

## Submission to the Phase out of live sheep exports by sea panel

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Australia's phase out of live export of sheep by sea must be legislated and completed within the current term of Parliament. Australians know well, from decades of experience, that as long as this trade is allowed to carry on, many more animals will continue to suffer, and for the overwhelming majority of Australians this is unacceptable.

As RSPCA Australia notes, "if Australia doesn't legislate the date now, we risk a delayed transition, sentencing thousands more sheep to a miserable fate of abhorrent and unnecessary suffering."

Nearly forty years ago, the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare concluded in its 1985 report, Export of Live Sheep from Australia, 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."<sup>1</sup>

The report noted, "there is little doubt that sheep suffer during the journey from an Australian farm to an abattoir in the Middle East" and that "any form of transport puts stress on livestock."

These statements remain as true in 2023 as they were in 1985.

The Committee also explained that reforms could only help to reduce "but not eliminate stress, suffering and risk during transportation of sheep to the Middle East" and that "a long-term solution must be sought."

The Committee concluded that the Federal Government "should promote and encourage the expansion of the refrigerated sheep meat trade... with the aim of eventually substituting it for the live sheep trade."

After nearly forty years of horrific deaths and unnecessary suffering for many thousands of sheep since the 1985 report, that "eventually" moment has finally arrived.

The Committee also recommended the live export industry not be allowed to self-regulate, as proposed, because of the nature of the trade and "evidence of non-adherence to current standards." But no amount of regulation has been able to, or can, eliminate the unacceptable suffering involved in an inherently cruel trade, or control a reckless industry that has continued to prioritise profit over the welfare of animals.

The current deputy leader of the federal Liberal Party, Sussan Ley, told parliament in 2018:

*The litany of animal cruelty in the live sheep trade makes a mockery of the industry's 'No fear, no pain' mantra. If the rules were actually enforced... no commercial operator would undertake the trade. Exporters have explained to me that it would not be viable. Unfortunately this is an industry with an operating model built on animal suffering.*<sup>2</sup>

Vets Against Live Export spokesperson, Dr Sue Foster, said recently:

*What never changes is the inherent conditions on these ships: ship movement, 24h lighting and 90dB noise for 20+ days, faecal "bedding" and heat stress. Even with the changes implemented since 2018, 38/41 voyages accompanied by independent observers have reported heat stress. The ships are not air-conditioned and no amount of ventilation helps when the ambient conditions exceed a sheep's heat stress threshold.*<sup>3</sup>

Not a single animal should be forced into these conditions ever again. As RSPCA Australia says:

*They're at risk of suffering extreme heat stress, poor conditions and overcrowded stocking densities that increase discomfort, and can limit access to food and water for some animals. They're at risk because of the unavoidable reality that live export leads to weeks of stressful circumstances for the sheep including repeated handling by unfamiliar people, standing in their own faeces and urine, unfamiliar environments with loud noises, varied ventilation, high humidity, mistreatment and inhumane slaughter practices once they disembark at their destination.*<sup>4</sup>

Live sheep exports now amount to less than one percent of Western Australia's agricultural exports<sup>5</sup> and the trade has been in steep decline for many years.

The Australian Labor Party committed to phasing out live sheep exports in 2018 while in Opposition and it can come as no surprise to anyone that the process to make that happen has started. The end of this vile trade has been coming for a long time, for nearly forty years in fact, and while affected farmers need to be compensated and helped to transition, this process should not be dragged out.

There must be certainty for farmers, for the Australian community, and Australia must show the world it is serious about moving away from this cruel trade. For the animals involved and for most Australians, who have made clear for a very long time they want live export of sheep to end, the phase out of this cruel trade cannot come soon enough.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22publications%2Ftabledpapers%2FHPP032016002632%22;src1=sm1>

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Hansard/Hansard\\_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/8ba325d4-4d2d-4a31-91b3-a83165c5a782/&sid=0105](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/8ba325d4-4d2d-4a31-91b3-a83165c5a782/&sid=0105)

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.vale.org.au/uploads/1/0/4/3/10438895/22.3.3\\_vale\\_media\\_release\\_shep\\_live\\_ex\\_phaseout.pdf](https://www.vale.org.au/uploads/1/0/4/3/10438895/22.3.3_vale_media_release_shep_live_ex_phaseout.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rspca.org.au/take-action/live-sheep-export-phase-out>

<sup>5</sup> <https://minister.agriculture.gov.au/watt/speeches-and-transcripts/sky-news-afternoon-agenda-biosecurity-disaster-communications-live-sheep-exports>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rspca.org.au/media-centre/news/2022/back-bad-old-days-rspca-again-warns-against-live-export-backflip>