

Submission re Phase-out of Live Sheep Exports by Sea

I am one of the many Australians deeply concerned about the treatment of animals and the importance of having legislation protecting them from harm. The live export of animals is an abhorrent and incredibly cruel practice and I was pleased that the Labor Government promised to end live sheep exports by sea as a major first step in improving the animal welfare standards in Australia.

It is imperative that the phase-out and end of live sheep export by sea happens as soon as possible. The longer the delay means more sheep will be subjected to inexcusable suffering. We know that this suffering includes being in extremes of temperature, cramped on ships with lack of air circulation and being covered in excrement in a totally foreign environment at sea and then to be subjected to the most vile abuse and horrendous fully conscious slaughter in importing countries. This is an election promise made by the Labor Government and it is also imperative that it happens in their first term of Government before there is any chance of the Labor Government not being re-elected as the coalition Government has a history of not caring about animal welfare. It really is an opportunity for the Labor Government to prove their intent to start championing animal welfare in this country, which is long overdue.

Animal welfare

Transport is [one of the deadliest](#) aspects of animal agriculture. Overwhelming evidence confirms that the live export trade involves [unacceptable suffering and cruelty](#). This particularly happens during long sea journeys. Most Australian sheep are exported to the Middle East which is [one of the world's longest](#) sea journeys. Voyages to the Middle East take an average of [between 20-21 days](#), but some can take up to [five weeks](#). Sheep leaving our ports depart during the Australian winter and arrive in the Middle East's summer, where [temperatures can climb over 40°C](#). Industry reports indicate that mortality rates on these voyages are approximately [four times greater](#) than for shorter voyages. Whilst there has been a commitment to end this it needs to end as soon as possible to stop further suffering to sheep.

Ethical considerations

The public have been outraged by the animal cruelty exposed in the live export industry with [numerous cases](#) of animal cruelty causing significant public concern both in Australia and internationally. It's been [over a decade](#) since the shocking cruelty of the live export trade was exposed on national television. The government implemented [the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System \('ESCAS'\)](#) - a system that requires approval before animals can be live exported internationally. Since ESCAS started in 2012, Australia has exported [over 23 million](#) farmed animals. It has been a complete failure, where cruelty on live export ships and in overseas abattoirs [continues unabated](#). Sadly the suffering doesn't stop there for those who survive the journey, as there are virtually no laws protecting animals in the countries they are sold to. These poor animals are then often subjected to abuse such as

being shoved into car boots and horrendous methods of slaughter that are illegal in Australia.

Live export industry in decline

The live export trade has experienced a significant decline and lack of social license in recent years. Live sheep [exports fell](#) from over 7 million sheep in the late 1980's to just over 1 million in 2018. Between 2016 and 2020, this figure decreased even further by [more than 50%](#). The Australian government has spent decades and millions of taxpayer dollars trying to get an industry that systemically abuses animals for profit to comply with regulations to little avail and sadly the animal suffering continues. The current Government must act immediately to end this continuing suffering and the only way forward is to start a phase-out of this industry as soon as possible and legislate the end of live sheep export by sea in this term of government.

Environmental concerns

The long-distance transportation of sheep by sea consumes [substantial amounts](#) of fossil fuels, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation. The effluent from the ships is also of huge concern, as are the dead bodies thrown overboard. Phasing out live export by sea aligns with Australia's goals to combat climate change, reduce carbon emissions, and transition to more sustainable industries. By reducing the carbon emissions associated with long-distance transportation and the environmental impacts of large-scale live export operations, Australia can contribute to mitigating the climate crisis, at the same time preserving natural resources. The land and water needed for animal agriculture can be put to much better use and feed the nation much more effectively growing plants for human consumption rather than growing plants to feed to animals to then feed to humans. Not to mention the effluent from animal agriculture which is a pollution crisis in itself. Transitioning to plant-based agriculture would allow us to reforest and protect much more habitat for our diminishing wildlife as well as sequestering more carbon for our climate, so it would be a win/win situation all round. So the sooner the phase-out begins and this cruel industry ends the better for our international reputation on animal welfare standards, the climate crisis, and the environment.

Fair transition for farmers

A rapid and successful phase-out of live sheep export by sea must ensure that farmers are provided with the necessary financial support and help with access to new markets and also help to transition to alternative eco-friendly farming such as plant-based agriculture. It is [essential](#) to ensure that farmers receive comprehensive support and resources during the phase-out period. This support will not only protect the welfare of animals but also help farmers adapt to new and emerging opportunities and maintain their livelihoods as agricultural endeavours evolve. It is important that farmers receive the financial support to transition to less cruel and more sustainable farming during the phase-out process. This is an excellent opportunity to be helping farmers transition to plant-based farming which involves no animal cruelty and is much better for the environment and the climate

crisis, as well as being better for human health. At the same time helping farmers to gain access to new and emerging industries.

Economic opportunities

Whilst there may be initial challenges transitioning away from an industry whose [social licence](#) is deteriorating, it also opens up opportunities for the development of alternative and emerging industries and export markets. Australia can enhance economic resilience, create jobs, and meet the growing demand for ethically sourced products. Embracing alternative industries, including plant-based production, can foster innovation, create new jobs, and stimulate economic growth. By investing in technologies and practices that prioritise animal welfare and sustainability, Australia can position itself as a global leader in producing and exporting ethically sourced products.

Support from stakeholders

There has been widespread support for the Australian Government's decision to phase out live export by sea, which has mobilised various stakeholders who share a common commitment to animal welfare. This broad-based support encompasses [animal welfare organisations](#), [veterinarians](#), and [the general public](#). This underscores the significance of the government's decision to phase out live export by sea. It highlights a shared vision that upholds the highest standards of animal welfare, ethical considerations, and sustainable practices. By embracing this support and working collaboratively, Australia can lead the way in setting a new standard for responsible and compassionate agricultural practices, leading the way for other nations.

Australia's international reputation

Australia's international reputation is being put at risk with the continuing live export of animals by sea and undermines the country's credibility. Australia [ranks poorly](#) when compared to other countries' animal welfare performance. By legislating the end of live sheep export by sea as soon as possible Australia affirms its commitment to ethical practices in the agricultural sector and will enhance its positive image and international reputation.

Government commitment

The Albanese Government must honour its commitment to ending the live export of sheep by sea. This has been a policy of the Labor party [since 2018](#). It was made in response to footage of a voyage that [killed over 2,000 sheep](#) the previous year. More recently, Labor [recommitted](#) to its policy of phasing out the live export of sheep if elected in the lead-up to the 2022 Federal election. Yet, the new Labor government has [already backflipped](#) on this promise. Rather than following through, the Albanese government has [pushed back its ban](#), saying that [it won't happen before 2025](#). The industry has seen this as an opportunity to [reverse the decision](#). Labor cannot afford to bank on winning the next election with the lives of tens of thousands of sheep and their protection hanging in the balance. This is not what the Australian public were

promised or expect. The Government needs to act urgently on their commitment to end the live sheep export trade by sea and stop the continuing suffering of animals.

Urgent Need to end trade

Since January 2023, there have been [60 live export voyages](#). Of these, 39 were by sea and 11 were sheep. The end result for the overwhelming majority of these sheep is slaughter. Though the elected Albanese Government has reaffirmed this commitment, Labor has [refused](#) to commit to a timeline. In order for the Albanese Government's commitment to be met, it must be accomplished within their first term in government. Delaying the phase-out would result in prolonged suffering for sheep.

The Labor Government has an opportunity to show the world that they mean business when it comes to showing the rest of the world that Australia does genuinely care about the treatment of animals and improve our International ranking in terms of World Animal Protection's [official rankings](#). Our friends in New Zealand have recently banned all export of animals by sea which reflects their nations desire to protect animals from harm rather than letting a few parties with vested interests profit from the cruelty to animals. Brazil has moved to ban all live cattle exports amid pressure from an influential animal welfare group that has compared the trade to "human trafficking at the time of slavery"

<https://www.countryman.com.au/countryman/livestock/brazilian-federal-court-bans-live-cattle-exports-amid-pressure-from-animal-welfare-group-c-10514485>

Strong animal welfare policies impact how Australians vote as demonstrated in [Surveys](#). There is little doubt that the commitments made by the Albanese Government in the lead-up to the most recent Federal election, including its commitment to phase out live sheep exports, ensured the Labor party received favourable political preferences. There is little doubt that these voters will continue to be influenced in a similar way in future elections.

Australians want certainty that this trade will end. We also want the certainty that the phase-out be legislated and commences in this term of parliament. And that it starts and ends as soon as possible. Australias reputation as a nation that cares is at stake. Australia can set an example to other countries to prioritise animal welfare at the same time as championing our environment and promoting more sustainable and ethical industries and jobs.

"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated" - Mahatma Ghandi

