

Submission
No 22

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE PHASE-OUT OF
AUSTRALIAN LIVE SHEEP EXPORTS BY SEA ON NEW
SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Humane Society International Australia

Date Received: 17 September 2024



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**

AUSTRALIA

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Submission to the New South Wales Legislative Council by Humane Society International (Australia) to the inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales (NSW)

17 September 2024

About HSI

Humane Society International (HSI) is one of the world's leading animal protection organisations and HSI Australia established our office in 1994. We work to create a humane and sustainable world for animals advocating across wildlife conservation and animal welfare policy areas. Our vision is for a world where people treat animals and nature with respect and compassion.

Submitted to:

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

NSW Legislative Council

For further information on this submission, please contact:

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Animal Welfare Campaigner

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Humane Society International Australia (HSI) is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the impact of the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales. HSI is a proud member of the Australian Alliance for Animals, which was formed to pursue critical reforms to animal welfare regulatory frameworks. HSI expresses our full support for their submission to this inquiry, and we also offer the comments below.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

- Currently, no live sheep are exported through NSW sea ports, and NSW is not directly involved in the trade to supply live sheep to overseas markets.
- The phase-out would have minimal, if any, impact on NSW farmers because they are not supplying sheep.
- Live sheep have not been shipped from NSW for at least six years, when some may have been loaded onto the Al Shuwaikh ship which departed Port Adelaide in South Australia in May 2018.
- No evidence of any foreseeable economic impacts to the NSW sheep industry were noted in the Independent Panel Report released in October 2023 following their in-depth review of the trade.
- The size of the live sheep export trade is very small, especially when compared to the sheep meat export trade. Western Australia's boxed and chilled sheep meat export trade is valued at \$576M which is over six times more than the value of the live sheep export trade (\$92M)¹. Live sheep exports make up less than 0.1 per cent of Australia's agricultural exports, nationally.
- The Independent Panel noted that, "the WA sheep industry can be profitable and sustainable during the transition period and beyond the end of live sheep exports by sea."
- The live sheep export trade has put Australia's reputation at risk. The phase-out will help to protect Australia's international reputation for both the Australian sheep and wool industries.
- The phase-out of live sheep exports by sea still leaves viable options open to sheep farmers and will allow for a more humane and sustainable future for the Australian sheep industry.
- While HSI does support financial assistance for impacted producers, HSI does not believe the Federal Government should provide compensation to NSW sheep producers because currently they are not exporting live sheep from NSW.

ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERNS

- HSI has long opposed the live sheep export trade and strongly supports the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea by May 2028.
- It is not possible to export large numbers of live sheep by sea humanely, and despite the implementation of the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System

¹ ABARES, Agricultural Forecast and Outlook, 2022 Agricultural Commodities Report, Vol. 12.1, pages 78-79

(ESCAS) since 2012, there have been continued reports of non-compliance and suffering.

- The live export of animals goes against the basic principles of animal welfare and always presents an unacceptable risk of animal cruelty.
- Environments with high humidity and heat are particularly challenging for sheep given their physiology, so they are more susceptible to suffering when subjected to these conditions.
- The analysis of Independent Observer reports from 2018 to 2023 showed that over 60 per cent documented heat stress in sheep, and the most common reported causes of death were starvation and gastrointestinal disease.
- Despite the northern summer trade prohibition, sheep continue to suffer heat stress during the months that surround the prohibited period. This suffering is impossible to avoid despite improvements with regards to stocking densities and ventilation.
- Once the sheep arrive at their destination to the Middle East, Australian sheep are slaughtered while fully conscious which HSI strongly opposes. If they were instead processed in Australia, the Halal-accredited slaughter here requires stunning.
- Mortality rates should not be relied upon as a measure of animal welfare. Animals can suffer terrible welfare without dying. The McCarthy Review in 2018 recommended the industry should move away from relying on mortality rates as a performance measure, yet they continue to refer to them.
- A fundamental principle of farm animal welfare is to slaughter an animal as close as possible to the point of production in order to minimise stress and discomfort. Long distance journeys contradict this most basic of principles from the outset.
- The best strategy is to make every effort to process animals as close to the farm as possible with minimal transport duration times.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACTS

- The phase out of live sheep exports is supported by the majority of Australians, including those in Western Australia where the impact of the phase out will be the most significant.
- The animal welfare implications of the live sheep export trade have been under public scrutiny for decades, with elements such as heat stress during voyages, inhumane slaughter methods at destination countries, high stocking densities and the long arduous journeys losing the industry its social licence.
- The numerous media exposés and animal welfare disasters over the years have led to declining public support for the live sheep trade from Australia. There is also growing public concern for animal welfare in Australia².

² Futureye “Commodity or Sentient Being? Australia's Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare”, DAWR, Canberra, 2018

- Polling commissioned by the RSPCA (McCrindle 2022³) showed that 78 per cent of Australians would support a phase out if farmers were supported through the transition.
- In May 2023 a survey showed over 70 per cent of Western Australians support a phase out (McCrindle 2023⁴).
- A Parliamentary petition⁵ in 2023 calling for a legislated end date to live sheep export secured 43,758 signatures, one of the largest Australian parliamentary e-petitions in history.
- The House Agriculture Committee Inquiry into the Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea Bill 2024 received 13,000 submissions, with more than 85% of them expressing support for the Bill.

³ McCrindle 2022: <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/media-centre/back-bad-old-days-rspca-again-warns-against-live-export-backflip/>

⁴ McCrindle 2023: <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/media-centre/breaking-news-more-7-10-western-australians-still-want-live-sheep-export-end/>

⁵ Parliamentary petition (2023): <https://www.aph.gov.au/e-petitions/petition/EN5323>