

Submission  
No 23

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

**Organisation:** Townsville Against Live Export Inc.

**Date Received:** 18 September 2024

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Dear Inquiry Committee,

## **Submission to Inquiry into the Impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales**

Townsville Against Live Export Inc. (TALE), is a group of Townsville residents opposed to the cruelty of the live animal export trade. The objects of the group are to end live cattle export from Townsville and to educate the public about the animal welfare, social, economic, and environmental impacts of the live export trade. We believe that a world without live animal exports is not only possible but essential for the welfare of our animals. We commend the Australian government's plans to phase out live sheep exports by sea and express our concern that any delay in this process could negatively impact cattle and other animals that are exported live for offshore slaughter. Our diverse membership includes urban and rural dwellers, united in their shared commitment to animal welfare.

In our view, the live sheep export trade clashes with acceptable standards of animal welfare. The persistent issues have not been adequately addressed by recent regulatory reforms. Instead, these reforms have only emphasised the deeply-rooted problems plaguing the trade.

Conditions endured by the sheep during their 2–3-week sea voyages to the Middle East are distressing. The heat and humidity, combined with the forced standing or sleeping in their own waste, expose the animals to a myriad of stressors. These include failure to eat, lameness, diseases such as salmonellosis, infection, and respiratory issues caused by high ammonia levels on board. An analysis by RSPCA Australia of Independent Observer (IO) reports from 2018 to 2023 shows that despite some improvements the trade continues to cause animal suffering. The data from 53 journeys of live sheep export which included in total approximately 2.5 million sheep recorded 6551 sheep deaths. Around 70% of reports noted animal welfare issues onboard live export ships inconsistent with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) including poor loading, poor handling, poor management of sick sheep, long horns, lambing on board, and sheep not fit to load for transport. Over 60% of IO reports (32 reports) listed indicators of heat stress.

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Independent-Observer-Report-Analysis-Live-Sheep-Export-Journeys-2018-2023.pdf>

Upon arrival in the Middle East, Australian sheep are slaughtered without stunning, causing extreme fear, pain, and distress. In Australia, the practice of stunning before slaughter, including for Halal-accredited meat export, spares the animals from consciously experiencing the cutting and bleeding process. This discrepancy is causing severe damage to Australia's international reputation. The Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) requires exporters to have arrangements with supply chain partners (i.e. importers, feedlots, abattoirs) in importing countries to provide humane treatment and handling of feeder and slaughter livestock from arrival through to point of slaughter, but does not mandate pre-slaughter stunning. ESCAS is meant to ensure animals are kept within approved supply chains, not transported in utes and car boots or sold for home slaughter. Yet investigations by Animals Australia reveals these rules being ignored in importing countries most recently in Oman and Jordan <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/compliance-investigations/investigations-escas# 2023> The war in the Middle East has made it difficult for animal welfare groups to operate in the Middle East and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has ceased the deployment of Independent Observers on live export ships travelling to the region.

Overwhelmingly, Australians support the end of live sheep exports. This sentiment is echoed in recent inquiry submissions. The 2023 Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports received over 80% of submissions and 3,300 survey responses supporting the phase-out. Similarly, the House Agriculture Committee Inquiry into the Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea Bill 2024 saw over 85% of the 13,000 submissions and correspondence items favouring the Bill. We believe that this strong support reflects the public's rejection of the inherent cruelty in the trade and their belief in more humane alternatives.

Interestingly, the NSW sheep industry has not depended on the live export trade for years. Since at least 2018, when exports from Port Adelaide ceased, no NSW sheep have been sourced for live export by sea. A small number are exported by air from Sydney to SE Asia. In the 2023-2024 financial year 7,261 sheep were exported from NSW, 4,525 for slaughter and 2,736 for breeding (DAFF figures). Subsequently, the state's sheep industry has limited exposure to the trade. Even in years where interstate trade in sheep from WA to Eastern states exceeded 300,000 head, the impact on NSW sheep prices was negligible. International commodity prices for lamb and mutton, a significant determinant for farm gate sheep prices in Australia, are far more influential, considering Australia exports over 65% of the sheep meat it produces.

The 2023 Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports report did not identify any significant impact on the NSW industry from the phase-out. However, the damage to Australia's international reputation resulting from the cruelty of the live sheep export trade affects all states, including NSW.

While the cruel treatment of sheep during transport and upon arrival in the Middle East is often the focus, it is worth noting that cattle exported from WA to the Middle East also experience similar conditions as they are loaded on the same ships as the sheep. No sheep are exported from Townsville, but large numbers of cattle are exported from our port for slaughter in SE Asia, primarily in Vietnam and Indonesia. These countries, like those in the Middle East, have lower animal welfare standards than Australia, and Australian animals have sadly suffered horrific abuse there.

We firmly believe that the time has come for Australia to lead the way in global animal welfare standards by ending live animal exports. We thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

J Brown

President

Townsville Against Live Export Inc.