

PHASE OUT OF LIVE SHEEP EXPORTS BY SEA

SUBMISSION SUMMARY

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As soon as possible - In this term of government and reasons for doing so

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Because of continuing risks to sheep welfare; to give certainty for all those in the trade; because the delay is fuelling confusion and misinformation in the media (with examples)

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(Examples of two WA companies, CMG and WAAMCO, already committing millions of dollars to WA meat processing facilities upgrades)

(d) Farmer transition to share in global boom in plant-based food production

(Food Frontier, Austrade and farmer group collaboration)

EMERGING OPPORTUNITY FOR WA FARMERS? 'Australian Agave Syrup' success story – agave croppers aim to satisfy booming world liquor demand with agave syrup for distilleries – this signals a rosy future for home market as well as export (with examples)

PHASE OUT OF LIVE SHEEP EXPORTS BY SEA

Submission

1. How should the government implement the phase out?

My family wants to see the phase-out begin in this term of government by immediately setting a start date and a finish date. As Senator Watt said, 'It is something we have taken to two elections and the Australian people have voted for ...'. The senator said live sheep exports had slumped in recent years and now represented only a fraction of WA's agricultural exports. Government figures show live sheep exports from WA fell to 498,789 head in 2022, down 12 per cent on the previous year. Australia exported 502,758 sheep in total last year compared with 2.3 million a little over a decade ago.

2. Why should the government use this approach?

Since January 2023, 11 sheep export ships have left. **The longer the phase out is delayed, the more sheep will continue to suffer**, the more Australian farmers' reputations will be besmirched, and the sooner Australia can reduce its carbon footprint associated with long distance shipping.

Sheep are in MORE danger than ever! It was reported in December 2022 that just 5 of 38 eligible export ships had Australian welfare observers aboard to monitor for cruelty and regulatory breaches of ESCAS. Most live export ships leave Australia without an independent observer on board to monitor compliance with these standards. (See links below) This is a broken promise to Australians after the images in 2018 of heat stressed sheep boiling alive. Even when all regulations are followed, sheep still suffer heat stress at sea and un-stunned slaughter if they survive the voyage. The old ships used for the trade are also of concern - a Perth-based Livestock Shipping Services (LSS) ship this month was docked with 1800 cattle on board for 6 days in Darwin, after major engine failure. This shows the unreliability of these aging live export vessels. This time it was cattle; but it could have been sheep en route to the far away Middle East. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/dec/15/live-exports-just-five-of-38-eligible-ships-had-australian-animal-welfare-observers>

[Live export ship Nine Eagle unloaded in Darwin six days after major engine failure - ABC News](#)

Uncertainty is fuelling confusion and misinformation.

Everyone whose income depends on live export - and the Australian public - deserve to know the start and end dates now. It can be no surprise to the live trade that an end date is coming. Labor began saying it would ban it in 2018. Uncertainty is creating false hopes for live exporters and Australians; it is generating misinformation and confusion that will continue into the next term of government unless definite dates are forthcoming. **For example**, Kuwait Livestock Transport and Trading Company's (KLTT) CEO, Osama Boodai, visited Australia in May and was

reported by the ABC as saying the Saudi Arabia market could reopen as early as next year, with a million more sheep a year being shipped. I rang and emailed Senator Watt's Canberra office for clarification but have had no reply. Regardless of whether it is true, it may encourage farmers to keep preparing sheep for live export, when they should be exploring alternatives to the live trade. Further, there are reports of farmers' talking of taking **legal action** – very stressful for them. See links below:

[Boost to WA's live sheep export industry on the horizon as Saudi Arabian market set to reopen - ABC News](#)

<https://www.sheepcentral.com/saudi-arabia-live-sheep-shipments-from-wa-possible-this-year/>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-03/live-export-ban-agriculture-minister-murray-watt-wa-legal-action/102050164>

Aware that this Independent Panel is right now exploring the 'how and when' of ending the trade, an **ABC Landline** reporter was invited to accompany an export ship for the FIRST TIME EVER! I watched the program last night. **I raise this as an example of continual conflict and confusion and muddying of waters in the absence of certainty about time frames for the phase out.**

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/programs/landline/2023-05-28/live-export---part-1:-an-exclusive-insight-into/102403796>

Although this voyage was touted as 'typical,' for me the sheep were far too crowded, the swell even knocked over the vet, and the thought of all those tightly packed sheep in the darkened pens (some for 24 days) was disturbing. If this is the best voyage the trade can present, the hotter May, September and October trips must be hell for both sheep and foreign workers alike. However, the purpose, no doubt, is to try to convince the city folk that life at sea is a mere cruise. Maybe some farmers think this 'typical' voyage is OK; I do not.

But this was not a typical voyage. Those with veterinary and/or farming knowledge can easily see the spin. To mention just a few of the 'gloss-overs' – the voyage occurred in January, **the coolest time in the Middle East**; high-speed boarding made it impossible to accurately check and remove unsound sheep; claimed sawdust in pens was seen only in the hospital pen, despite what the voiceover said; it was claimed to be a 14-day voyage, but factoring in loading and unloading time, the first sheep on and last off would have been 23-24 days on board! I was concerned to see that sheep necropsies in the lower decks were being stared at and smelt by penned sheep nearby. The rare autopsies on our farm were always done well away from stock, who become stressed by the sight and smells.

Vets Against Live Export (VALE) is compiling a detailed 'Fact Checker' of the program. (See link: <https://www.vale.org.au/blog>)

3. How other countries have phased out live export

In September 2022, the **New Zealand** Parliament passed a bill banning all live export of animals by sea, taking effect from April 2023. **Not much notice was given.** As well as the animal welfare risks, the New Zealand government was keen to stop the damage to New Zealand's 'brand'. **In Brazil** - one of the largest live exporting countries - Federal Court Judge Djalma Gomes ruled that live export from every Brazilian port be halted immediately due to welfare concerns. Our farmers are being criticised right now for poor animal welfare practices by the UK and EU. Poor animal welfare by farmers is being used as a bargaining tool in trade negotiations, so live export taints the reputations of all farmers, not just those involved in the trade.

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

This is not the first time the government has phased out or introduced changes to industries. And it won't be the last. So, farmers, drovers, transport drivers and everyone in the supply chain will be affected, as well as the wealthy live export companies. Below I list examples of phase-outs and disruptions in the dairy, fruit growing and timber industries

My experience informs me that many years ago our farming family would have seen the numerous whistle-blower evidence of cruelty in the trade, noted the public's overwhelming opposition to it, and stopped sending animals. In farming the ability to adapt to change is constantly present. I have lived through such transitions. For example, [REDACTED] upsets in the **dairy industry** and had to **diversify**. Sometimes cows were milked in winter as well as in summer, and the extra milk was sent to Melbourne. [REDACTED], once the state's largest specialty cheese factory - now closed. For better welfare and to broaden the farm's operations, we kept bobby (male) calves and ran them as steers for meat. The introduction and popularity of margarine caused further fear and stress.

After Australia joined the then Common Market, we witnessed [REDACTED] **orchardists** having to pull up acres of productive fruit trees, because their overseas market disappeared. Local fruit canneries closed, jobs were lost, and orchardists had to change their land use and/or find work elsewhere. They received little or no compensation in those days.

This month the Andrews government announced that **native timber harvesting** in Victoria will end by 1 January 2024, instead of in 2030 as previously advised. Short time frames like these, with government (read taxpayer) support if warranted, give people certainty; and they know where they stand.

5. Support and adjustment options for those affected by the phase out

(a) Why wealthy live export companies should not receive Australian taxpayer support

WA mixed enterprise sheep farms generate the bulk of their income from crops. Importers of WA live sheep, such as Kuwait, with its Al Mawashi \$70million state-of-the-art abattoir, benefit from value-adding the Australian sheep by killing them in Kuwait and selling the fresh or chilled meat to compete against Australian exported meat products in supermarkets around the Gulf. This means WA farmers are missing out on value-adding, and our workers have fewer employment opportunities in processing.

This is ludicrous when the Middle East is already Australia's largest export market for processed sheep meat products for both lamb and mutton - in both value and volume. Some wealthy foreign-owned live export companies have vertically integrated their businesses and own facilities in Australia as well as other countries. Thus, the trade will not remove the live exporters entirely from WA as some of them own and operate sheep meat abattoirs in the state. (Pegasus report, 2018). Emanuel Exports, which has been before the courts, and wealthy foreign export companies like LSS, RETWA (the Australian subsidiary of KLTT) and so on, can still engage in live exports in other regions. Therefore, they should not receive any support or compensation from Australian taxpayers.

(b) Australians – We agree with support for those Australians affected in the export supply chain if they can justify their case for getting taxpayer support.

(c) Expansion of Domestic Meat Processing is now underway in WA – CMG and WAAMCO

The redirection of sheep from live export to domestic processors will enable them to improve economies of scale in meat processing, making processed sheep meat products more price competitive. This will create new jobs for the unemployed or underemployed and will generate economic growth and a reduction in unemployment benefits. This will in turn relieve the burden on taxpayers and the savings can be directed to support farmers and others during transition.

It is already happening. It is timely to read in the media that WA sheep meat processors are undertaking new and costly developments right now, which will help farmers transition. A few examples below:

First, according to the CEO of **CMG**, a major WA meat processor, there is increasing demand for WA lamb and mutton. See link below with excerpts from the article, which state:

CMG chief executive officer Wayne Crofts said CMG remained optimistic about the increasing demand for Western Australian lamb and mutton, given its quality and proximity to key markets.

“However, live sheep exports have not impacted our market development historically, and we have relationships with growers and have plans to increase our ability to process lamb in WA into formats that our markets require around the world,” he said.

“We are mid-way through a **\$40 million expansion in Bunbury** that will give us greater export capacity and are developing plans to expand processing.”

██████████. It was founded in 1923 and is now Western Australia’s largest vertically integrated ... lamb ... business.

Mr Crofts said the government is seeking input from industry.

“We look forward to sharing our plans expansion in capacity and technology with them.

“We are working on additional support in skilled labour to assist in processing product, and the recent announcements on visa workers provide a real challenge for the meat industry in Australia,” he said.

“We required continued support from Austrade to grow market access and the recent UK announcement is a great example of that.

<https://www.sheepcentral.com/cm-g-optimistic-about-future-demand-for-wa-sheep-meat/>

Second, Katanning-based WA Meat Marketing Co-Operative, one of Australia’s largest sheep processors, is **spending up to \$80 million to upgrade** its plant. **WAMMCO** chairman, Craig Heggaton, who is also a farmer, recently purchased the Katanning Jumbuck Motel as a starting point, and he hopes to build a mining-type village to attract workers. He plans to build a worker camp, expand plant, and increase staff numbers. See link below:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2023-05-01/abattoir-plans-to-build-worker-camp-and-expand-operations/102279974>

(d) **Farmer transition to share in global boom in plant-based food production**

Means-tested support could be used to help farmers transition to plant-based crops – Alt Protein (alternative protein) is now a booming international industry. Just one example is major global food giant **Tysons, the biggest US producer of animal meat** by sales, which introduced its **first plant-based** products in 2019 - adding burger patties, bratwurst, ‘Italian’ sausage and ground “meat” made from **pea protein**.

Food Frontier (see link below) is an organisation that helps leaders in Australia and New Zealand understand the many emerging alternative protein industries and unlock their benefits. In 2020, together with NSW Farmers and the National Farmers’ Federation, Food Frontier announced the new national Future of Protein Forum bringing together traditional livestock, plant, and alternative protein producers to meet the projected demand for Australian protein. See media release and Farmer Magazine extract in the link below:

<https://www.foodfrontier.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Future-of-Protein-Forum-Media-Release-August-2020.pdf>

<https://thefarmermagazine.com.au/future-of-protein-forum-unties-food-producers/>

Food Frontier's website (see link below) states that it is:

Strengthening pathways for engagement across the supply chain: We are delivering valuable insights to farmers interested in diversifying their crops, ingredients makers considering the growing demand for domestically produced protein ingredients, and Australian and New Zealand businesses seeking to bolster their exports, particularly into Asian markets. [My emphasis]

Food Frontier's supporters include Agriculture Victoria and Blue Horizon. Its collaborators include, to name a few, Austrade; Grains & Legumes Nutrition Council; Alternative Proteins Council (including Nestle); and Australian Food Service Advocacy.

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

An exciting new plant product possible for WA farmers – 'Australian Agave syrup' - provides syrup for distilleries and has a rosy future - and parts of WA have a suitable climate for agave growing. A possible transition for farmers?

There is currently very high demand here and around the world for alcoholic spirits, especially gin and tequila, the latter being made from agave syrup. Many Australian companies and distilleries are trialling and supplying agave spirit. See links below:

Queensland - [REDACTED] - "A strange spiky new crop might start popping up around north Queensland soon, if current trials in the Burdekin continue to amaze researchers."

[Agave trial crops could be expanded in the Burdekin - ABC News](#)

WA [REDACTED] - A cattle station in the Gascoyne region of WA is vying to become one of Australia's first agave spirit farms. **Andrew Forrest is trialling agave, hay and sweet potatoes**

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2022-12-19/harvest-road-to-produce-agave-spirit-at-brickhouse-station/101783596>

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

Queensland – [REDACTED] – See BBC link below for following states:

"The **Queensland agaves**, all 500,000 of them, are being grown by Australian spirits company Top Shelf International (TSI). It first started planting them last year...

To optimise growing conditions for the plants TSI is **collaborating with horticulturalists from Adelaide University**, and it has also received **a research grant from the Australian government**.

... Mr Fraser adds that the agave plants are not too fussy. "The plant is really resilient, like it's really sturdy. It can grow on the side of a concrete highway."

NSW - [REDACTED] - 'The Beales' agave spirits are currently being sold throughout Australia, and they won a silver medal at the 2021 London Spirits Awards'. They have received advice from Mexican agave growers.

The BBC link says: 'There are other plantations in **New South Wales** and **South Australia**'.

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

Echuca Distillery in **Victoria** has just won two gold medals at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. Currently the distillery uses imported Mexican **agave syrup**, but perhaps in a few years' time it might be using 'Australian agave syrup! <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-23/echuca-distillery-agave-wins-san-francisco-world-spirits-comp/102363458>

Conclusion

My family voted Labor because it promised to end live sheep exports. After seeing sheep being loaded onto ships at Portland in Victoria many years ago, my farmer mother was so disgusted she never bought sheep meat again.

A recent independent opinion poll commissioned by the RSPCA found that more than two thirds (67%) of respondents wanted an end to the live export trade, regardless of where they lived. Western Australia, which produces and exports most of the sheep in the trade, had the highest level of opposition at 70%. Ending live sheep export by sea in this term of government will end sheep suffering and uncertainty. To quote Minister Watt it is 'the right thing to do'.

Jan Kendall [REDACTED] (May 2023)