

Dear panel members,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the submissions regarding live sheep export.

I definitely would like to see the export and trade of live sheep end right now.

I strongly support a phase-out period beginning as soon as possible, particularly during this term of government. I'm concerned that there is the risk that if Labor is not re-elected to fulfil its promise, a Coalition government could resurface, creating a significant setback to the phase-out.

According to the polls most Australians want certainty that this trade will end as the majority do not support it. The public know that the government has failed to protect exported sheep from suffering and brutal handling.

A recent independent opinion poll commissioned by the RSPCA found that over two thirds (67%) of respondents wanted an end to the live export trade. Western Australia, which produces and exports most of the sheep in the trade, had the highest level of opposition at 70%. Some politicians have also been recognising the industry's slow decline.

The longer we delay the phase-out starting process, the more sheep are subjected to the horrific suffering at sea, only to suffer again with a fully conscious slaughter at their destinations.

Their suffering has impacted many caring Australians, myself included, the workers on the ship, the veterinarians, and the Australian public. The trade is an ugly one built on cruelty and suffering and is totally avoidable.

Given that there has already been a threat of the trade ending years ago, the industry has already had time to consider this predicted outcome, due to the issues connected with it being raised several times. Therefore, the right time to transition from live sheep exports to local processing for international trade is now.

Australia supposedly holds high rank in terms of World Animal Protection; however it is clearly not at this high standard, nor is it monitored and regulated sufficiently with decent animal welfare standards. New Zealand's recent ban is an example of how a civilised country should behave toward animals. They have listened, respected and valued the views of the public over a few vested interests.

Australia does not deserve this high international reputation. It continually signs off for ships to leave the docks whilst turning a blind eye to what happens to them after leaving the docks.

Heat stress is a constant risk on live export ships as animals literally cook from the inside out whilst their organs shut down one by one. In 2013, more than 4,000 Australian sheep died on board the Bader III, the ship they were traveling on turned into a floating oven. Sheep suffer lameness, abrasions, become contaminated with urine and faeces due to overcrowding and not granted sufficient standing room, access to clean drinking water and food. All of these are illegal conditions for them to be kept in. It cannot be allowed to go on.

If farmers were offered structural adjustment support, then the transition would be a success and we could end the mass cruelty and expand jobs in regional Australia also.

Options to consider are transitioning the live sheep export trade to a boxed, chilled meat trade processed locally.

Encouraging farmers to plant-based agriculture is definitely a concept to pursue also, as it is more ethical and hugely more sustainable.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to be heard.
Feeling hopeful.

Manuela Ferstl