

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

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Inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on NSW.

Dear Inquiry Committee,

I am a resident of rural NSW, a livestock owner, and a veterinarian. I have additional post graduate qualifications in animal welfare science, and have worked and published on the issues of humane slaughter and the animal welfare impacts of live sheep export.

The continuation of the live sheep export trade cannot be justified; any efforts to overturn the recent federal government decision to end the trade must be quashed. We have known about the significant animal welfare issues associated with this trade for decades, but they have been ignored by the industry and its participants. Any minor improvements have had to be forced on industry fighting tooth and nail against reform.

I was heavily involved in scientific work in 2018 which contributed to bringing about the summer suspension in trade and increased space allocation for sheep; this was desperately needed due to the serious heat stress issues associated with travelling across the Equator and into the Northern Hemisphere summer. Although these changes have resulted in some reduction in mortalities, they certainly have not 'fixed' all the welfare issues (as industry would have you believe). Recent summaries of Independent Observer reports make it clear that significant welfare issues continue on board these ships. It is the nature of the shipboard environment, and the environments encountered on the routes and destinations, that make 'fixing' this trade impossible.

It should be noted that the live export industry strongly resisted the abovementioned animal welfare improvements at the time. And yet now try to use these changes to justify continuation of the trade.

Despite the changes, Independent Observer data analysed from 2018–23 showed that sheep were continuing to suffer heat stress during at least 36 of 41 voyages to the Middle East. The data shows prevalent temperatures that exceed known thresholds for heat stress. The reports reveal significant animal welfare issues including gastrointestinal diseases, inanition, and starvation, and non-compliances with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock such as poor loading, poor handling, poor management of sick sheep, carriage of late pregnant ewes with lambing on board, presence of long horns, and presence of sheep that were not fit to load for transport.

Australia's participation in live sheep exports is not necessary for us to contribute to improved global animal welfare standards. We can strive for long-term and widespread benefits to animal welfare by working through international organisations such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and international trade agreements.

The Australian community is largely in support of ending live sheep exports. This is evident from the findings of recent inquiries into the matter. Over 80% of the 800 submissions and 3,300 survey responses received by the 2023 Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports supported the phase-out. Similarly, more than 85% of the 13,000 submissions to the House Agriculture Committee Inquiry into the Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea Bill 2024 expressed support for the Bill.

Importantly, the NSW sheep industry has not relied on the live export trade for several years, with no NSW sheep being sourced for live export since at least 2018. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the phase-out of live sheep exports will significantly impact the NSW sheep industry.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support the federal government's decision to phase out live sheep exports, due to the trade's inherent animal welfare issues. The industry has lost its social licence, and the majority of Australians (including the majority of veterinarians) no longer support the trade.

Regards,