



Animal Justice Party

Live Export Campaign Discussion Points

1. The economics of the live export trade

The live export trade constitutes 0.5% of all Australian exports and is less than 5% of the value of the total agriculture industry. The live cattle trade accounts for around 90% of the total live export trade, with a value of \$1.5 billion, while the live sheep trade is much smaller at \$85 million and 0.1% of all agricultural trade nationally.

The live sheep trade has been in steady decline, with the number of live sheep exported per annum dropping from 7.1 million in 1988 to 1.1 million in 2019, largely due to the increase in “boxed” chilled and frozen meat supplied to Middle Eastern markets in place of or in addition to live sheep.

Australia already exports billions of dollars’ worth of chilled meat to many countries, including the Middle East. The boxed meat trade is growing rapidly. In 2009, Australia exported 19.9 million kg of boxed lamb to the Middle East. In 2019, it was 57 million kg, an 187% increase.


The main markets for Australian live sheep exports are in the Middle East – Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The Gulf states have proven to be unreliable customers - Bahrain has rejected a shipment because a small number of sheep appeared to have ‘scabby mouth,’ and Saudi Arabia has a history of rejecting shipments at a whim.


The main markets for Australia’s live exported cattle (for slaughter) are Indonesia and Vietnam, with China a growing market.

2. What alternative markets are there for sheep?

Studies funded by industry organisations assume that farmers have few viable alternatives to live export, and that the end of the trade would have a significant impact on prices and farm incomes.

When the live export of sheep ends (as the Albanese government committed to at the 2022 election) there will be available markets in eastern Australia to absorb them. The phase-out of live sheep export would involve reactivating the meat processing sector in





Western Australia, with support for sheep farmers during the transition to supplying the domestic sheep meat market, or moving into cropping and other sectors.

3. Price regulation

The live export industry claims that the trade underwrites farm gate prices for sheep in WA, meaning it provides a floor price for the farmers selling their sheep to exporters. This argument doesn't stand up to scrutiny. In Australia's case, given that we export far more of our sheep than we consume domestically, international commodity prices are the most important determinant.

A case in point is the temporary ban of the live sheep export trade to the Middle East during the northern summer in 2018 and 2019. During this ban farm gate prices for WA sheep remained stable and new markets were found for mutton sheep displaced from the live sheep export trade.

4. What about the jobs the industry provides?


Workers employed by the live export industry include sheep producers, stock-hands, stock transport drivers, shearers, truck drivers and vets, who could easily be absorbed into the domestic industry. Live export also exports jobs – jobs in slaughterhouses and downstream processing are exported overseas with every live animal. The AMIEU conservatively estimates jobs lost due to live exports, in the meat-works industry alone, at 40,000 since 1990.

5. Don't Middle Eastern countries rely on live animals due to lack of refrigeration?

The countries Australia exports sheep to are some of the wealthiest oil-rich nations in the world. The idea that they don't have refrigeration is ludicrous. 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%.

6. What about independent observers reporting conditions on board ships?

Reporting used to be the job of independent observers, but since June 2020, when the Morrison government decided to relax the requirement due to the risks of COVID, there has been an independent observer on board only two live export voyages, despite hundreds of voyages taking place. Prior to this, independent observers were required on ships (starting in 2018), but by 2019, the requirement changed so that it was only mandatory for 'long-haul voyages'.





7. Does having a vet on board improve welfare standards on ships?

Animals experience a range of serious health and welfare problems caused by the conditions on board live export ships, including heat stress, failure to eat and drink, injury and disease. These problems are exacerbated by extreme heat and humidity, rough weather, and prolonged confinement for up to 5 weeks on board a ship.

Live export vessels can carry up to 70,000 animals and the stocking density means their basic needs can't be met, as they are unable to move freely, lie down or access food and water. The fact that manure isn't removed during voyages means sheep are often standing in and sleeping in their own waste for weeks on end.

The current requirements are for one vet per voyage. Given that there can be up to 70,000 animals on board, one vet would have little impact on their welfare. Also, vets are chosen by exporters and are subject to pressure not to report poor conditions on board.

8. Why can't Australia ensure better welfare conditions in slaughterhouses in other countries?


The live export industry and the government often claim that the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) ensures that animals are protected against inhumane practices along the supply chain. The reality is that once livestock reach their port of destination the animals are beyond the control of Australian laws. The live export industry cannot guarantee that animals will be treated humanely in their destination countries.


There are numerous reported examples of animals ending up outside of the approved supply chain after being sold to individuals who subject the animals to inhumane treatment during transport and in slaughterhouses. Stunning before slaughter is not a requirement for exported animals. Extensive evidence gathered from importing countries has shown inhumane, brutal slaughter and handling practices that would be contrary to Australian laws and standards.

9. A city versus country issue?

We often hear from the live export industry that there is a divide between how people in cities and people in rural areas feel about this issue, with the implication that city folk don't really understand the issue. This is simply false.

Research carried out by specialist consulting firm, Futureye, showed an overwhelming majority (95%) of the Australian public is concerned about the treatment of farm animals





and considers farm animal welfare in Australia to be an issue to some degree. Live export was named as the issue of greatest concern, with very little difference in opinion between city and country people.

10. Public opinion in Australia is against live export

Recent independent polling commissioned by the RSPCA of a representative population sample found that just over two thirds (67%) want an end to the live export trade, regardless of where they live – in cities, towns, or regional and rural areas. Western Australia, which produces and exports most of the sheep, had the highest level of opposition, at 70%.

These results are consistent with other polls in showing that most Australians do not support the continuation of the live export trade and would like to see it phased out as soon as possible.

The live export trade, whether in sheep, cattle or other animals, cannot claim to have a social licence to operate when a clear majority of Australians oppose it on animal welfare grounds and have been calling for change over many years. The live export trade is inherently cruel, with enormous animal suffering incurred every step of the way.

11. New Zealand bans all live export by sea, Germany ends non-EU live exports – what is Australia waiting for?

New Zealand ended the live export of animals for slaughter in 2008 but continued to export live animals for breeding. In late September 2022 the New Zealand parliament passed a bill banning all live export by sea, taking effect from April 2023. Apart from the significant animal welfare issues with the live export trade, the New Zealand government was concerned about damage to New Zealand's reputation and brand. Germany has now announced an end to live exports outside the EU, with further restrictions expected.

After decades of avoidable animal suffering, animal and human casualties, intermittent bans and repeated disasters at sea and at docking, it's clear that the live export trade is not worth saving. It's past time for Australia to follow New Zealand's lead and end the live export trade once and for all.