

Dear Panel

Australians care deeply about animals, yet our national approach to animal protection is one of the worst in the world. Following the election of the Albanese Labor Government, many Australians had high hopes that neglected animal welfare issues would finally receive the attention they deserve.

The live export trade is a practice that deeply disturbs the majority of Australians. Animals transported on export ships endure appalling conditions, only to face even worse welfare standards upon reaching their destinations.

The Albanese Government has committed to phasing out the live export of sheep by sea. With the second-largest sheep population in the world, Australia's live export industry places hundreds of thousands of our animals at risk every year. Almost all our sheep are sent from Western Australia to the Middle East.

I strongly encourage the government to **legislate an end date in this term of Parliament**. Otherwise if a Liberal Coalition government returns after May 2025 all the hard work by the more compassionate Albanese government could be overturned. Obviously, a transition period of a few years will occur, but it must have a legislated end date soon preferably this year. As Prime Minister Albanese has said, 'live sheep exports won't be phased out before 2025 and that they are committed to ending the trade after consulting with sheep farmers and the WA government.' Even though the trade will not be completely phased out before 2025 **the phase out should 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 in these imported countries where they are slaughtered cruelly.**

I thoroughly support the end of the live sheep export trade and support the phase-out.

The reasons are-

1. **Animal welfare:** transport is one of the deadliest elements of animal agriculture. Overwhelming evidence confirms that the live export trade involves unacceptable suffering and cruelty. This is notably so during long sea journeys where Australian sheep are exported from Australia to the Middle East. Voyages to the Middle East take an average of 20-21 days, some can take up to five months especially if compounded issues of disease prevents transport ships landing in ports or poor weather. During that time, sheep leave the Australian winter and arrive in the Middle East's summer, where temperatures easily climb to over 40°C. Industry reports indicate that mortality rates on these voyages are approximately four times greater than for shorter voyages. And the extreme hot weather conditions mean sheep easily suffer painful, cruel heat stress as they are unable to regulate their body temperatures efficiently.
2. **Ethical considerations:** the live export industry has been plagued by numerous cases of animal cruelty which have caused significant public outrage, both domestically and internationally. It's been over a decade since the shocking cruelty of the live export trade was exposed on national TV. In response, the government implemented the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) - a system that requires approval before animals can be live exported internationally. Since ESCAS started in 2012, Australia has exported over 23 million farmed animals. It has been an utter failure - cruelty on live export ships and overseas abattoirs continues unabated. Yet, the suffering doesn't end for those who survive the journey; because there are virtually no laws protecting animals in the countries they're sold to, they're often subjected to abuse and methods of slaughter that are illegal in Australia.
3. **Environmental impact:** the long-distance transportation of sheep by sea consumes substantial amounts of fossil fuels, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation. Phasing out live export by sea aligns with Australia's goals to combat climate change, reduce carbon footprint, and transition to more sustainable industries. By reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation and the environmental impacts of large-scale live export operations, Australia can contribute to mitigating climate change and preserving its natural resources.
4. **Live export is a dying industry:** the live export trade has experienced a significant downturn. Live sheep exports fell from over 7 million sheep in the late 1980's to just over 1 million in 2018. Between 2016 and 2020, this figure decreased even further by more than 50%. In recent times, sheep exports have fallen from 2.916 million in 2010-11 to 1.851 million in 2016-17. Currently Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment figures show 555,957 live sheep were **exported** by sea in 2021. So it is definitely a declining industry. The Australian government has spent decades - and millions of taxpayer dollars - trying to review

and reprimand an industry that systemically abuses animals. Yet our animals continue to suffer. The government has had ample opportunity to crack down on this irredeemable industry, yet the abhorrent suffering continues. We must not allow any more animals to endure this agony. The Albanese Government must stand by their word and ban live export - not in the next term, but right now.

5. **The Albanese Government must honour its commitment:** ending the live export of sheep has been a policy of the Labor party since 2018. It was made in response to footage of a voyage that killed over 20,000 sheep the previous year. More recently, Labor recommitted to its policy of phasing out the live export of sheep if elected in the lead-up to the 2022 Federal election. Yet, the new Labor government has already back flipped on this promise. Rather than following through, the Albanese government has pushed back its ban saying that it won't happen before 2025. The industry has seen this as an opportunity to reverse the decision entirely. Two years out from the next federal election, Labor is already banking on winning the next election, and gambling with the lives of thousands of animals during the interim years. This isn't what we were promised and what the electorate voted for. There must be no delay to legislate an end date to this cruel trade. Otherwise we send the wrong message to the export industry that it is still a negotiable issue. **Legislating an end date this year gives farmers certainty to transition to alternative markets.** Obviously, a transition phase out period would follow. New Zealand ended this trade, and we can too.
6. **Ending the trade is urgent:** Since January 2023, there have been 60 live export voyages. Of these, 39 were by sea and 11 were sheep exports. The end use for the overwhelming majority of these sheep is slaughter. Though the elected Albanese Government has reaffirmed this commitment, Labor has refused to commit to a timeline. In order for the Albanese Government's commitment to be met, it must be legislated soon in this term of government and a phase out already started within their first term in government. Delaying the phase-out would result in prolonged suffering for sheep.
7. **Ensure a just transition:** the success of the phase-out of live sheep exports from Australia hinges on the support provided to farmers during the transition process. It is essential to ensure that farmers receive adequate assistance and resources to navigate this significant change effectively. By offering comprehensive support, including financial aid, access to alternative markets, and guidance on transitioning to more sustainable agricultural practices, we can facilitate a successful transition away from live sheep exports. This support will not only protect the welfare of animals but also help farmers adapt to new opportunities and maintain their livelihoods in the evolving agricultural landscape.
8. **Economic opportunities:** while the transition away from live export by sea may present initial challenges, it also opens up opportunities for the development of alternative industries and export markets. By transitioning away from an industry whose social licence is deteriorating, Australia can enhance economic resilience, create jobs, and meet the growing demand for ethically sourced products. Embracing alternative industries, including plant-based production, can foster innovation, create new jobs, and stimulate economic growth. By investing in technologies and practices that prioritise animal welfare and sustainability, Australia can position itself as a **global leader** in producing and exporting ethically sourced products. By supporting farmers in this transition, we can ensure a just and inclusive process. **The long-term global outlook for chilled sheep meat is strong, supported by growing global demand.** The value of Australian sheep production for the frozen meat trade **alone** increased from \$3.4 billion in 2010–11 to \$4.5 billion in 2021–22. **The economics of a frozen meat trade far outweighs the live sheep export trade.** Minister Watt says there are significant opportunities for WA sheep producers outside of live sheep export. The government has already been working hard to open up new markets for boxed sheep meat, including in the United Kingdom, India and potentially the European Union.
9. **Broad-based support from stakeholders:** the Australian Government's decision to phase out live export by sea has generated widespread support and mobilised various stakeholders who share a common commitment to animal welfare. This broad-based support encompasses, animal welfare organisations, Vets, and the general public. This broad-based support from various stakeholders shows the significance of the government's decision to phase out live export by sea. It highlights a shared vision that upholds the highest standards of animal welfare, ethical considerations, and sustainable practices. By embracing this support and working collaboratively, Australia can lead the way in setting a new standard for responsible and compassionate agricultural practices, inspiring other nations to follow suit.
10. **Protecting Australia's international reputation:** the continuation of the live export trade puts Australia's international reputation at risk and undermines the country's credibility. Australia ranks poorly when compared to other countries' animal welfare performance. By implementing this policy, Australia affirms its

commitment to ethical practices, reinforcing its positive image and maintaining trust in its agricultural sector.

Supporting the Australian Government's policy to phase out the live export of sheep by sea is crucial for safeguarding animal welfare, protecting Australia's reputation, addressing environmental concerns, and creating new economic opportunities. By embracing this policy, Australia sets an example for other nations to prioritise animal welfare and promote more sustainable practices.

OUR legal system has denied animals that are raised for food the same compassion, moral consideration, and legal protection as other animals in human care. Animals that are raised for food are no less deserving of care and being treated humanely. They deserve compassion as to how they are farmed, transported and how they are killed. These animals feel fear and pain, they are living, sentient beings. They are not simply just commodities that can be bought and sold, allowed to suffer in silence whilst being transported then be cruelly killed fully conscious in countries where no animal welfare standards even exist. Sheep have endured decades of cruelty on transport ships and at point of slaughter in these overseas countries.

As Mahatma Ghandi once said, *"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."*

Australia can do better, should do better and will do better. Our past mistakes can be corrected. Now is the time to end this cruel industry once and for all. **Legislate an end date of the live sheep export trade to ensure for everyone that this vile trade has ended and begin the phase out period soon.**

Your sincerely

Phoebe Laird