



The Honourable Murray Watt  
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

**RE: Phase out of live sheep exports by sea**

Dear Minister Watt,

Healthy Food Systems Australia (HFSA) is an advocacy group dedicated to promoting a food system that is healthy and sustainable for all people and the planet, through holistic and systemic policy actions. Our vision is for a food system that promotes public and planetary health, and is healthy, sustainable and equitable for all Australians. We believe that this transformation can only occur with a coordinated shift at all levels of the supply chain, including the broader, interconnected elements of the food system.

HFSA strongly welcomes the government commitment to phasing out live export of sheep by sea. Live export has a long history of being inhumane and immensely cruel to animals. There has been a significant lack of transparency in the routine monitoring practices, which is seemingly only enhanced in the advent of public exposure or scandal. Evidence shows that ruminant livestock, which are naturally land-based animals, experience significant suffering and stress for the duration of their sea transport, which can be up to three weeks for long distances [1]. Indicators of this suffering and distress include mucosal irritation, and pulmonary inflammation due to ammonia build-up from having to urinate in densely packed transport spaces, heat-related stress [2], lack of access to food and water [3], and lack of access to resting space to lie down [4]. Recent studies have also shown that cattle and sheep experience kinetosis (motion sickness) during these long voyages [5]. In addition, zoonotic disease risks associated with live export include pustular dermatitis, pneumonia, salmonellosis, as well as conjunctivitis [4]. Furthermore, there is evidence of aggressive or violent handling of the animals both within-country transport and at their final destinations and slaughter practices at those destinations often do not align with Australian animal welfare standards.

The government's decision not to extend the ban on live export by air transport and to cattle exports both by sea and by air is concerning. HFSA argues that a more decisive and inclusive approach should be adopted to prevent animals from being exposed to the deplorable conditions associated with current live export practices. Excluding air transport as a means of export does not effectively safeguard animals from mistreatment upon reaching their final destination, and like sheep, cattle also endure significant suffering during the prolonged journey of shipping exports. While we acknowledge that the industry may require a transition period to adapt to alternative trade practices, it is important to emphasise that the cruelty associated with live export has been widely recognised for decades. Consequently, ensuring the safety and welfare of animals should be given significantly greater priority.

We answer the government consultation questions below:

## **Mechanism**

- 1) *How should the government implement the phase out of live sheep exports by sea? Why should the government use this approach?*

The government needs to set clear targets leading to a complete and permanent cessation of the practice. This process will require:

- 1) A clear timeline with a strict and final cut-off time for live export;
- 2) Consultation with stakeholders – including those proximate to the export industry, but also animal welfare organisations and other stakeholders advocating for healthy and sustainable food systems;
- 3) Development of alternative trade strategies that don't involve live animals, but do not have unintended consequences that may just shift cruel practices to elsewhere in the supply chain;
- 4) Enhance animal welfare regulations – including strong monitoring and evaluation processes, and appropriate punishment for non-compliance;
- 5) Communication and education – engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including industry stakeholders, the public, and affected communities throughout the process. Raise awareness as to why this phase-out is necessary, the importance of animal welfare, and benefits to transitioning away from live export; and
- 6) Develop a plan to extend this ban to other livestock animals and other transportation methods.

HFSA acknowledges that a 'phase out' (rather than immediate cessation) may be necessary to allow for a smooth transition and allow farmers and exporting partners to adjust their operations and explore alternative avenues for trade, mitigating the potential economic impact on these stakeholders whilst also leading toward a permanent and sustainable termination of live export. A phase out process will also allow for the implementation of robust animal welfare standards during this period, enabling enforcement of stricter regulation and to protect the animals that will be exported during the remaining live export period.

## **Timeframe**

- 2) *What is an appropriate timeframe to phase out live sheep exports by sea? What are your reasons for proposing this timeframe?*

HFSA advocates for a prompt transition away from live sheep export. Although certain stakeholders may favour an extended phase-out period to facilitate gradual adjustments, we contend that the detrimental impacts on animal welfare outweigh the benefits of protracted transition. It is our recommendation that the government swiftly undertakes necessary measures and engages in inclusive consultations to establish a sustainable and enduring shift away from live export, minimising potential repercussions. A transition of 2-5 years would be an appropriate transition period, however, a prolonged transition spanning several decades is unacceptable.

## **Impact and adjustment**

- 3) *Will you or your business be impacted by the phase out of live sheep exports by sea? If so, please provide details of the impact.*

N/A

- 4) *What will the phase out mean to you, your employer or employees, suppliers, customers, friends and family, and/or your community?*

HFSA believes that a phase out of live export by the Australian government will ultimately have a positive effect on the industry, the wider community, and our food system more generally.

Firstly, it will result in much needed and much improved animal welfare. The discontinuation of live export would significantly enhance the welfare of animals involved in the trade. By transitioning to alternative trade practices, animals would no longer endure the stress, confinement, and potential mistreatment associated with long-distance transportation.

Second, it would enhance the reputation of the Australian meat industry. The cessation of live export would contribute to improving the reputation of the Australian agricultural industry both domestically and internationally. Demonstrating a strong commitment to ethical treatment of animals aligns with growing consumer demands for responsible and sustainable food production, thereby bolstering trust and market competitiveness. This may also result in new economic opportunities.

Thirdly, it has a significant impact on environmental sustainability. Live export inherently entails considerable greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impacts due to the long-distance transportation involved. Shifting to alternative trade practices would reduce carbon footprints, contributing to environmental sustainability goals and demonstrating Australia's commitment to addressing climate change. This is also in alignment with global trends. Numerous countries are increasingly phasing out or imposing stricter regulations on live animal exports due to animal welfare concerns. By aligning with these global trends, Australia can maintain its reputation as a responsible and progressive player in the international trade arena.

- 5) *What barriers and/or constraints might there be for exporters, farmers, and other participants across the supply chain to transition away from live sheep exports by sea?*

HFSA acknowledges that efforts to transition toward more healthy, sustainable and equitable practices will need to account for the potential impacts on affected stakeholders. Farmers and export organisations may benefit from government support in transitioning away from live export mechanisms. Nevertheless, the scale and dominance of these live export practices have detrimental effects on livestock animals and members of the community who are deeply concerned for their welfare, thus we urge that the government minimises delay to the phase out as much as possible.

- 6) *How should supply chain participants be supported as they transition away from live sheep exports by sea?*

There are a range of support mechanisms that could be offered to affected stakeholders in supply chains, including financial assistance to adapt operations, assistance for infrastructure upgrades and incentives for business diversification. Furthermore, offering skill development and training to equip

them in transitioning to alternative trade practices and logistics management would likely be of value.

HFSA encourages the government to be widely consultative in this process, especially with stakeholders outside the industry, in order to account for any potential unintended consequences of policy change.

For example, decreasing live export of sheep may result in increased live export of cattle or increased export of chilled and processed meats. In response to market demands, the industry may be motivated to prioritise cost-efficiency in the production of these alternative products. This emphasis on cost-effectiveness might encourage a reliance on large-scale industrial agriculture methods, which are also recognised for their inherent cruelty towards animals.

7) *What would you or your business and/or other supply chain participants need to do to transition away from live sheep exports by sea?*

N/A

8) *How long do you think it will take for you and/or other supply chain participants to transition away from live sheep exports by sea?*

N/A

9) *What can be learnt from other countries that have ceased live sheep exports? What lessons can be learned from Australian states or territories that no longer export live sheep by sea?*

## **Opportunities**

10) *What opportunities should the government and/or industry pursue in the lead up to and following the transition out of live sheep exports by sea? (e.g., expanding domestic processing and value adding, increasing sheep meat exports, other)*

The government should look to successful examples overseas, whereby countries have been able to phase out their live export practices and simultaneously enhance the prioritisation of animal welfare in these industries. Some examples are New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden and Netherlands – each of these countries have either taken steps towards, or have already implemented a phase out of live export practices, recognising the importance of humane treatment of animals and aligning good practice with evolving societal values and expectations.

11) *What would industry participants need, or need to do, to take advantage of opportunities?*

N/A

12) *What are the barriers and/or constraints to pursuing opportunities?*

N/A

## **Conclusions and recommendations:**

HFSA supports the government commitment to ending the cruel live export of sheep by sea, and would encourage them to extend this to cattle and other livestock, as well as export by air. We promote a swift phase out of this industry and for the process to be consultative of a range of

stakeholders, including animal welfare organisations and those promoting healthy and sustainable food systems.

