



25 May 2023

Dear Review Panel

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the *Phase out of Live Sheep Exports by Sea Review*.

Townsville Against Live Export Inc (TALE) is a non-government, not for profit community organisation based in [REDACTED]. We focus mostly on ending the live export of cattle, as sheep are not exported from North Queensland. We welcome the government's decision to phase out the live sheep export trade though.

Surveys have repeatedly indicated that most Australians are opposed to live animal exports due to concerns about animal cruelty.¹ On board live export ships, animals endure horrific conditions. Once landed in importing countries with lower animal welfare standards than those in Australia, animals are at risk of experiencing cruel handling and slaughter methods that would be illegal here, including having their throat cut while fully conscious. The Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) is weak and does not require pre-slaughter stunning for exported animals.

The New Zealand government recently ended the live exports of breeding animals by sea. Live animal exports for slaughter from NZ ceased in 2008. The current NZ Minister of Agriculture, Damien O'Connor, had said that ending live exports by sea would "protect New Zealand's reputation for world-leading animal welfare standards." Further, Germany has banned all live animal exports outside of the European Union, and a Brazilian court recently banned the export of live cattle from all the country's ports over animal welfare concerns. We are pleased that Australia is following these precedents, although at this time it is limited to live sheep exports.

When should the live sheep export trade end?

Australia does not have a good international reputation for animal welfare, receiving a ranking of D on the Animal Protection Index (API) in 2020 from World Animal Protection.² One of the recommendations in this report was that live exports be banned *immediately*.³ The report stated, "Live export is a stain on Australia's reputation and immensely damaging to the country internationally. It is a clear example of animal welfare being completely disregarded in the

¹ <https://www.rspca.org.au/blog/2022/live-sheep-export-cruel-unpopular-and-unsustainable>;
<https://www.rspca.org.au/media-centre/news/2018/new-poll-finds-3-4-australians-want-live-export-end-greatest-concern-over>

² https://api.worldanimalprotection.org/sites/default/files/api_2020_-_australia.pdf

³ Page 24.



interests of economics.”⁴ An end to live sheep exports by sea will be a start to restoring Australia’s reputation as a nation that cares about the welfare of animals.

Until the phase out is in place, however, animals will continue to suffer and die. We believe that the live export trade for all animals must therefore end as soon as possible.

There has been plenty of warning for those in the trade. In 1985, the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare considered the future of live sheep export and concluded in its report *The Export of Live Sheep from Australia*, that, on animal welfare grounds alone, there was enough evidence to stop the trade. Before the federal election in 2019, Labor promised to phase out the live sheep export trade over five years. It would have been banned by now if Labor had won the election. Labor then went to the election in May 2022 with a weaker commitment to end the live sheep trade, although it ruled out phasing live sheep exports within the first term of government if elected, and with no precise timeline.

We want the Prime Minister, Mr Albanese, to keep his promise to implement a ban but accept that he may not wish to break his other promise that the phase out would not take place during the first term. However, for there to be any guarantee that live sheep exports by sea will end, the government must act during this term. Failure from Labor to be re-elected for a second term could mean that the promised phase-out may never happen, as the Coalition is opposed to the phase out. We believe that passing legislation, during this term of government, to ban live sheep exports, with an explicit end date set immediately after the next election, will allow the government to keep both promises.

New Zealand was able to phase out live exports by sea within a two-year transition period. In acknowledging that some people had been affected by the end of live exports, the Minister for Agriculture said, “The two-year transition period has allowed those impacted by the ban sufficient time to adjust their business models and supply chains to account for the removal of the trade.”⁵

We urge the government to legislate as soon as possible a maximum two-year-transition period for the phase out of live sheep exports by sea from Australia with a definite end date, together with the provision of adequate support to assist farmers in transitioning away from live animal exports.

Sheep farmers have had nearly 40 years to plan a transition, and as the trade is now in great decline, this process should not be delayed further. The phase-out must begin and end as soon as possible. Any delay means more animals will be subjected to cruelty.

Other animals

The current ALP Federal government has made it clear that it has no plan to end the export of cattle, buffalo, and goats - this is disappointing. ALL animals suffer on board live export ships, and once landed in importing countries, they are subject to the same brutal slaughter methods. Some

⁴ Page 25.

⁵ <https://www.beefcentral.com/live-export/nz-passes-bill-to-end-livestock-exports-by-sea-in-april-2023/>



ships sailing to the Middle East carry both sheep and cattle, and these animals are subject to exactly the same conditions on board. Their slaughter abroad happens in similar circumstances. If exporting live sheep is considered cruel, then it is difficult to understand how other species are deemed less deserving of protection. TALE urges the government to consider banning ALL live animal exports by sea and not to disregard these animals' welfare merely in the interest of economics.

Interim measures

It is inevitable that, once an end date for the trade is announced, exporters will be keen to make the most of the trade while they can, and animal welfare standards may drop even further. We, therefore, make the following recommendations:

ASEL - The Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL 3.2), which set out the minimum animal health and welfare standards exporters must meet throughout the export supply chain, must be strictly enforced. These standards have not prevented animals from suffering and dying on board live export ships, and where possible they should be strengthened.

Independent Observers - These must be deployed to report compliance in much greater numbers than has occurred to date, especially since the pandemic. Independent Observers should be deployed on board ALL live export ships, regardless of the trip duration and with no exceptions being made for operators spuriously claiming "insufficient space" or other reasons.⁶ This would allow for real observation of the animals and their response to the stressors experienced on board ships as a measure of animal welfare, rather than the use of mortality rates as is currently the case. As the RSPCA has pointed out, "Mortality rates are an extreme indicator of poor animal welfare; they signal an underlying level of suffering and stress in the broader population".⁷

Reports - Independent Observers' reports should be published promptly on completion of a voyage, not delayed for several months as many have been.⁸ Their publication should occur within a month, not quarterly, as is currently the case.

Dealing with breaches - Despite claims by industry and government that the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) protects Australian animals, the reality is that Australian Government regulation does not have legal effect in foreign jurisdictions. It is appalling that monitoring of the trade appears to be conducted largely by NGOs, with most ESCAS breaches reported by animal welfare groups. We would like government agencies to take a much more proactive role in monitoring standards.

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/feb/20/greens-decry-utter-decimation-of-independent-observer-program-for-live-exports>

⁷ <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-are-the-standards-of-animal-welfare-onboard-live-export-ships/>

⁸ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/independent-observer-reports>



In addition, when breaches have been reported, it can take a long time for investigations to be completed. For instance, Report 186, a complaint from PETA of non-compliance with ESCAS animal welfare standards for cattle in Indonesia which identified non-compliant handling and slaughter, was received by the Department of Agriculture on 25 June 2021. Twenty-one months later, details of the investigation and action taken were included in ESCAS Regulatory Performance Report 1 January 2023 – 31 March 2023. Such an excessive delay is unacceptable. Any reports of breaches must be investigated promptly – we suggest within 3 months - and strong action must be taken against any person or company found to be using non-compliant handling or slaughter methods.

Overbreeding - Once the end date is determined, we trust that sheep farmers will take appropriate measures to ensure they do not have excess sheep past that date. This will require significantly reducing the breeding of sheep, starting immediately. The government needs to ensure that this is the case.

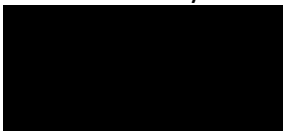
No new/resumed trade – The phase out period must be a period during which the trade will gradually decrease, and farmers transition to other pursuits. The government must not let any new live export trade commence or any previous live export trade resume, as this would be completely inconsistent with the spirit of the phase out. We urge the government not to grant permits to exports to Saudi Arabia, as has been recently proposed.⁹

Climate change issues – we understand that some farming sectors are keen to replace the sheep flocks traditionally exported live with sheep destined for domestic slaughter. Given the urgency of action needed to address climate change, especially in the light of recent predictions that the climate will be exceeding the critical 1.5 degree threshold within the next 5 years, we urge the government to ensure that the sheep flock is reduced, not increased, and that sheep farmers be encouraged and supported to transition towards the production of climate-friendly crops.

Conclusion

Australians overwhelmingly support an urgent end to the live sheep export trade, and farmers need certainty regarding the end date. A two-year transition period out of live sheep exports must be legislated asap, with an end date shortly after the next Federal election. This will then pave the way for Australia's transition away from ALL live animal exports.

Yours sincerely



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⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-17/live-sheep-export-saudi-arabia-market-reopening/102356320>

