

**Submission
No 41**

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

Organisation: FOUR PAWS Australia

Date Received: 20 September 2024



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

To Portfolio No. 4 – Regional NSW

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

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a submission to the NSW Inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on NSW.

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them. With offices worldwide, including Australia, our vision is a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding.

FOUR PAWS, advocates for the protection and humane treatment of animals. Internationally, we have been a leading voice in exposing the severe welfare issues associated with live animal transport via sea including overcrowding, extreme heat, and lack of proper care resulting in prolonged suffering.

In Australia, we have actively campaigned for a ban on live sheep exports, highlighting incidents of cruelty during long sea journeys to the Middle East. Through investigations, public awareness campaigns, and lobbying efforts, we continue to push for a complete ban on live exports and advocate for more humane alternatives, such as the chilled meat trade and transitioning out of animal agriculture to more humane and environmentally sustainable farming.

FOUR PAWS do not oppose the \$107 million compensation package to assist the industry successfully transition to more humane and sustainable alternatives and strongly supports the Federal Government's legislated ban on live sheep exports.

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

The Federal Government's decision to phase out live sheep exports by sea is a direct result of the persistent and severe animal welfare abuses inherent in this industry. For decades, live export ships have been sites of large-scale suffering, with sheep forced to endure weeks and months of extreme heat, overcrowding, poor ventilation, and inadequate care. This cruelty is well-documented, and despite countless promises of reform, and unsubstantiated claims of improved welfare, the industry has repeatedly failed to protect the animals in its care. The live export industry lost its social licence with the Australian public many years ago, and opposition



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

to this industry has continued to mount as Australians have had to bear witness time and again to the brutal reality of live export.

Sheep are transported for weeks and even months when being exported by sea. The tragedy of the animals who suffered for so long on the MV Bahijah is fresh in the minds of Australians and is just the latest in a long line of examples of the cruelty inherent in a trade that prioritises profit over animal welfare.

Over 14,000 sheep and 2,000 cattle were stranded on this vessel for over five and a half weeks in horrendous conditions, with extreme heat and insufficient ventilation, leading to significant animal suffering¹. After just two weeks off the ship animals were loaded back on the ship, in the heat of the Western Australian summer to be sent back to the Middle East, a journey of another 30 plus days¹. The decision to send these animals into a conflict zone and then forcing them to endure a prolonged journey back to Australia showcases the blatant disregard for animal welfare within the live export industry.

High Mortality Rates and Heat Stress

One of the most pressing concerns in live sheep export is the significant mortality rate caused by heat stress. During long sea voyages, particularly to destinations in the Middle East, sheep are often exposed to extreme temperatures, resulting in fatal heat stress.

According to reports, mortality rates during such journeys have exceeded the regulatory threshold of 2% in some cases, with many sheep dying from overcrowding, dehydration, and heat. Analysis of data from on board independent observer reports show that 80% of reports documented sheep were starving and 60% documented animals were suffering with signs of heat stress²

Inadequate Ventilation and Overcrowding

Live export vessels frequently suffer from poor ventilation and overcrowded conditions. This often leads to severe respiratory distress, heat exhaustion, and the spread of disease among sheep. The cramped conditions prevent sheep from resting or accessing food and water properly, further exacerbating animal suffering.

Failure to Meet Animal Welfare Standards

The live sheep export industry has consistently failed to meet animal welfare standards. Thousands of sheep are crammed into multi-level vessels, meaning that adequate care cannot be provided for individual animals when they fall ill, suffer injuries, or need urgent attention. In

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-05/mv-bahijah-refused-licence-to-re-export-stranded-animals/103429850>

² <https://www.igawlae.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/independent-observers-report.pdf>



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

these confined, overcrowded conditions, animals are left to suffer without relief. Unpredictable and harsh conditions at sea—such as storms, extreme heat, and long delays—exacerbate this cruelty, often turning already dire situations into life-threatening crises for the animals.

Despite existing regulations intended to protect animal welfare, investigations have repeatedly exposed the industry's routine violations, demonstrating that these standards are either ignored or unenforced. This ongoing neglect points to a systemic failure that makes the humane treatment of animals impossible within the live export trade. These continued breaches of welfare regulations showcase the industry's inability to protect animals, reinforcing the importance of the live sheep export ban.

Animal Suffering upon Arrival

Upon reaching their destination, Australian sheep face even greater suffering, often enduring brutal handling and slaughter practices that do not meet basic animal welfare standards.

Exposés and undercover investigations have repeatedly revealed the horrific fate of these animals, with evidence spanning decades. In 2023, undercover footage from Oman's sale yards captured Australian sheep being sold, mishandled, and slaughtered in clear violation of Australia's export regulations.

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

NSW is not directly involved in the live export trade and there is no live export through NSW ports. The Independent Panel Report on the Phase out of Live sheep Exports by Sea commissioned by the Federal Government and released in October 2023 failed to document any economic impact on NSW farmers. Additionally, a recent report by Pegasus Economics documented 'While NSW has not been directly involved in the live sheep export trade by sea as no sheep are loaded for export through NSW seaports, it is also now the case that NSW sheep farmers are no longer even indirectly involved as they have been unable to sell their sheep to the live sheep export trade since May 2018.'³

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

FOUR PAWS urges governments and industries to support a swift reduction of meat production by any means and a transition towards food systems that support animal welfare, human health standards, care for the environment and that enable ecological restoration. FOUR PAWS champions the 3 Rs approach to animal agriculture Reduce, Refine and Replace.

³ Submission to the Inquiry on the Impact of the Phase-Out of Australian Live Sheep Exports on NSW, Dr Alistair Davey September 2024. Pegasus Economics



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

Meat and dairy production are drivers of the climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, and environmental pollution. The provision of meat by these industries prioritises a high return through a cheap price for consumers, a price that is paid in animal suffering, environmental degradation, and public health costs. A change in the food system and a reduction of meat consumption is needed to bring our general food consumption in balance with the carrying capacity of the planet.

Animal agriculture contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, with methane from ruminants being a leading cause of climate change. Furthermore, the intensive use of land and water for grazing animals exacerbates drought conditions and puts additional strain on natural resources. One of the most effective measures to decrease the climate and environmental impact of our food systems is to reduce the number of animals being farmed. The climate crisis is an opportunity to rethink current food and farming systems and to catalyse a transition to a food system that benefits planet, animals and humans.

In NSW livestock farming, particularly sheep and cattle production, is a major driver of land degradation, habitat loss and deforestation.⁴⁵ As the significant environmental consequences of animal agriculture become increasingly evident, transitioning to alternative and sustainable income streams offers New South Wales both economic and environmental benefits.

The NSW government can play a pivotal in supporting a just and fair transition for sheep producers to alternative and sustainable ventures. This can be achieved by investing in pilot projects, commissioning research and conducting economic modelling and assessing viability of various alternative income streams considering different climatic, soil and socio-economic variables. NSW has the opportunity to become known as a world leader in sustainable agriculture, rather than a global hot spot for deforestation.

In October 2023 Denmark's Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries published 'Danish Action Plan for Plant Based Food'⁶ demonstrating the leading role government can play in driving change in the agricultural sector. The Danish government has three primary objectives: to increase demand for plant-based foods, to develop supply for plant-based foods, and to improve how all the different stakeholders - from scientists to farmers and chefs, food sociologists, and nutrition experts - in this nascent domestic industry are working together⁷.

⁴<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/lost-more-than-half-our-forest-why-nsw-is-a-global-hotspot-for-deforestation-20240911-p5k9pg.html>

⁵<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/13/australia-the-only-developed-nation-on-world-list-of-deforestation-hotspots>

⁶ [Danish Action Plan for Plant Based Food 2023 Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark 2023](#)

⁷ [Denmark publishes world's first national action plan for plant-based foods' GFI Europe](#)



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

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

The live sheep export industry in New South Wales lost its social licence to operate years ago due to its failure to meet basic community standards for animal welfare. For decades, the industry has been the subject of public outrage, as it has consistently prioritised profit over animal welfare.

Public sentiment against live export in Australia has decisively shifted, especially following well-documented exposés of animal suffering on live export ships and at their destination. Numerous polls have shown that Australians strongly oppose the live export of Australian animals. Including a 2022 McCrindle poll which found that 78% of Australians supported a ban on live sheep exports. This reflects the overwhelming desire within New South Wales and nationwide for the industry to be ended.

Moreover, public activism has demonstrated the depth of concern. Nearly 44,000 Australians signed a Parliamentary e-petition calling for an end to live exports, making it one of the largest petitions of its kind. This overwhelming response highlights the public's firm stance: the live export trade has no place in a society that values animal welfare.

The animal welfare crisis posed by live exports is also well-documented. Reports from the Department of Agriculture's own regulatory body and inquiries such as the 2018 McCarthy Review⁸ have revealed systemic failings, despite multiple government interventions aimed at improving conditions. The welfare risks, combined with the industry's failure to adequately address these issues, has led to widespread calls for a definitive ban.

⁸ [Independent Review of conditions for the export of sheep to the middle east during the northern hemisphere summer](#)