

Submission for the consultation process by for the phase out of live sheep exports by sea

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Australian Government's commitment to phasing out live sheep exports by sea during the 2022 election campaign as part of its Plan for Strengthening Animal Welfare. Thank you for providing all Australians with the opportunity to have a say in the consultation process of this very important policy, as a member of the community who has had significant interest in this issue for many years, I am very pleased to have the opportunity provide input to the Australian Government's policy to phase out live sheep exports by sea by making this submission into the consultation process.

A phase out of this trade has been long overdue following a numerous incidents and many stories highlighted by the media since 2003 showing graphic footage of the suffering and cruelty faced by animals, including sheep, being transported by sea to other countries. Thank you to the current government for recognising the majority of the Australian peoples concern about the treatment of sheep during the export process and taking action to phase out live sheep exports by sea.

Unfortunately it has taken 20 years for our government to finally act and I believe that this industry has had plenty of warning that the phase out has been coming, this has been demonstrated by the recognition by industry that the animal cruelty faced is completely unacceptable and the significant reduction in the reliance on this trade in recent years. Therefore there is no excuse for those in this industry to indicate they have not been forewarned and the phase out of live export of sheep should commence immediately with a timeframe for the ban set as soon as possible and not delayed till the next term of parliament. I will explain the reasons why my proposal is reasonable, sensible and shows the Australian Government is truly committed to this ban, as promised prior to being elected to government, within my submission.

It was disappointing to read that of all the 12 questions raised in this consultation paper not one asked any questions regarding the welfare of the sheep and the need for the phase out and ban to happen as quickly as possible from here on given that any further delays will only result in ongoing suffering for those animals still being exported by sea. It is clear that that from the Australian Government's perspective, this part of this consultation process is actually focussed only on how to delay the phase out and ban for as long as possible with no regards to the concerns of the ongoing animal welfare issues suffered by the sheep by ensuring this policy is implemented in a timely manner.

I have therefore decided to answer some of the questions put forward in the consultation paper within this written submission and also to highlight the reasons why animal welfare should also be at the forefront of how and when this policy is put in place.

Mechanism

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

The phase out should commence as soon as possible. If a timeline is set now for the ban this will give certainty to all industries impacted on the ban and the ability to put in place changes that work within the policy settings.

For example, a timeline for the ban could be 1 July 2026 with the phase out approaches and actions commencing from 1 January 2024. This would allow a phase out period of 30 months for industry and other related businesses to make the necessary adjustments to their business activities to work with trading partners on how they will be continuing trade within the industry.

During this period government should also consider how best to ensure the animal welfare of live sheep being exported by sea will continue to be done through monitoring and enforcing the trade during the phase out period. The purpose of the phase out is to ensure that animal welfare standards are of the highest level, this cannot be done if we continue to export sheep by sea. The government cannot wait until the next term of parliament to set these timeframes as they may never occur if another government is elected in.

Timeframe

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

Please refer to response in question 1 above.

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.

I do not have a business, however, as an advocate for the bans on live animal export (including sheep) over the past 10 or more years I will be significantly disappointed if the phase out and ban does not occur in a timely manner. This industry has been profiting from animal cruelty for too long and we have been aware of the torture and cruelty the animals being exported by sea which has been evidenced time and time again for 20 years now. It is time to put in place a policy now.

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

The phase out will mean that I and all other members of the Australian community will be able to hold our heads high in the knowledge that we, as a nation, have acknowledged that sheep are sentient beings and not just products to be treated cruelly for profit. If we do not ensure policy to phase out and ban live sheep export by sea is done expediently (that is within this term of this parliament) our country runs the risk of not putting this policy in place, or worse, it doesn't happen at all and the Albanese government will lose its social license for not progressing this policy as promised before it was elected.

Australian businesses will be able to continue to sell sheep product within Australia and overseas. More jobs within Australia will be created through processing sheep within Australia. But more importantly we will be able to focus our businesses on the growing requirement for more sustainable and ethical products e.g. plant based and cell based meats, which will deliver better environmental, health and animal welfare outcomes and significantly contribute to Australia's commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

- 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?

According to an article by Farm Weekly in 2019, there were 32 licensed live sheep exporters by sea in Australia, with two companies making up 50% of exports. Taking this into consideration and given the decline in numbers of sheep being exported since 2019 it would appear that the 2 largest companies should by now be more than prepared for the phase out of live sheep exports and I am sure have been setting their radar on other more profitable business opportunities. Farmers and other supply chain participants will be minimally impacted given that the majority of the sheep produced currently for live export will continue to be managed and processed within Australia.

According to the Western Australian Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development website, in 2019, 1.1 million sheep were exported from Australia. The value of these exports was A\$143 million, a reduction of 43% when compared to 2017 due to the restrictions imposed from mid-2018. Western Australia contributed 97% of the live sheep exported from Australia in 2019.

The key products of the Western Australian sheep industry are wool, sheep meat (lamb and mutton) and live sheep. The Merino (bred for wool) is the most common breed of sheep in WA, making up 80% of the state's flock. At around 12.4 million sheep, the WA flock turns off between 4.5 and 6 million sheep and lambs for meat and live export as well as 65 million kilograms of greasy wool (primarily for export markets) annually. BY my calculation this would equate to around only 11% of WA's sheep stock actually going to live export and only 3% of the rest of the nation's sheep stock going to live export.

A report from the Guardian in March 2023 indicated that the majority of live sheep exports from Australia are run through two foreign-owned companies that operate out of Western Australia.

This is not significant and therefore supports the argument that live sheep exports can be phased out and banned as soon as possible with little disruption to farmers, employers and the live export industry in general as the small numbers of animals bred for this industry is negligible and will continue to be processed here in Australia resulting in the need to create jobs associated with the sheep industry.

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

In the report by the Guardian in March 2023, the Minister for Agriculture, Mr Murray Watts, was quoted as saying "I'm not sure that we necessarily are facing a situation where farmers will lose their business or go out of business". He further suggested that any issues around compensation, structural adjustment etc can be dealt with through the consultation process. I am inclined to agree with the Minister, for many reasons pointed out throughout my submission, there should be a smooth transition to the phase out and ban of live sheep export by sea as long as the policy is put in place as soon as possible giving a reasonable timeframe to transition any structural adjustments. Refer to my response to question 9 for further recommendations on reasonable timeframes and the need to have the policy and timeline put in place within this term of parliament.

The best way the Australian Government could support the supply chain participants within Australia's live sheep export industry is to ensure that the phase out and ban on live sheep exports policy is put in place as soon as possible, that is during this term of parliament to give certainty to all participants in the supply chain and provide whatever support is needed to commence planning as soon as possible. Other than this, I don't believe it will be necessary for government to provide additional support during the transition period for the reasons stated in my response to question 5 above.

- 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?

As a member of the Australian community I believe that government policy and legislation is the only thing that community now wishes to see from government to ensure the phase out of live sheep export.

- 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?

As a member of the Australian community and participant in the supply chain as a consumer and as stated previously in this submission, I believe that a transition time of 30 months from implementation of the policy on 1 January 2024 would provide ample time for all those involved in the supply chain in Australia to transition away from live sheep exports by sea. A Bill could be put forward to parliament in early 2024 for the phase out of live sheep export by sea with a timeline of 1 July 2026 for the ban to be put in place.

- 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?

In September 2021 the New Zealand (NZ) Government introduced a Bill to ban sea exports of some live stock (including sheep) under the Animal Welfare Act Amendment Bill 1999. The Bill included the phase out of live export by sea cattle, deer, sheep, and goats by prohibiting the issuing of these certificates, which will then mean a full ban on the export of livestock by sea by 30 April 2023.

The transition period allowed the NZ government to give farmers and exporters time to plan and adjust how their businesses operate with the new rules before the ban came into force on 30 April 2023, 24 months after the introduction of the Bill to Parliament.

In September 2020, the Gulf Livestock 1 export ship was transporting cattle from New Zealand to China when it capsized in rough seas caused by Typhoon Maysak.

It had 43 crew members on board, including two Australians, two New Zealanders, and 39 Filipinos. Only two survivors were ever found.

More than 6,000 head of cattle on board all perished. Imagine the horror and injuries endured by these animals as a result of the ships tossing and turning throughout its last hours before it ultimately sank.

Rough seas are not uncommon when travelling by sea and many animals continue to be injured and die from their injuries as a result of severe storms when travelling by sea.

The NZ government waited 12 months for a report to come out following this unnecessary tragedy, however, still there were no answers. It was one of the final incidents to occur that made the people of NZ realise that the live export of animals could no longer continue and within 3 years of this tragedy they have now successfully transitioned to a ban on live animal export.

The Australian Government needs to set policy in place for the phase out and ban of live sheep export by sea as expediently as possible. I believe the impact of this trade on Australia's international reputation as a fair and compassionate nation (like NZ) would be at risk if the government were to take too long or potentially not implementing legislation should another government be elected in the next term of parliament.

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)

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

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

In response to questions 10, 11 and 12 please note the following:

Australians have elected the current government because they want certainty that this trade will end. The opportunity to legislate the phase out and ban of live sheep export by sea is here now and must commence within this term of parliament to provide that certainty to all Australians including those within this industry. It is expected by many Australians that the phase out and ban begins and ends as soon as possible.

If the findings from this consultation finds that support for farmers is needed, government support to help them through the transition may help them and other Australian employees find opportunities in other streams.

Many Australians agree that this type of trade is cruel and unethical, live export trade has lost its social license. By putting in plan a ban timeline as soon as possible, Australia can be proud that it will be viewed internationally as a progressive, compassionate and world leading nation.

The industry is only worth around \$100 million per annum (and declining), a tiny percentage of Australia's GDP. The economics no longer add up. There has been an ongoing decline in live sheep exports which is projected to continue.

The small amount of jobs in Australia that rely on this trade could easily be made up by jobs created though banning this trade including domestic processing of meat to be exported.

There has been a growing need to transition to alternative industries e.g. plant based protein and cell based meats which will deliver better environmental, health and animal welfare outcomes and significantly contribute to Australia's commitment to having net zero carbon

emissions by 2050. Australia has the opportunity to be one of the countries that is taking the lead in carbon neutral plant based food sources.

Data presented to Senate estimates last month showed that just 11 of the 78 eligible live export voyages that left Australia between May and December last year had an independent observer on board. Almost half of those that travelled without an observer said they didn't have enough space on board.

Other considerations

It was disappointing to read the Terms of Reference for the consultation and to note they do not mention anything about animal welfare. The whole reason for the phase out and ban is to put an end the suffering of the sheep in an industry that cannot provide the appropriate care to the sheep on board the ships.

Time and again the industry has shown that profit is always put before animal welfare, this will not change until live sheep export is ceased. Industry has been profiting from animal cruelty for too long and we have been aware of the torture and cruelty the animals being exported by sea which has been evidenced too many times for more than 20 years now. It is time to put policy, NOW.

Data presented to Senate estimates this year showed that just 11 of the 78 eligible live export voyages that left Australia between May and December last year had an independent observer on board. Almost half of those that travelled without an observer said they didn't have enough space on board.

Sheep are sentient beings not products, which is how they are treated by the live export industry. Heat stress, illness, injury and death on board ships that continue to lack adequate independent observers/vet care shows that it is not possible for industry to ensure animals will be treated humanely.

I note the panel will also undertake face-to-face meetings across Australia, particularly in Western Australia, given the impact of this policy to the agriculture sector in that state. Other opportunities to participate may include virtual forums. In doing so, the panel will engage with all relevant stakeholders, including live sheep exporters, farmers, supply chain participants, communities, trading partners, animal welfare organisations, Indigenous Australians, state and territory governments, academics, and other relevant parties.

As a member of the Australian community that has had a long term interest in the banning of live sheep export I would like to request to be considered to be selected for further involvement in engagement with the consultation process including any virtual forums or other opportunities for engagement to further discuss my views as a community member on this extremely important policy.

Kind regards

Kerryn Suthern

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