

## **WAFarmers Dairy Council Position Paper: Live Export and Animal Welfare**

WAFarmers Dairy Council, March 2023

### **Introduction**

The WAFarmers Dairy Council is concerned about the impending ban on live sheep exports. We see this decision as reactive and the beginning of a ban on all live exports. Higher revenue margins and ROI on export animals has allowed many dairy farms to remain in business, historically by covering the gap caused by low milk prices. The Australian Dairy Industry has worked hard to increase the value and utilisation of male calves, and has developed good practices around calf welfare. The sale of dairy beef and the use of sexed semen to produce heifers for live export are important practices embraced by dairy farmers today: it's about making fewer male calves and value adding to the ones that are born. The WAFarmers Dairy Council makes the following specific points about live export and animal welfare.

#### **1. Dairy beef**

Live export effectively increases the value of dairy beef. The more diverse markets there are, the greater the value.

#### **2. Live export heifers**

Heifers are a high value live export market which is an important income stream for many dairy farmers. Farmers have embraced sexed semen technology to cater for the export heifer market which has reduced the number of lower value male calves being born. In an isolated milk market such as WA where there is little manufacturing, the export heifer market is a valuable tool for balancing the supply of milk.

#### **3. Importance of live export from Northern Australia**

The live export of beef from northern Australia increases the value of dairy beef in general. This is because the export of beef from Northern Australia means cattle are not being processed in the south where they would be competing with dairy beef. The ability of existing abattoirs to process such an increase is doubtful.

#### **4. Cultural responsiveness**

In these times of respecting and being inclusive of all cultures and stages of economic development, live export is important for diverse overseas communities. Many of the countries to which we export rely on wet markets for their animal protein. This reliance can be for cultural and/or economic reasons all of which Australia should strongly support.

#### **5. Drought**

Live export is a very important tool in the time of drought to manage animal welfare. Stock numbers can be reduced quickly to lessen the effects of drought on remaining stock.

#### **6. Animal welfare improvements**

The Federal Minister has failed to recognise the great improvements in animal welfare within the live sheep and cattle export industry. We concede that there were problems in the past, but it is important that when improvements are made they are recognised.

### **Conclusion**

Banning sheep live export is the thin end of the wedge which could result in banning live exports for cattle too. Given the multiple issues under discussion at the election, the government cannot argue they have a mandate for ending live shipping. The government should not be taking opportunities and markets away from hard-working farmers based on misinformed opinions. Instead the government should be helping educate the community on the huge strides made in animal welfare and live exports and helping them to understand the broader significance of live exports to rural survival. The government should also help educate the community to understand different cultures and lifestyles around the world. We believe that live export is perfectly legitimate and sustainable export industry. Live export will continue from other countries if Australia bans it, and we believe Australia's animal welfare standards are among the highest in the world. We therefore recommend Australia continues live export for reasons of farmer livelihood, trade and overall animal welfare.