



Shire of Cranbrook - Opposition to the Cessation of Live Sheep Exports by Sea

The news that there was an independent panel visiting Cranbrook on Wednesday 19 April 2023, to consult with stakeholders came as a surprise to the stakeholders themselves. The stakeholders consisted of farmers, representatives from agribusinesses including transporters and stock agents, as well as members of the public. It was only the community's quick response to the news of the meeting that ensured that approximately 150 people attended the meeting in the Shire of Cranbrook's Community Hall, some had driven from over 300 kilometers away to be present.

It is hoped that the large attendance would send a strong message to the Federal Government of the community's opposition to the phase out of live sheep exports by sea. The quick gathering of angry and upset people should highlight the enormous impact the end of live export of sheep would have on farmers, businesses across the supply chain, and towns such as Cranbrook and Frankland River in the Shire of Cranbrook.

The Panel was asked a range of questions: One farmer raised the matter of the impact on the countries that receive the sheep and the effect of the cessation on their economies. Sovereign risk was again raised as a question by another attendee, who asked if the Federal Government had considered how the implementation of restrictions that would significantly reduce the worth of its contracts would affect another country's economy. Everyone there was aware of Indonesia's inflation rate in 2011 after the cattle live export ban was put in place without consultation, and the damage done to its relations with Australia.

Another farmer spoke about the effect on the wool trade if people got out of sheep, with a flow on to the supply of shearers in the supply chain. Another farmer spoke eloquently about the importance of the live sheep trade to local towns and their survival, as well as the effect on the cattle industry as many livestock transporters by sea combined their loads for efficiency.

It was clear that those present were devastated by the Government's decision and the effect on the current sheep market. The interruption in the supply chain was already impacting farmers leaving them unable to move lambs to market to allow heavily pregnant ewes to come onto the feeders.

A random comment overheard at the meeting was that everyone would turn to cropping and that in turn would affect their industry and leave Australia even more vulnerable to the costs of fertiliser and chemicals, and external environmental factors such as the war in Ukraine. However, not everyone has that choice as their land may not be suitable for cropping.

All questions were asked very courteously at the meeting of 19 April 2023, and the Panel which consisted of Warren Snowdon, Sue Middleton, Phil Glyde and Heather Neil, were treated with respect. However, good manners could not hide the distress in peoples' voices as they talked about their families, their mental health, and their concern for their livelihoods.

The meeting was advised that all the Panel had signed an agreement prior to being appointed that they would not present an alternative discussion on whether the trade should be stopped. Their role was purely to identify the best way to phase out live export and who in the supply chain may need support during the transition. A transition to what? The meeting pointed out to the Panel that Western Australia does not have the population or abattoirs to support a transition to alternative markets.

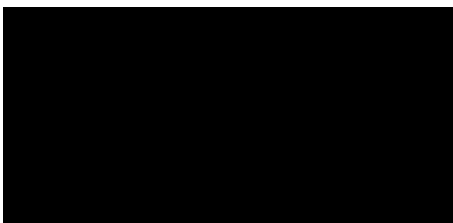
It is not possible in Western Australia to build abattoirs to service this industry. In the last month in regional Western Australia two sheep abattoirs have been advertised for sale due to bankruptcy. As quoted below:

“A Waroona abattoir remains on the market more than seven months after it first went up for sale despite the Federal Government’s push to increase the amount of meat processing in Australia. The situation exposes the harsh reality of the WA industry with the facility one of four in the State for sale.” (The West Australian, 30 May 2023).

With few abattoirs, how can we be expected to expand domestic processing and increase sheep meat exports? To staff the abattoirs that are operating there is a staffing shortage, only alleviated slightly by the Federal Government introducing workers from the Pacific Islands, creating further problems with the shortage of suitable housing in regional Western Australia.

It is hard to understand how the 19 April meeting could be classed as a consultative meeting when the outcome for live sheep exports has already been decided by the politicians in Canberra, to the point of making the Panel look redundant. The community understood that the decision was based on a 2022 election promise, but other election promises have not been kept, and democracy would not function without the ability to be flexible and change decisions. The case for the live sheep trade should not have been made without considering all the advantages and disadvantages; that is what a democracy is all about. It should not be influenced by parties that have no understanding of the current care that goes into the transport of sheep by sea. It can consider the viewpoint of those who wish to ban the trade, but in turn must consider the viewpoint of those who are responsible and care for their sheep.

As a local government in a rural regional area, we are very aware of the huge impact of the Federal Government’s announcement, and the angst it has brought to individuals, families, and our community. Regional Western Australia like many regional areas, is limited in support for mental health issues. Farmers can cope with dry years, low livestock prices, high costs, isolation, and bush fires, but it is decisions like this, made from Canberra without true consultation, that do the most damage to their mental health. We are, therefore, writing on behalf of our ratepayers and our community to seek a reversal in the decision made to phase out live sheep exports by sea.



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SHIRE OF CRANBROOK
30 May 2023