

Dear Panel

The Australian Government as part of its election commitment to phase out live sheep exports by sea has developed a consultation process. Information received through this consultation process will help the government better determine how and when these exports should be phased out, including the practical adjustments required for those in the live sheep exports supply chain and related industries.

Those affected by the phase out will have the time to prepare for, adjust and transition away from the trade. The consultation planning phase especially with WA farmers and a timeframe for phasing out live sheep exports is important and has already commenced. **However, government legislation with a clear END DATE MUST be determined in this term of government to make closure of this industry a reality and a promise to the electorate that the industry is ending.** If a returning Coalition government resulted in 2025, without a legislated end date in Parliament, a new government would likely reverse all the hard work achieved in the consultation phase and the live sheep export industry would continue. What we need from Labor is a clear date for ending this trade as New Zealand provided when they moved to end live animal export. This can't just be an empty promise. **This legislated end date gives assurance that it will happen, and WA farmers can plan appropriately.** The transition phase would follow over a few years but must also begin in this term of government, to more than likely end soon after 2025. This aligns with Prime Minister Albanese's comment that the live sheep export trade will not end in this term of government. **However, the phase out must begin in this current term of government and be as short as possible. Every day of delay sheep will continue to suffer on lengthy voyages and will be slaughtered cruelly in these imported countries.**

The previous Coalition government after over 10 years promised much but delivered very little in genuine improvements in animal welfare standards for sheep. Even after endless reviews and enormous waste of taxpayer money, improvements were minor and tokenistic and exported sheep still suffered.

That was the legacy the Liberal/National government left us.

Many people voted Labor in the 2022 election for real change in animal welfare and an end to this industry. We must have consultation with all stakeholders who will be affected by the ending of live sheep exports by sea. An implementation plan will ensure what follows is an orderly transition process to end this cruel industry. Community opposition is so strong against the export of gentle sheep, it is not only about their transport by sea on long voyages, but also about how they are cruelly slaughtered in overseas countries. ***What we don't want is the industry scrambling to increase live sheep exports by air so as to accommodate their intent and plan to continue live sheep exports at all costs.*** The government must be alerted to changes the industry may want to implement in this regard and be mindful of capping and **decreasing sheep transports by air**, as these sheep will still be cruelly treated and slaughtered in backyards or on streets, fully conscious with no animal welfare standards in place. The community were firm that sheep suffered on these export ships and in the imported countries. Transporting huge numbers of sheep by air will not be acceptable. In 2020, there were still high numbers of 33,683 sheep exported by air. We know that the industry will fight back and use any avenue that they can to work around the legislation in order to continue 'their business-as-usual approach.' We have witnessed the industry's attitude and bullying tactics to maintain this industry and the 'status quo' at all costs on their terms over the past decade.

Personal reasons for the phase out of live sheep exports by sea

For me personally the phase out will mean that we will end this cruel industry that should have ended years ago. I support wholeheartedly an end to the live export of sheep by sea for slaughter in overseas countries. It will also signal to the world that *finally* the Australian government is listening to the Australian community and prioritising genuine animal welfare reform. Under a federal Liberal Coalition government for over the past decade, we had procrastination, endless wastage of taxpayer money on reviews that told us simply that this industry was wrong and there existed no way to successfully mitigate, minimise or effectively control gentle sheep from cruel suffering. There were minimal concessions by the previous government who still did not act on the informed 'science' but chose instead to 'cherry-pick' some of the McCarthy recommendations that suited them. These included independent observers on only some voyages, bans that were introduced to be overturned, limited ban periods that meant sheep were still being exported in the Middle Eastern summer. I am relieved that the Albanese government is sticking to their election promise that live sheep exports by sea will end.

The Panel are seeking input on the following issues which I provide below:

- **How the government should phase out live sheep exports by sea**

1. As the phase out will not be instantaneous but involve a gradual process to accommodate farmers and the industry, many of the recommendations of the McCarthy review must be introduced now to minimise the suffering of sheep throughout this transition process. One of the key reforms suggested strongly by McCarthy was modelled on the 'science of heat stress' when shipping sheep to the Middle East in their summer. McCarthy was clear that to avoid suffering of sheep due to heat stress that there should be a ban on the live export of sheep in the entire Middle East summer from May to October. The Morrison government refused this major recommendation and only agreed to a ban from June 1st to 23rd September inclusive. To complicate the issue even further and support the industry, different length bans and dates were imposed on varying destinations in the Middle East. They caved into the industry and variations to current dates included Kuwait's prohibition dates being decreased by 7 days subjecting more of our sheep to unbearable heat stress where most of our sheep are exported to anyway. The Red Sea proposed prohibition dates were also decreased by 14 days, whilst Oman direct (single discharge) proposed prohibition dates were decreased by 31 days and Qatar was one day. They capitulated to the industry to permit more sheep suffering.

Therefore, the reductions in the prohibition periods to Middle East destinations (Kuwait, Qatar, Oman direct, and Red Sea destinations) affected over 85% of Australian sheep. More sheep suffering more heat stress.

The Morrison government's focus was more about keeping a cruel industry going rather than improved animal welfare outcomes. ***Hence the primary motive of decreasing the prohibition dates for the majority of our exported sheep was based on the industry's economics.*** The Morrison government adjusted the bans to keep the economics of this trade **their priority**. Hence the difficulty and conflict of interest by the government regulating this trade fairly when it supports the very industry responsible for animal suffering.

The Morrison government NEVER applied the original recommendation of McCarthy for a sheep ban for the entire Middle East summer from May to October. A ban period should include all of May, June, July, August, September, and October to minimise heat stress of our exported sheep to the Middle East. **Ban periods must not be reduced but increased from May to October to reflect the 'science' during the transition period.**

2. Under the Albanese government during the proposed transition period, as we are unaware of the length of this period, we would like to see ***our exported sheep with more protections genuinely enforced*** such as reduced stocking densities, more access to feed and water, more staff on board, a licensed Vet and an Independent Observer on all export ship voyages, a stronger supply chain in place that monitors the overseas slaughterhouses better. Under the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) maintaining even the minimum animal welfare standards in imported countries has failed our exported animals repeatedly over the years and has an abysmal track record. Sheep have been sold openly on social media, tied and thrown into car boots and slaughtered in makeshift slaughter rooms at livestock markets. Lambs dragged by ropes around the neck and legs, with ear tags being removed to prevent traceability and animals being taken to private residences and slaughtered with 'a sawing motion'. Past incidences reported to the department where breaches of the supply chain have occurred, or incredible suffering of our exported animals have been reported even with visual evidence- nothing was done by the Department to address these breaches- a slap on the wrist only with meaningless warnings and our exported animals were continually and inhumanely abused and slaughtered. ***Whilst sheep are still being exported during the transition period, ESCAS must be more effective of their protections in the supply chain for our exported animals.*** Where breaches in overseas slaughterhouses occur, licences must be revoked permanently in any slaughterhouse for any Australian exported animal including our cattle. If these overseas slaughterhouses close, then fewer animals can be exported. **ESCAS and the Department of Agriculture were reluctant in the past to suspend exports to countries that continually breached standards or reoffended repeatedly with major noncompliance.** That is because they supported this cruel industry to continue. ESCAS has failed to protect properly all our exported animals. There is no assurance that this organisation can even be trusted to do its job properly when breaches of animal cruelty continue. The public and myself included lost complete faith in ESCAS and the regulator to do their job properly, and that is why a Liberal/Coalition government can never be trusted and why many voted Labor in 2022!
3. **Regular testing of sheep during the day on voyages near the Middle East to obtain accurate results as to the correct numbers of sheep actually suffering heat stress must occur. Testing sheep in the evening in**

areas further away from the Equator will not yield accurate results on heat stress in sheep, which is how some export ships were trying to manipulate the data to get the results that they wanted. Inspectors on these ships must be present to observe that testing yields reliable data and not 'manipulated' data.

4. The government and the industry are encouraged to support improved animal welfare outcomes rather than focus entirely on mortality data. "A key recommendation from the McCarthy Review was that industry should **focus on animal welfare** instead of measures that use mortality as a benchmark." Sheep endure horrific heat stress on these ships. Just because they do not die immediately does not mean that they do not suffer. Any animal suffering and in pain means poor animal welfare outcomes. Mortality must not be the indicator for animal suffering. Observing animal behaviour, signs and symptoms, location of water and feed, stocking density and actual temperatures inside the ship, this is what dictates the standard of animal welfare provided. The industry and the government failed for years to recognise this difference and our sheep who cannot regulate their body temperatures properly suffered prolonged symptoms of heat stress before they succumbed to death.

Reviews and the science must guide our actions to raise animal welfare outcomes. If we farm sheep, export them, and kill them, we have a moral responsibility to recognise that they feel pain and they are sentient beings that want to live. They must therefore not be treated cruelly throughout this process. That means that this industry and the government must have a legal robust framework that protects sheep in transit and at point of slaughter so that they are treated humanely as possible throughout the whole export process. This standard must be maintained whilst we transition to end live sheep exports by sea.

- **The timeframe to implement the phase-out.**

In Australia the Live Animal Export Prohibition (Ending Cruelty) Bill 2019 has already passed in the Senate. This bill seeks to permanently ban the export of live animals for slaughter like sheep. As this bill was passed over 3 years ago in the Upper House, having it legislated with an end date to ban the export of live sheep for slaughter should be passed in this term of government. Australia has delayed an end to this vile industry under a Liberal government. Unlike Australia, New Zealand opted to end live-animal exports for slaughter in 2008. New Zealand further discontinued live animal export of 'breeding stock' by sea and announced that it would end in April 2021 over a period of two years to allow for a transition period. Hence all of the country's **exports** of livestock including breeding stock by sea ended on 30 April 2023. If New Zealand transitioned over a 2- year period to end the sea transport of breeding stock, I cannot see why Australia cannot end the live export of sheep for slaughter over a 2–3-year transition period also, as long as it is legislated legally with an end date in this term of government with a short transition period to follow.

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

Obviously, the phase-out of live sheep exports will have an impact on exporters, farmers and other businesses across the supply chain. The Australian government has announced a financial package to help the industry transition away from live sheep exports which I strongly support. The package includes funding for exporters to develop new markets and for farmers to improve animal welfare and farm productivity. The government has also announced that it will work with the industry to develop a new export model that prioritises animal welfare, whilst they transition to end the live sheep export trade, and support jobs in regional Australia.

- **Support and adjustment options for those impacted by the phase-out.**

On the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development website the government has provided alternatives for sheep planned for the live export market during the Northern hemisphere summer, where export bans exist, which include the following options for farmers that could be applied and adjusted in the phase out transition period to end all live sheep exports permanently.

Options for WA Sheep farmers are-

-Farmers prioritise sheep for the wool market rather than the meat market. Retain for wool production in the longer term.

-Sell sheep for slaughter as mutton in Australian markets or overseas frozen markets.

-Sell lighter lambs to the air freight market- although as mentioned prior the **government must set caps on this as to not replace air transport with sea transport** as the same animal welfare concerns exist as to poor standards of sheep slaughter in these exported countries. **We do NOT want a situation where farmers are now selling off all their lambs due to lighter weight for air freight to Middle East markets, where poor animal welfare slaughter methods will continue to exist.** This will only create another problem for the government if air freight of lambs increases. We cannot erase one market to replace with another market when cruel slaughter methods will still await these young lambs at the other end of their journey! **The government must be wary that the industry does not increase the air freight of innocent young lambs to Middle East countries where they will be inhumanely slaughtered. Caps and limits must be set and a gradual decrease in air freight of lambs MUST be a focus to phase it out also.**

-Sell heavier Merino lambs for slaughter in Australian markets or overseas frozen markets.

- **Opportunities, including options to expand domestic processing and increase sheep meat exports.**

1. There are several alternatives to live sheep export. One is to process sheep in Australia and develop a chilled and frozen meat-exports trade only. Evidence supports that this market alternative will result in better welfare for sheep slaughtered in Australia under Australian welfare standards where stunning animals prior to slaughter is more humane. As the chilled meat markets for slaughter of Australian sheep in Australia increases throughout the transition process, the government must also employ more inspectors to ensure that Australian abattoirs maintain this best practice that sheep are stunned prior to slaughter. This will provide more sustainable regional opportunities for more jobs for Australians to work in abattoirs, or as inspectors or in the transport line of frozen meat.
2. Processing sheep in Australia has other benefits that will reduce the risk of disease transmission. This is especially relevant in a time period post COVID when this disease spread initially from animals to humans very rapidly across the world with dire economic, social and emotional ramifications worldwide. Transporting and keeping sheep in unhealthy cramped conditions where they suffer and/or die in their own excrement is conducive to spreading disease to humans. **The Australian government have a moral responsibility not to add to the spread of COVID like diseases that originate from any exported live animal from Australia.**
3. In a Review of the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) as far back as November 2018 there were discussions as to a transition to a frozen meat trade then. Around 20,000 sheep were dying on live export ships each year from heat stress, illness, injury and failing to eat the unfamiliar food pellets on board. With the deaths of all these sheep, there were shrinking profit margin for exporters and farmers. The rationale to continue the live animal export trade has been questioned for years. In 2016-17, ABARES estimated that the live export trade was worth \$1.432 billion. With the decrease in the export of sheep over recent years this trade worth has dramatically decreased.

In 2018 RSPCA Australia's senior policy officer, Dr Jed Goodfellow, said "domestic processing was the only way to ensure Australian animals' welfare. Investment in a chilled and frozen meat-only trade would prevent the suffering inherent to live export and save millions of animals from the cruel fate awaiting them at their destination and on-board ship."

The Sapere Research Group report of March 2013 ten years ago had already noted a gradual decline in the WA sheep flock numbers which would have a question mark over the sustainability of the live export trade. Coupled with this, there has been a significant increase in the consumption of processed sheep meat by the major live sheep import countries in the Middle East. And this increase in the consumption of processed sheep meat products has continued to this day. So, the live sheep export industry is in decline. The volume of sheep exported has declined significantly from a peak of around 7.3 million in 1983. In recent times, sheep exports have fallen from 2.916 million in 2010-11 to 1.851 million in 2016-17 (ABARES, Commodity Statistics). Currently Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment figures show 555,957 sheep were **exported** by sea in 2021, while air **exports** accounted for 22,572. There was already a decline of 27% of sheep exported by sea in 2020 compared to 2019.

So, coupled with the number of sheep deaths on export ships, an industry in decline, reduced WA flock numbers and difficulty maintaining and costing improved animal welfare outcomes in an export trade, an obvious consideration is a transition to a frozen meat industry where overseas markets are increasing. In 2013, 170,000 tonnes of boxed chilled red meat shipped to the Middle East earned \$780 million dollars for Australia's red meat industries. So there is potential to develop these markets further due to the increased consumption of frozen sheep meat. The State of Industry Report- The Australian Red Meat and Livestock Industry **October 2017** says on page 3, "The red meat industry... comprises, beef, sheep meat and goatmeat sectors. Our red meat industry contributes to 405,000 Australian jobs through direct and indirect employment and **generates \$15 billion in export revenue** through the supply of more than 100 global markets." There is potential to develop even further these supply chains with an expanded frozen meat industry and increase Australian employment, and thus **decrease all live animal exports**. Better for Australians, the economy and animal welfare. **It is time to re-evaluate all live animal exports and transition to frozen meat markets only.**

In summary I strongly urge the government to **legislate a definitive end date for the live sheep trade in this term of Parliament to provide certainty for farmers and the public. We cannot further damage our international reputation and subject countless more sheep to this unacceptable risk of live sheep export continuing. The phase out must begin and end as soon as possible. New Zealand is a model for ending the live animal export trade in its entirety. A 2–3-year transition phase out period should be adequate when the government is already starting to build alternative markets in the frozen sheep meat trade for farmers.**

Your sincerely

Lucia smith