

My name is Mary O'Halloran, and I come from [REDACTED] in the Great Southern region of Western Australia.

I have read the consultation paper on live sheep export and am disappointed to see that there is not even a consideration of the policy's cancellation. It is hard for people in farming areas to believe that their opinions are being listened to when a seemingly irreversible decision has already been made that will affect them and their communities so profoundly.

I understand that the government has little reason to listen to the opinions of rural communities as they represent such a small voting bloc. However, as this is going to have the greatest impact on farming communities, there should have been detailed consultation conducted before the decisions regarding the ban were made. This is the least that people in rural communities deserve.

I come from a farming family and live in a community that essentially revolves around the industry. I am also a PhD student, and my research is focussing on rural volunteer fire brigades. These brigades are predominantly made up of farmers and their employees, overseen by the Local Government. Through my research I have done a lot of work with ABS data, and the profile of the [REDACTED] shows that in 2021, more than 30% of employment was in either mixed farming (sheep or cattle, and grain) or sheep farming. For a community of just under 2000 people, a loss of any of the related employment in these industries will be highly damaging. It has the capacity to lead to the loss of income, not only for the farming community, but the entire town. The effects of this will be felt by everyone. If people cannot make a living in town they will leave, the school will lose students, local businesses will lose revenue, ultimately leading to a spiral of decline. Since the announcement of this plan the price of sheep has already fallen considerably. If sheep farmers are to remain viable, the margins will have to be passed on to the Australian consumer.

There is a belief in rural areas that you shouldn't vote for Labor because they don't care about people outside the city boundaries. This has just proved that point. The previous coalition government was dysfunctional and did little for rural areas, but they did not try and directly undermine a key Australian, particularly Western Australian, industry.

Addressing the points outlined in the consultation paper, which was depressingly short and lacking in detail:

1. If the live sheep trade is going to end, the government needs to step up, and negotiate trade deals with nations that are willing to receive their goods already processed. This will require investments in associated industries such as meat processing, packing, and freight. It will have impacts, not only on the Australian economy, but also its soft power capacity. Australia is often discussed as the food bowl of the Asia Pacific region, if this industry is undermined, so is this notion. Given that we are facing a future with continued population growth and food needs, this change is irrational.
2. The timeframe. Given my complete opposition to this decision, this is hard to address. However, if it is to be phased out, it needs to be done slowly and incrementally, with independent analysis conducted at each stage. Before the

phase out begins, the government needs to communicate to producers what support it is willing to provide, what form this will take, and the vision that is hopefully in policy makers minds for the sheep industry going forward. Sheep farmers are not going to continue producing this commodity if it is not viable to do so.

3. The livelihoods of my friends, relatives, and community members will be affected by this decision. As previously mentioned, the price of sheep has already fallen significantly, while inputs have continued to rise for a variety of local, national, and global reasons. A key element that enables rural resilience is economic diversification. If sheep are no longer a profitable commodity, farmers will be forced to rely on their cropping enterprises. This raises a lot of risks due to the reliance on seasonal rainfall in broadacre agriculture. If it is a bad year, farmers have put hundreds of thousands of dollars into the ground that they will not get back. There is no irrigation in the area, and this would not be viable. As the effects of climate change become more apparent, the risk is only going to rise. If sheep prices continue to fall, people will be left with livestock that represents a loss to continue maintaining, leaving them with a difficult choice if they can't sell them. Broadacre agricultural regions are already subject to population loss and ageing, this will just exacerbate and accelerate the problems already faced.
4. See above.
5. One of the barriers is the lack of infrastructure and supporting industries. There are already issues in the meat processing sector, with operators struggling to continue sustainably. If the live sheep trade is to cease operation, significant investment needs to be made that allows producers to access such operations cost effectively. This will have to come at least partially from the government. Another barrier is a lack of support from government. There needs to be a clear indication that government are willing to help solve a problem that is entirely of their own making. Farmers have done all they have been asked to do, as have the other stakeholders in the supply chain. Regulations around live export in Australia are some of the most stringent, and the welfare of the animals is prioritised at all stages. In the rural community it is expected that farmers will be left to cope with this on their own, it would be nice if this were not the case.
6. There needs to be government investment in the supply chain to help them enable an increase in domestic slaughter and processing. This may necessitate funding for infrastructure, as well as ensuring that these businesses are able to attract adequate workers. Developing a new visa class or allowing more people in on appropriate visas to work in the supply chain may be necessary.
7. As outlined in the responses to the previous questions, this needs to be done in a manner that reflects detailed planning, rather than a knee jerk reaction to a vocal minority that have no idea how the sheep industry works. Any planning needs to involve stakeholders from across the supply chain, including farmers, transport representatives, as well as people from the meat processing industry. These stakeholders need to be listened to, rather than treated as though their opinions don't matter. It has been shown that allowing people agency in a changing situation is more likely to show positive results. Up until now, this has not happened, which is entirely the fault of government.

There also needs to be financial support for affected producers, as the government is willingly undermining their livelihoods.

8. If this is going to happen, it needs to be done over at least 10 years. This gives producers and other supply chain members some clarity, security, and certainty, and will hopefully result in a more stable sheep price. It also gives the government time to consult properly and thoroughly with those affected, not just those in the city that are more interested in making a political statement at the cost of people's livelihoods.
9. If you had developed a comprehensive consultation paper instead of three pages of poorly structured sentences, you wouldn't need to ask this. It is not up to producers to do the research, this is a decision my government, who have the resources and time to work this out. There should be a comprehensive investigation and analysis of what has been done in other States, as well as other countries. Surely this should have been done before the decision was made to see what the impacts would be of phasing out the trade. If this was not done it was irresponsible and shows disdain and disregard for the people involved.
10. I have answered this in previous questions.
11. See above
12. One of the main barriers is the lack of consideration, consultation, and support from government. This needs to be addressed immediately unless the government wants to undermine the food security of Australia and the wider region. You may think that this is hyperbolic, but it is just pushing more people out of the agriculture sector and jeopardising the sustainability of rural communities. As I mentioned previously, rural people already feel as though government doesn't care about them, they won't be surprised if the narrative and actions don't change. Government has a choice, they can create a well-developed, effective domestic supply chain and foster other trade relationships, which will create jobs and revenue, or they can continue with business as usual, and it is the Australian people who will bear the brunt through livelihood loss and price increases.

I would like to think that this will be read and considered, but my hopes are not high. I will end this by saying that there is a chance for government to prove rural people wrong and provide the support and consideration that is deserved.