

Submission
No 38

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

Organisation: Sentient, The Veterinary Institute of Animal Ethics

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The veterinary voice in animal welfare

Inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales

Submission by Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics

Introduction

Sentient is an independent Australian veterinary association dedicated to animal welfare advocacy based on the ethical implications of animal sentience and the findings of animal welfare science. Our members are represented in academia, private practice (companion, equine and large animals), non-government, government and industry settings, with expertise in many fields including animal welfare, animal behaviour, clinical medicine, epidemiology and the use of animals in teaching and research. A number are qualified specialists in particular disciplines or have extensive experience within industries such as live export, horse racing and greyhound racing. Sentient has presented at international and national conferences, published papers, contributed numerous submissions to state and federal government inquiries, and provided evidence at parliamentary public hearings. We also host final year veterinary science students for Public, Industry and Community placements in animal welfare advocacy. Sentient is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

Sentient applauds the Government for its election commitment to undertake the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea. This process will enhance Australia's international reputation in terms of animal welfare standards and scientific scrutiny and will open opportunities in more sustainable and ethical trades involving sheep. We can see no negative impacts on New South Wales of the proposed phase-out and our focus is on the animal welfare considerations.

Response to terms of reference

Thank you for reading our responses to the following terms of reference:

- (a) evaluate the economic impact of phasing out live sheep exports on New South Wales sheep producers and related supply chains in regional towns, including:
 - (i) transport operators
 - (ii) fodder and grain producers
 - (iii) other associated industries

The phasing out of live sheep exports by sea should have no economic impact on NSW sheep producers and related supply chains in regional towns because there is no live sheep export trade from NSW or even from surrounding states. The NSW sheep industry has not relied upon live

exports for many years. Furthermore, the Independent Panel's report¹ into the impacts of the phase-out did not identify any impacts on the NSW sheep industry.

(b) evaluate the impact on the sheep industry in New South Wales if farmers are unable to restock with animals from Western Australia (WA)

NSW farmers should be able to restock as needed, such as after long-term droughts, from both WA and other states. In terms of WA, flock numbers would be expected to remain the same, but rather than being exported, sheep will be processed locally for the chilled meat export market. On welfare grounds it is preferable for NSW farmers to restock with animals from an adjacent state to reduce the impact on sheep of long-distance transport by road.

(c) evaluate the price implications on New South Wales sheep and lamb producers of having stock from WA regularly sold at our sales

There should be no price implications for NSW because the phaseout period allows time for increased processing capacity to be developed in WA, meaning there would be no need to sell WA sheep in NSW or elsewhere in Australia.

(d) examine whether the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea will have any impact on NSW Government revenue and bottom line

We have no evidence that the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea would have any impact on NSW Government revenue.

(e) examine potential implications in demand for New South Wales mutton after the phase-out of the live sheep trade

We can see no such implications for the demand for NSW mutton after the phase-out of the live sheep trade.

(f) examine reasons used by the Federal Government for the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea and whether the Federal Government should provide compensation to New South Wales sheep producers

The Federal Government is phasing out live sheep exports by sea to 'strengthen sheep welfare to better align Australian export law with community expectations'² and to legislate a firm end date to provide a clear timeframe to allow producers, businesses and markets to make business decisions.

¹https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/3.%20AGR195.1123%20Independent%20panel%20report_v9.3.pdf

²https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Agriculture/LiveSheepExportsBill/Advisory_Report

Sentient commends the Federal Government for legislating this phase-out. The live sheep export trade is renowned for systemic cruelty to sheep which no regulatory change has corrected, including death and suffering from heat stress or infection, being stranded for indefinite periods in high heat and humidity due to mechanical failures onboard or debacles between importing and exporting nations, and the inevitable exposure to brutal handling and slaughter without prior stunning at their destination. For these reasons, the trade has lost its social license to operate. This was demonstrated by a McCrindle survey in 2022 that found 78% of Australians support a phase-out of live sheep export, and a 2023 McCrindle survey that found that 71% of Western Australians, including 69% from rural areas, supported a phase-out.

Furthermore, the live sheep export trade is small, making up less than 2% of the value of sheep meat exports from Australia. It is also a dwindling trade, having declined over 20 years from approximately 5 million sheep annually to 0.5 million sheep. There is potential to locally process such a small number of sheep annually and given the boxed meat trade has now taken over the live export trade in size, this offers a more lucrative market for producers in WA who had previously relied on live export. We believe it is important for the Committee to appreciate that the live sheep export trade is not sustainable, so it is in the interests of producers to be provided a phase-out period to allow them to adapt their business models. This lack of sustainability is due to the natural decline we have seen over the years and to the loss of ships as they age and no longer meet Australian Maritime Safety Authority compliance requirements.

Sentient also applauds the Federal Government for the compensation provided to WA producers to assist them through their transition through the phase-out period. There is no reason why the Government should compensate NSW producers as they do not rely on the live sheep export trade and there is no evidence they will be affected by the phase-out and eventual ban.

(g) examine animal welfare concerns relevant to the determination to cease live sheep export by sea by the Federal Government

The live export industry has never been 'fixed' in terms of risks to the welfare of sheep and from a veterinary point of view, we cannot emphasise strongly enough that this trade is incompatible with acceptable animal welfare standards due to the inherent risks to the animals involved. Mortality rates are a crude and insufficient measure of welfare, but these are relied upon by the industry, albeit on the assumption that any mortality rate is acceptable. To truly identify the welfare risks to sheep we must consider morbidity rates. The Parliamentary Senate Select Committee investigation findings back in 1985 determined that the export of live sheep from Australia "based on welfare findings alone should be phased out immediately". Our regulatory system has been unable to protect sheep exported by sea from suffering, and for too many, this suffering is extreme. This is because it is impossible to control all factors when sheep are shipped from Australia to the Northern Hemisphere. Sheep exported by sea are exposed to lengthy voyage times, prolonged heat stress (which cannot be overcome by ventilation), humidity, high stocking densities, inanition (inability to adapt to new forms of feed), ship movement, 24-hour lighting and 90dB noise, restricted food and water access, faecal contamination, disease (including

salmonellosis and respiratory diseases), lameness, risk of injury and potential catastrophes such as adverse weather events and mechanical failures. Australia's international reputation would be further harmed if we failed to achieve the proposed phase-out of live sheep exports by sea in a timely manner.

(h) examine the impact to local meat processors

Local meat processors in WA will profit from the phase-out once capitol is recouped.

(i)examine proven alternative markets and opportunities for New South Wales sheep producers

This issue does not appear to be relevant to NSW sheep producers as they do not need to rely on live sheep export.

(j) explore the social and community impacts of income loss for New South Wales sheep producers, including the evaluation of support mechanisms for affected communities

This issue is also irrelevant to NSW sheep producers. They do not need support mechanisms as none of their operations will be affected by the phase-out.

(k) analysis of potential economic losses from the phase-out and the impact on employment across regional New South Wales, including but not limited to transport, contract musterers and veterinary suppliers

Not relevant, as animals require mustering and veterinary services regardless of the mode of transport.

(l) identify case studies of graziers in other regions or countries that have successfully transitioned from live exports

Successful transitions away from live sheep exports have been achieved in the UK, New Zealand and Australia (in NSW, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania).

(m) examine alternative income streams for New South Wales sheep producers

This question is not relevant as NSW sheep producers do not export live sheep.

(n) examine community views in New South Wales of the live export industry, and

Australians overwhelmingly support an end to live sheep exports as indicated in response to point (f). If NSW residents and producers were concerned about the phase-out, we would have expected them to attend the 'Keep the Sheep' rally in Canberra on September 10, but this was dominated by producers from WA.



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(o) any other related matters.

The 'Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea Bill' provides certainty to the industry and individual farmers, allowing them to transition to a chilled/frozen sheep meat market. The Bill has been passed based on sound reasoning and we trust the future focus of all governments will be on supporting WA producers and farmers through this transition and developing trade agreements for the export of chilled/frozen sheep meat, particularly with nations with objections to live animal export. Animal welfare should be given the highest priority during the phase-out. This means expanding any gaps in domestic processing capacity in WA, providing financial support to WA farmers and producers and ensuring that there is no unnecessary killing of healthy animals. The welfare of sheep who continue to be exported by sea during the phase-out period by must be protected by:

- appointing Independent Observers to all ships, regardless of their point of destination
- independent monitoring of loading and
- expanding the northern summer trade prohibition to the period 1 May to 31 October

20/9/2024

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