

May 30th 2023

Dear committee members.

My name is Sharon McLay, nee Scott, and I have been writing to folk like you about live sheep exports since I was a child.

I first found out about live sheep exports, sitting beside my father at a meeting in [REDACTED].

A gentleman was addressing the meeting regarding the decimation of his members wages, conditions, and jobs.

He spoke of workplaces closing, of workers sitting on the fences and waiting in car parks to see if they would be called in to work that day.

Even as a child, I could see his desperation to be heard. For those assembled to listen to his warnings regarding the future of his members jobs – and indeed the future of many others and that of animals.

It was when he mentioned animals however that I really focused, and this is why this meeting remains in my memory all these years later.

He showed grainy footage, which my father tried to stop me seeing, but the glimpses I got burned into my mind.

The man was [REDACTED] of the meat workers Union.

The footage he showed was of heinous conditions aboard death ships, of terrified animals being slaughtered in the streets, being kicked, dragged, punched. They were sheep. Australian sheep.

Other footage I could not see but was to learn from listening to those watching was cattle.

Australian cattle being beaten, tendons being slashed, eyes stabbed. The bellows of the cattle turned down during the presentation, such was the

distressing and agonising sound – unmistakable, even for a child – terror, pain, torture.

The folk in that meeting were not soft animal lovers, or animal activists, or even those with a mild interest in animal welfare. These people were hard-headed trade unionists, many of them leaders of their unions. The kind back in those days who would punch on at the [REDACTED] hotel over the road to sort out demarcation disputes!

The silence in the room when the lights came back up however was thick and heavy.

Mr [REDACTED] was trying to get his comrades to fight for an end to the LIVE ANIMAL EXPORT trade.

He wanted them to educate their members and sensibly figured out that most Australians would not really care about meat workers losing their jobs, BUT they WOULD care about the heinous cruelty animals endured on the ships and at their destinations.

He spoke of how the professionalism of the slaughtermen he represented was being undermined and disregarded by greedy “squatters” who saw nothing but profit when they looked at their animals and cared even less for those who had the “solemn duty of dispatching them”. A duty he claimed his members took very seriously to complete as rapidly and with as little pain and suffering as possible. That his members took pride in doing their jobs PROPERLY.

He spoke of how the “squattocracy” would sell out the jobs of the common man for an extra few cents per animal.

That comment stayed with me too, an “extra few cents per animal”...

The awareness created by Mr [REDACTED] and other trade unionists led to the 1984 senate enquiry into Live animal exports.

The trade was deemed intrinsically cruel, and the finding was made that it be phased out.

Interestingly some of those giving evidence, a vet, went on to become a Liberal Premier of Victoria, yet did not disclose any affiliations at the time or vested interests. This seems to be a common theme with the trade, politicians with vested interests and cosy relationships with the industry, not looking at you Mr [REDACTED] who called yourself a “unionist”.

Fast forward to countless instances of documented cruelty, television exposes and community outrage – I am yet to find even ONE person who believes Live export is Ok, let alone that it should continue.

The cruelty I observed at that meeting as a child replicated and repeated over and over and over again, year after year. All the while industry and government claiming they are “isolated incidents”

Folks they are not.

Things have not improved.

Industry has just learned how to hide and spin it better.

The upcoming use of taxpayers’ money to justify live export, via “our” ABC is yet more evidence of industry’s reach.

You will notice the ‘Landline’ programme will be featuring several episodes portraying live sheep exports as a wee bit less pleasant than an all-expenses paid cruise!

Funny how it was done in January, the coolest time of year for exports and with a friendly ‘journalist’.

I will be writing to ‘Auntie’ to express my complete disgust at this work of fiction they are presenting as journalism too, don’t worry!

I’ve been asking to observe live export ships for decades, even offered to pay my fare! Yet for some reason they don’t want folk like me to see their operations. I wonder why?

JOB TRUTH and FICTION

The industry shattered the meat processing sector in Australia.

Slaughterhouses closed and families with little means or options suffered terribly. I know this because I helped make up food parcels for meat workers union unemployed members and their families.

The live export sector often claim :

“if we don’t send them, they will get them elsewhere, and the treatment of the animals will be worse..” Aside from that being the drug dealers justification, its simply illogical.

The fact we keep sending animals tells the populations of those countries that we are fine with the way they treat our animals. For surely if we weren’t, we’d stop sending them, wouldn’t we?

Folks, sheep are still being stuffed into car boots, still being thrown off the back of trucks, still being trussed up and sold at markets for home slaughter. Sheep are still being used as sacrifices.

Whilst on sacrifices, lets get fairdinkum shall we?

That’s what It’s really about folks.

Live animals for SACRIFICE.

Please stop trying to tell the Australian public that they need “fresh meat” because they don’t have refrigeration.

Really? Saudi Arabi, Jordan, Kuwait, seriously?

Anyone who believes those nations cannot afford refrigeration really needs to get out more!

And before someone points at me as being “racist” for this comment, I have the same opinion of our own “festivals of sacrifice”, Christmas and Easter, where our gluttony sees millions slaughtered to celebrate life! How very bizarre and ironic, but I digress...

Live export not only exports animals -it exports jobs, and not just on the kill floor.

The sectors and jobs slaughterhouses sustained from cleaners to lunch trucks, to fire equipment service technicians. And let’s not forget the funding in rates and to emergency services, like my old profession, the fire service.

Why doesn’t industry simply tell the truth, I’d have more respect for them if they did?

They started sending the animals to break the meat workers union, make a few extra cents for graziers, make lots of extra money for exporters, and hand a shed load of jobs to our friends in the countries we export to. Don’t worry

about value adding, a quick buck is far better an earn for the immoral and ethically bankrupt.

Whilst on jobs, lets look at some other fantasies the live export sector peddles shall we?

Job losses.

They claim truck drivers, drovers and even shearers will lose their jobs!

The sky will fall! Yet they accuse folk like me of being “emotive”!!

If this doesn't illustrate the contempt they hold their fellow Australians and their intelligence in, I don't know what does!

Our shearer is desperate for workers! So much so that he goes into schools to try and encourage young folk to take up the profession. We have a desperate need for skilled shearers, none will lose their jobs.

Drovers, well unless I'm mistaken, the same animals will need care, droving, management whether they are being loaded onto a sheep ship or mustered for local slaughter, so that one's out.

Truck drivers, well given the fact I'm a 50 something female whose been offered several truck driving jobs since retiring from the fire service, I'd say employers are desperate for qualified articulated and heavy licensed drivers, so I think we can all call BS on that one too!

Please folks, enough, enough, enough. Enough of the cruelty, enough of the deliberate infliction of suffering. Enough of sheep, the gentle souls who built this nations wealth being treated like insensible bags of potatoes, ENOUGH.

A very, very small minority of people make filthy coin from this sector.

The vast majority of Australians are against it.

Australians have been against it since the time [REDACTED] and his fellow unionists exposed this wanton evil, since the 1980's, when I was a child, and grew up fast after seeing what we were doing.

I've stood on pickets, I've written to your kind, I've visited your offices after begging and pleading for you to see and hear – not see and hear me – but to

see and hear them. See and hear the suffering and cruelty we are inflicting on these gentle, helpless animals.

To this end, I would like to take a moment to thank Mr [REDACTED], for hearing me respectfully and with attention. I won't name his colleagues who refused to see me, or who did but then treated me with contempt, but there were too many over the years.

The shame of what we do is not limited to our knowledge.

I was shocked and surprised to be quizzed on the trade in the UK and the USA by fellow female firefighters when I visited those countries as part of the UFU's (United Firefighters Union) delegation to learn more about supporting women in firefighting.

The drug dealers argument that if we don't do it, someone else will, didn't wash with them either, I must say.

I found it interesting to hear that many would not travel here due to this and our treatment of native animals – and those dollars were instead going to NZ, as the long-haul travel destination.

(For those unaware, firefighters take leave in blocks, which means they are perfect candidates for long haul tourism. Tourism being a sector that creates more jobs and brings in more coin than LE or the Ag sector in entirety)

Finally, to answer your requirements for these submissions -

The trade should cease immediately. Sheep breeders have had more than enough notice, and the Australian public should not have to suffer for their recalcitrance. They won't go broke, unlike the workers and others who relied on slaughterhouses to simply feed their families.

Their profits may dip, but any canny grazier would also have enough put by to cover this, just as they should for drought, or should disease strike. The graziers will cope, jobs won't be lost, we have a worker shortage for heavens sakes. Just end it now, short, sharp and over with. As if the trade never existed, and the death ships were unavailable. Simple, don't overthink it. Businesses survive such changes all the time, grazing operations should be no different.

I invite you all to meet sheep.

Not visit an industry property, but really meet sheep.

I invite you all to our farm and home, [REDACTED] where the sheep have names and answer to them.

I invite you to spend even as little as an hour with them, sitting quietly and observing their obvious intelligence and individual characters and personalities. I say personalities with deliberate intent – they, like us show frustration, happiness, anger, embarrassment, joy, shyness, fear, pleasure and of course pain, some being more ready to show it than others, just like us.

We must stop this disregard for their suffering, I beg you all, please just see them, see the horror of live export for what it is please, and use your power to end it once and for all.

Kindest regards and hopes for your wise consideration,

Sharon McLay

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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