start and end as soon as possible. The enabling legislation must be passed and implemented in this term of government, as the Labor government did with new superannuation taxes and other new policies.

Why?

If live export continues, sheep will continue to suffer, and Australia’s reputation will continue to suffer. Many civilised countries like New Zealand and Brazil have ended the trade very quickly, because of its cruelty to sentient beings. Since Covid most live export ships leave Australia without an independent observer on board to monitor compliance with animal welfare standards (ESCAS), and this is another reason why sheep are still in danger. Eleven export ships have sailed since January 2023.

The time frame to implement the phase out –

So, it must be no surprise to live exporters that the end is coming. The phaseout must be short and sharp – beginning in this parliamentary term to give those involved in the trade certainty.

For example, in September 2022, the New Zealand Parliament passed a bill banning live export of animals by sea. It took effect within a year - in the following April 2023. The New Zealand government was keen to quickly limit damage its reputation and brand following numerous tragedies and loss of life, 2 both human and animal. Soon after Brazil, a large competitor to Australia in the live trade, halted live exports immediately after Federal Court Judge Djalma Gomes ruled it necessary on welfare grounds.

How the phase-out will impact exporters, farmers, and other businesses across the supply chain

After decades of bad publicity about the trade, those involved cannot claim they were caught unawares about the trade’s end. Many farmers have left it already and found other farming methods, including cropping. ESCAS has failed to prevent heat stress occurring; yet ESCAS restrictions were responsible for Saudi Arabia refusing to import sheep after its implementation in 2012.

Expansion of domestic abattoirs - New opportunities are arising with abattoirs gearing up to absorb the sheep previously exported alive. For example, [REDACTED], one of Australia’s largest sheep processors, is spending up to \$80million million to upgrade its plant. [REDACTED], who is also a farmer, recently purchased the [REDACTED] Motel as a starting point to house workers, and he hopes to build a mining-type village to attract more. This will also provide excellent employment opportunities. See link below:

[REDACTED]

Cropping etc - Those who previously exported their sheep live can transition to join farmers doing cropping. The plant-based alt-protein industry is booming and has been adopted by major US companies around the world, including [REDACTED], the biggest meat producer. So, opportunities abound with help from Austrade, government and farming organisations, as well as [REDACTED] (see link below). Cocktails, using spirits, are booming both here and globally. Real progress, for example, is being made trialling agaves to produce 'Australian agave spirit' like Mexican tequila - in WA (by [REDACTED]) as well as in NSW and Queensland. [REDACTED] in Victoria has just won two gold medals at the San Francisco World Spirits Conference. At present the company is using imported Mexican agave spirit for its 'Chilli Lime Agave Spirit'. See links below, where the ABC reports:

'It is not just in the US where spirits made from the agave plant are taking off. Australia is the third biggest consumer of the drinks after Mexico and the US'. 3 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-23/echuca-distillery-agave-wins-san-francisco-world-spiritscomp/102363458>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-23/andrew-forrest-expands-brick-house-station-agrifoodbusiness/13079300>

<https://theshout.com.au/agave-spirit-hopes-for-western-australia/>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61783637>

<https://www.foodfrontier.org/>

Support and adjustment options for those affected –

My family, who are taxpayers, do not believe any support should be given to live export companies such as [REDACTED], which has been before the courts, and others such as [REDACTED], which often has problems with ship breakdowns. Most recently one of its ships was laid up in Darwin port - with 1800 cattle aboard - due to 'major engine failure'. The stock were finally unloaded after 6 days. (See link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2023-05-22/liveexport-vessel-unloaded-darwin-nine-eagle-breakdown/102376610>)

Wealthy foreign companies operating in Australia should not receive financial support or assistance from Australian taxpayers. They are directly competing with Australia's exported chilled, boxed sheep meat in Middle Eastern countries. For example, Kuwaiti company [REDACTED] has built a state-of-the-art abattoir for live Australian sheep in Kuwait; it slaughters them and sells chilled meat around the Gulf. Kuwait and others have been enjoying the value-add on sheep to the detriment of Australian sheep meat producers and exporters.

Australians involved in the trade, who can demonstrate 'real' loss, should be able to apply for support from the taxpayer to transition out.

In conclusion, my family is not alone in wanting an end to the trade. We saw that a recent independent RSPCA poll found two-thirds of respondents wanted live export to end. I was interested to read that 70 per cent of WA respondents, from where most of the sheep are exported, want the trade to end.

Charles Davis and family

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