

Live Sheep Export by Sea- Phase Out, Submission

Dr Lynn Simpson (Ex shipboard Veterinarian)- March 2023

To whom It May Concern.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to strengthening animal welfare in Australia, and Australia's global reputation, by means of the phasing out of live sheep exports by sea.

Introduction:

I am an Ex shipboard Veterinarian, with extensive experience in this field including, accompanying 57 long haul voyages (multiple ships/ multiple companies/ multiple loading ports/ many export delivery destinations), 3 years experience as a Stevedore loading sheep onto live export ships in Fremantle, as well as general work based on live export associated farms, registered premises, feedlots and time spent consulting on Live exports for Industry [REDACTED] as well as twice contracting to the Department of Agriculture about Live Exports. As such I believe I can provide a broad base of experience and understanding of the implications of a phase out of the export of live sheep by sea.

1: Potential Mechanisms:

Why transition:

Phasing out of the live sheep trade by sea would reflect and recognise the overwhelming scientific, professional, community and global concern of unnecessary animal suffering as has been indisputably demonstrated, repeatedly, with decades of direct evidence and science-based studies of this trade. Moving away from this trade would improve the Australian 'brand' as seen nationally and internationally.

Australia would no longer be seen as draconian and 'lacking' with our treatment of sheep in this manner. This advancement should reflect well in improved broader trade relations, especially but not limited to more animal welfare progressive countries such as in the EU and UK.

The phase out would also result in increased pride in Australia by most Australians as an advanced nation and reduce shame and embarrassment currently experienced by so many.

How to transition:

The live sheep export industry has expansive involvement from many individuals in Australia, however very few are employed or rely on the trade for the majority or all of their employment. I am deeply dubious of the 'employed by industry' numbers spoken of and believe them to be grossly overestimated and not representative of 'full time' equivalent roles. The true number of people 100% reliant on the trade for employment is actually quite

small- most weave their work between other trades/outlets. Therefore, their employment, Assets (trucks/ farms) and skillsets are highly transferable to 100% land based non sheep export positions.

As such I believe most people involved can transition from Live Sheep export well, requiring no extra training or qualifications, and within a relatively short period; many immediately. A small number will lose a dynamic, jet setting type lifestyle and may be reluctant to let that go in favour of improved animal welfare. If so, these people have no place working with livestock, they should only be allowed to work with dead animals.

- **Feedlot/ Registered premises staff-** Generally have easily transferable skills/ availability, could transition to farms/ non sheep live export feedlots/ stations/ stock agency work etc.
- **Ship Stock people** - Easily transferable skills/ availability, could transition to farms/ non sheep live export feedlots/ stations/ stock agencies etc. Most if not all, already sail on voyages between existing land-based employment as described above. Currently the trade is sending about 6- 8 ships carrying sheep per year- not a full time job. This would entail approximately 3 stock people per voyage, a maximum of 24 multi week contracts for the year. Easily transferrable to land based work.
- **Shipboard Vets-** Easily transferable. Many are already semi-retired or sailing between land based non export related vet work, others can immediately transfer employment to Veterinary clinics, consulting on other livestock ventures (Industry/ Government/ private) or work as Veterinary Meat inspectors for any existing or newly developed/ opened abattoirs. Currently the trade is sending about 6- 8 ships carrying sheep per year- not a full-time job.
- **Feedlot Vets-** Only part time contracts, easily transferred to non-export work.
- **Stevedores-** already fitting in the loading of Live Export ships between other types of vessels. Ships often slow down on return (empty/ballast) voyages or wait at anchor for loading berth availability- hence stevedores rarely, if ever, experience a lack of work.
- **Truck drivers-** Stock crate truck drivers should be able to simply transition from driving sheep to the ports for ship loading, to driving sheep to abattoirs for domestic processing. Others may then also pick up work driving refrigerated trucks/ containers full of chilled/ frozen sheep meat to ports for loading onto container ships for export. Stockfeed/Pellet carriers already use their trucks and skillsets to transport bulk grains and fertilizers meaning they should not be deeply impacted losing deliveries to 6-8 ships a year, (Feed mills already supply primarily to non-export operations).
- **Farmers/ Producers-** Are likely to be able to immediately transfer sale of sheep from Exporters directly to abattoirs with no other changes. Some may wish to change breeds or percentage of breeds to better transition to domestic markets- however as it is expected that most sheep previously destined for live export by sea will likely be

exported as processed chilled and frozen product many will be able to continue their current breeding and management programs. Processors have been telling the 'panel' apparently, that 'if they can get them and kill them, there is a market for them'. Having nowhere to send stock does not seem to be the problem, capacity will need to be enhanced as required however.

- **Exporters-** Should have the level of business acumen to transfer into other industries and those with a greater agricultural skillset V's business skillset should be able to transfer to non-live sheep export, related livestock/ agricultural roles with Industry, private or Government organisations as applicable.
- **Importers of live sheep-** should be encouraged to engage in trade negotiations to receive chilled/ frozen products as applicable to ensure the continued supply of high protein food and food security to importing countries.
- **Shearers-** Sheep require shearing regardless of going onto a ship or not. Shearers worried about losing their roles should clarify that the roles will simply change to on farm shearing instead of large stand number shearing at export feedlots as fluctuating ship movements/availability currently dictate.
- **DAFF Live Animal Export Staff-** Transfer their roles to other more progressive fields of Agriculture/ enhance the ESCAS staffing levels.

Direct mechanisms:

- Support expansion/ development of any gap in domestic processing capacity- especially in Western Australia.
- Support/ assist in any upskilling as required. I see this to mainly consist of training new domestic abattoir workers if the current systems are insufficient. However, to absorb around a further 500,000 sheep per year (transferred from the export trade) should not be an insurmountable problem for the existing facilities. To source more labour the work visa access will likely need to be amended to facilitate processing expansion.
- More actively engage in encouraging the uptake of chilled/ frozen sheep meat in international markets to ensure no loss of sales for producers.

2: Suggested Timeframe:

Two years phase out time, as has proven to be doable for the New Zealand operators with the exception of a few denialists who appear to have resisted transition and now find themselves deeply aggrieved.

There is currently an oversupply issue with sheep in Western Australia especially and that is with the live sheep by sea trade still operating. Immediate advice on reduced breeding to

producers is needed if processing needs cannot be met. Farmers are famously known for adapting their practices to changing seasons or on environmental trend basis, droughts etc.

Producers and others need to seek better, realistic, advice from their industry representatives on political decision making, eg like Whaling or Tobacco farming shut downs.

Anyone who believes they are being caught unaware of the organic death of this trade for a multitude of reasons is poorly informed or in denial. I believe poor industry leadership has directly contributed to the producers current very real, psycho-social stress. The **1986** Parliamentary Senate Select Committee investigation findings stated very clearly that the Export of Sheep by sea “based on welfare findings alone should be phased out immediately”. For 37 years the trade has been on notice for closure. Whilst I am empathetic to peoples real or perceived stress on this matter, I believe they have had time to manage a less stressful transition away from Live sheep by sea.

If involved parties cannot voluntarily withdraw in that timeframe, then those resisting, need to be persuaded as soon as possible to lessen their stress.

Most importantly, regardless of all the R and D, regulatory oversight and money that can be spent on this trade, the fact is sheep will never be able to cope with the heat stress parameters faced during sea voyages to the Northern Hemisphere from Australia and need for acclimatization. These factors cannot be changed no matter how much some would like to. There will always be unnecessary suffering when sending sheep into hostile environments.

The sooner the better, why would the Australian government knowingly allow more sheep to be exposed to these unmitigable risks?

Hence, I would suggest two years be the maximum phase out time for the ‘Australian phase out period’. This would also give producers a definite and workable timetable and should provide some stability/ certainty of their future path of action. Less time would be preferred from a scientific/ animal welfare basis.

3: Impact and Adjustment:

Will it impact me? Yes, positively.

I will no longer be spending my time repeatedly explaining why the Live Sheep by sea trade should no longer be accepted in Australia and explaining why industry propaganda is fanciful smoke screening. I will continue to have to explain the Australian experiences to other countries concerned with their own existing Animal welfare issues however will have the relief that we have evolved away from considering the trade legally acceptable.

I do not believe there will be a new exodus of ships to ‘new markets’. Many ships are dying a natural mechanical and material death and not being replaced. Some existing ships are

simply sitting at anchor and not returning to load sheep even though there is a surplus, prices are dropping and some trade supporters are wishing they would. Once phased out I would experience reduced shame and embarrassment of my country's agricultural practice and animal welfare standards and I may even return to buying sheep related products- I currently refuse to, and buy alternatives as I do not wish to support any producers whom supply the Live Export trade.

4: What will it mean:

- A definitive phase out timeline will provide farmers/ producers with some certainty of the future steps they take. Reducing their collective psychological stress.
- The average Australian will gain much overdue increased pride and respect in the Australian Governments stance on improving Animal Welfare standards.
- Reduced suffering for many sheep in the future.
- If I were still an Onboard Ship Veterinarian it would mean that I would simply return to practice on land or follow government, industry, or private consulting pursuits. Transition would be immediate with no reskilling necessarily required.
- My sheep farming community and friends would no longer question my ability to be part of this trade, and I theirs.

5: Barriers/ Constraints:

- Ensuring enough domestic abattoir processing capacity to process sheep redirected from the Live Export trade.
- Live export workers not wanting to relinquish a relatively dynamic, jet setting lifestyle to return to conventional agricultural pursuits and further resisting transition for personal gratification purposes.

6: Support

- Legislate the outlawing of export of live sheep by sea to eradicate the potential for farmers to worry about bouncing/ reversing policies with subsequent changes of government to provide a solid base on which producers/ farmers can tailor their future ventures.
- Government and Industry should ensure advice and assistance is available to farmers and producers if needed on how best to offload their previously Live export destined animals into the domestic processing chain. Most will know, some may need advice- possibly even via stock agents.
- Guarantee from the Government that there is processing capacity in the regions most effected by the phase out.
- Possibly guarantee or offer, 'first offer' to support farmers with drought relief etc for a fixed short term (two years?) if any farmers/ producers fear they may end up 'carrying' sheep on their properties for longer than expected due to direct phase out consequences and natural pasture capacity potentially being overwhelmed (unlikely

for current numbers as direct consequence of 'phase out', but may reduce some trepidation to farmers looking to transition seriously for the first time).

- Provide information on how food security will be ensured for the import markets: i.e, Undo decades of industry's incorrect fearmongering such as confirming that there is refrigeration (I have never been to an importing sheep region where I cannot find refrigerated coke why would it not be available for meat- total BS, there is access to all the refrigeration required), not all animals are for religious sacrifice and most meat is readily sourced from supermarkets (refrigerated, in air conditioned buildings) as in Australia. These countries are not 'backward', 'third world backwaters' with no infrastructure.
- Essentially undo much of the misleading propaganda relied upon so heavily by some industry representatives to justify a farmer's participation in this trade when they may have voluntarily transitioned away many years ago but thought they were doing an almost charitable service. It's been nauseating to hear the same propaganda rubbish touted by overpaid industry representatives whilst literally sitting at a table with them in yet another Middle Eastern Marriot or equivalent 5 star hotel/ restaurant enjoying 5 star quality food such as Alaskan crabs, fresh Japanese Sashimi and fine wine readily. The hypocrisy is incredible.
- Provide information to whomever wants it about the alternatives to strict religious sacrifice alternatives, such as the long established use of 'chits' being purchased to sponsor a slaughterman killing an animal in the name/stead of an individual whom is not trained/ competent to kill well, enabling that individual to meet their desired religious commitments/ requirements. Some areas will actually eat a cake to substitute for the need to slaughter an animal- Many believers and their beliefs have evolved to be less strict and more flexible for participants than in the past.

7: Transition requirements:

- As a Vet there would be no greater requirement to transition from ship to land work as there is for a vet to change jobs on land. The medicine, surgery and science is the same- only change would be environmental factors. Easy transition.

8: Time required for a shipboard Vet to transition?

- Should be an immediate ability to transition. There is a serious short supply of Vets in Australia with many varied and appealing jobs on offer nationally and internationally if wanted.

9: What can be learned from other countries who have ceased exporting Live Sheep?

- They are respected more broadly for their improved animal welfare stance globally.
- Other trading partners/ countries are not refusing or being difficult to trade with them based on animal welfare stand concerns.

- They do not live with the constant concern of poor PR (local (i.e. animals escape into Fremantle port waters) or global (ships sink- i.e. Gulf Livestock 1, Danny F 2, Queen Hind, Uniceb, Haider, Badr 1, etc, etc with great loss of life) from any potential disasters, exposés or revelations of events that bring shame, shock, grief or embarrassment to the Agricultural, National or Government communities showing up in lounge room TV's and online feeds all too often.
- Countries who have ceased exporting sheep live such as New Zealand are garnering global goodwill and a reputation for high standards and ethics regarding animal welfare and their willingness to embrace scientific knowledge.
- New Zealand experienced some political and pseudo (lobby group) political pressure, however all but the greatest denialists turned their attention to diversification and transitioning away from the export of sheep by sea once they were certain it would be outlawed.
- Any backlash New Zealand experienced for committing to ending their Live export of sheep paled in comparison to the overwhelming goodwill achieved globally and nationally.
- I have been asked Globally and often, "If New Zealand can do it why not Australia?" Other countries are watching and some individuals and cohorts actually say they would visit NZ before Australia as they feel Australia is too cruel and backwards in regards of animal welfare for their liking.

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)

- Should embrace the opportunity to expand domestic processing and local regional employment to ensure that any sheep meat bought anywhere in the world will have been processed in accordance with Australian standards and hopefully no substandard/ problematic meat would be attributed as Australian, possibly damaging the overarching Australian brand. The Australian brand should equate to reliable high quality.
- Value adding could include the reintroduction or expansion of any hide processing businesses- Tanneries etc in Australia, reduce reliance on sending core products like skins away only to buy them back as products such as leather.
- The reintroduction of meat canneries may be considered to provide more jobs, and a cheaper high protein product with a long shelf life. My understanding is that Australia has not canned meat products for human consumption for some time, yet we import them, this appears to be a lost employment opportunity and potential biosecurity risk.
- Increased trade agreements/ opportunities to export sheep meat and associated by products.
- The phase out could increase trade with other countries, industries or individual businesses whom have boycotted Australia to some degree in a stance against our involvement in the live export of sheep by sea.
- Opportunity to demonstrate improved animal welfare standards and recognition of scientific data presented to date in reference to animal suffering during sea voyages.
- This would be a fantastic catalyst to have animal sentience officially recognised in legislation.

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

- They would need to transfer any financial, time or other effort into the domestic chain instead of the live export chain. Hopefully increasing their gains from value adding with by products and local jobs/employment in regional Australia.

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

- Old thinking and irrational reticence to change.
- Poor industry guidance and information sharing.
- Fear and uncertainty of change that needs support to achieve/develop.
- Possible resistance to utilise existing processing facilities to their maximum capacity, such as only running one shift if two could be achieved, 5 days operation instead 3. If so, more facilities may need to be upgraded or built.

Other:

- Climate change gains in the form of reduced green house gas emissions from ships. Exporting refrigerated shipping containers, densely packed with sheep meat/products is much more environmentally efficient and less harmful than the current shipping outcomes with Live sheep. This is due to the enormous amount of relative empty space required to house live animals that require head space, space to live, move, lie down, be tended to and enable differing management activities such as running ventilation fans, water osmosis and feed augers etc.
- Boxed meat exports should be a more friendly climate change alternative in comparison to the bulky and inefficient nature of the Live Sheep transport.
- The environmental pollution and poor PR of live exports in the forms of hosing all manure into the sea, throwing all the mortalities (dead animals) directly into the sea causing environmental contamination (both in water and washing up on international beaches- complete with farmers ear tags) and occasionally risks to humans due to oceanic feeder activities being attracted to the carcasses.

Conclusion:

The shorter and more legally solidified the phase out is, I believe would provide the most strengthened animal welfare outcome, reduce the number of animals yet to suffer and die at sea, and provide the most certainty for the future path of farmers and producers to follow.

Sincerely
Dr Lynn Simpson
BSc, BVMS, MVSc (Epi)