

30 May 2023

Dear Panel Members,

Stop Live Exports is a community-led, non-profit organisation that advocates for the end of live animal exports from Australia. Our submission is representative of the views of over 17,000 Stop Live Export supporters who believe that the live animal export trade is inherently cruel, outdated and has no place in Australian society.

TIMEFRAME

One thing is certain – that every shipment of sheep leaving Australia will result in horrific suffering for thousands of Australian animals. Be that due to the appalling conditions on ship or the fact they face fully conscious slaughter in the receiving country. Either way, there is no possible way to remove the systemic and inherent cruelty of the live export trade.

Therefore, we are of the view that the trade must end as soon as practical.

Stop Live Exports would like to see a date for the trade to end set and legislated by December 2023 with the phase out completed no later than December 2025.

The live animal export trade has been in terminal decline for decades, with live sheep export numbers dropping from over six million in 2002, to 1.1 million in 2019, to 575,000 in 2021. If the trade has naturally declined by over 500,000 in two years, then it is not unreasonable to expect the transition for the final 500,000 to take a further two years.

This terminal reduction in numbers was already occurring before the much publicised Awassi Express incident in 2018. The reduction of the live export trade has not negatively impacted sheep farming in Australia.

With the ongoing history of catastrophes, loss of lives, loss of social licence, ongoing regulatory breaches and public disapproval, the industry cannot claim they haven't been aware that the trade was a sunset industry and have not had time to prepare or diversify.

Setting the date as soon as possible will provide certainty for local producers and the processing sector as they embark on building capacity for local slaughter and infrastructure.

TRANSITION

During the transition period Stop Live Exports would like to see a cap on the number of sheep exported put in place so as not to exceed the current levels, and set milestones for progressively decreasing numbers of sheep over the phase out period.

Additionally, during the phase out period we would expect a) independent observers on all voyages, b) ASEL enforced and breaches penalised c) ESCAS breaches penalised.

IMPACT

According to the Live Export Trade Review report commissioned by Animals Australia and prepared by Pegasus Economics, the economic impact of the trade on farming in Australia is minimal;

“With the decline of the live sheep export trade, the relative significance of the trade for WA sheep farmers has also diminished. Based on 2017-18, sales to the live sheep export industry represent only around 5 per cent of total cash receipts for WA specialist sheep farmers and around 1½ per cent for WA mixed sheep farmers.”

Industry modelling around the economic impact of cessation of the trade negatively focuses on job losses rather than job gains. The Department for Agriculture has contended that employment in WA will likely increase with the end of live exports:

“Total employment in Western Australia is likely to increase if sheep destined for live export are processed in Australia. This is because meat processing is labour intensive, and likely to employ more people than the live export industry it would replace (Davey & Fisher 2018).”

Australia has the resources and expertise to lead the way in prioritising growth of the already much larger and faster growing market of the export of chilled meat products.

REGULATORY FAILURE

The industry has proven they cannot be relied upon to uphold and meet the ASEL or ESCAS standards imposed by the government. An ongoing list of breaches and lack of enforcement or penalties imposed demonstrates the Department is not equipped and has a lack of ability and impartiality to deal with breaches in a satisfactory and proper manner.

All that aside, once the animals leave Australian control we no longer have the ability to secure the welfare for these animals in the receiving countries where the fate they suffer would not be legal in Australia. This in itself should be enough to end the trade as noted as far back as the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare (1985) that found:

“The Committee came to the conclusion that, if a decision were to be made on the future of the trade purely on animal welfare grounds, there is enough evidence to stop the trade. The trade is, in many respects, inimical to good animal welfare, and it is not in the interests of the animal to be transported to the Middle East for slaughter.”

The export of live animals and the ongoing disasters since this time have damaged the Australian farming reputation. It is inherently high-risk, with decades of repeated evidence of suffering and cruelty and it needs to end as soon as practical.

In addition to the industry accepted mortality rate on board ships, disasters result in even many more thousands of animal deaths. Earlier this year, more than 15,000 sheep drowned after a live export ship sank in Sudan, and in 2020 a capsized ship killed 14,000 sheep. Since 2000, over 618,000 sheep have perished during live exports from Australia.

We are concerned about the lack of focus on animal welfare in the panel discussions so far. The very basis for ending this trade is rooted in an extensive history of animal welfare violations. Therefore, any plans regarding the phase-out should prioritise animal welfare alongside considerations for industry stakeholders.

The refusal by the National Farmers' Federation and other pro-live export industry bodies to engage with the panel in an attempt to interfere with the phase-out is unacceptable. Additionally, ongoing spread of misinformation that favours the industry needs to be corrected. Such information can even be found on the Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/animal/welfare/export-trade>

"Suggestions that the live trade could be completely replaced by chilled and frozen meat fails to take into account the requirements of the market. While Australia has developed a significant trade in meat products, the lack of refrigeration and cold chain facilities, as well as strong cultural preferences for freshly slaughtered meat precludes Australia from servicing all of its export markets with processed meat products."

This statement is not factually correct. A review undertaken in 2011 by Market Vision Research & Consulting Services, a company based in Dubai, noted that in the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain there was near-universal household ownership of refrigerators, at 99.5%. Freezers also have a high penetration (73%), among households. This figure would have only grown along with the wealth in these countries over the last decade.

To ensure this election promise is upheld, we urge the government to legislate a date and implement plans for the phase-out to begin during the current term of Parliament.

We agree with RSPCA Australia chief executive Richard Mussell's statement that "the live sheep export trade had deep, inherent and unfixable animal welfare issues." Similarly to our request, RSPCA has urged the government to legislate an end date within its current term, before 2025, to give producers certainty and to protect Australia's international reputation.

After recently banning all live animal exports, the New Zealand government rightly said the ban would protect the country's reputation as consumers become more ethically conscious.



**STOP LIVE
EXPORTS**
CARE • CONNECT • CHANGE

We implore you on behalf of ourselves and our supporters, to recommend implementing the end of the trade as soon as practical. This will position Australia at the forefront of global animal welfare initiatives, protect countless animals from horrific suffering and meet the expectations of the Australian public who have seen enough evidence of suffering and expect to see our animals treated better.

Thank you for your due consideration to the concerns raised in this submission which will provide certainty for producers, stop animal cruelty and protect and improve our international reputation as progressive leaders.

Yours sincerely,
Angelica Martin
On behalf of Stop Live Exports