

**Submission
No 50**

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

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

20 September 2024

Like many other Australians, I have written many letters and many submissions over many years to many inquiries on the cruel, marginal, live sheep export trade. For yet another inquiry to be taking place is frankly absurd and an obscene waste of Australian taxpayers' time and money.

There is no evidence that ending live sheep exports will have any negative impacts on NSW. Since 2017-18, live sheep exports by sea have occurred only from Western Australia.¹ And I note, at least \$107 million of Australian taxpayer money will be used to fund a transition package for the live sheep export industry.

What is clear is that the most significant impacts from ending live sheep exports will be overwhelmingly positive. There is already widespread relief felt by many Australians around the country just from knowing they will no longer have to bear witness to the ongoing brutal treatment of these sentient beings. Cruelty inflicted on animals, animal suffering, whether witnessed directly, or through images, or just from being aware that it is happening, can have profoundly negative impacts on many people.

The inherent cruelty and suffering in the live sheep export trade has been extensively documented over decades and is well known. For many Australians, it has been difficult to understand how this trade was allowed to continue for so long while it was obvious that regulation could not eliminate the suffering and cruelty, or control a reckless industry that continues to prioritise profit over the welfare of animals.

As RSPCA Australia Chief Scientific Officer, Dr Suzanne Fowler, has pointed out:

*If these problems could be fixed, they would have been fixed by now. While some improvements have been forced upon the industry by increasing regulation over time, in reality, little has changed because little can change; the issues with live export are inherent to the trade and business model, and are unfixable.*²

The current deputy leader of the federal Liberal Party, Sussan Ley, told Parliament in 2018:

*The litany of animal cruelty in the live sheep trade makes a mockery of the industry's 'No fear, no pain' mantra. If the rules were actually enforced... no commercial operator would undertake the trade. Exporters have explained to me that it would not be viable. Unfortunately this is an industry with an operating model built on animal suffering.*³

When the bill to phase out the trade was introduced into Parliament earlier this year, RSPCA Australia's CEO Richard Mussell said:

*The science supporting this position is clear and irrefutable. Today's motion follows years of this scientific evidence that prove that sheep undoubtedly suffer in live export, both on the lengthy sea voyages and in the country of destination.*⁴

The position of the majority of Australians is also well known, reflected in eighty-five percent of over 13,000 submissions received by a recent federal parliament inquiry supporting the phase out of this cruel trade.⁵ The overwhelming support for the ban was predictable and consistent with numerous polls over many years. As RSPCA's Richard Mussell notes:

*Animal welfare is important to the Australian community, and over the course of this dark history of repeated disasters, the Australian community has turned irrevocably against this outdated practice. Multiple polls, petitions, surveys and public rallies continue to demonstrate the public's will to see an end to live sheep export - including independent polling that consistently finds around 7 in 10 West Australians support the current government's policy, a figure that is consistent nationally.*⁶

The live export industry continues to claim it has cleaned up its act – as they have claimed many times before, over decades - but evidence of continued suffering is clear. As Vets Against Live Export spokesperson, Dr Sue Foster, noted in March 2023:

*What never changes is the inherent conditions on these ships: ship movement, 24h lighting and 90dB noise for 20+ days, faecal "bedding" and heat stress. Even with the changes implemented since 2018, 38/41 voyages accompanied by independent observers have reported heat stress. The ships are not air-conditioned and no amount of ventilation helps when the ambient conditions exceed a sheep's heat stress threshold.*⁷

Recent in-depth analysis undertaken by RSPCA Australia, using data from Independent Observers over 53 live sheep export journeys carrying 2.5 million sheep between 2018 and 2023, revealed continued routine suffering of sheep on live export vessels. Findings included that "80 per cent of independent observer reports from recent live sheep export voyages say sheep are starving on board, and at least 60 per cent reported animals suffering with signs of heat stress."⁸

As well as the documented risk and suffering experienced by sheep before loading, while being loaded, while on board ships on these long journeys, while being unloaded and transported again in another country, the method of their slaughter offers another layer of horrendous suffering. RSPCA's Richard Mussell:

*Year on year, sheep in live export continue to suffer and die in their thousands from the serious, repeated and cumulative impacts of transport stress, searing heat and stifling humidity, overcrowding, hunger, increased risk of succumbing to disease and infection, risk of injury, as well as the risk of being slaughtered fully conscious at their overseas destination.*⁹

At a hearing in Western Australian earlier this year, Melanie Latter from the Australian Veterinary Association explained that, "most if not all sheep that go to the Middle East are slaughtered fully conscious" and "sheep can remain conscious for twenty seconds after having the blood vessels in their neck severed. So that's quite a lot of time to be experiencing the pain of the neck cut and the fear and the anxiety of that death process."¹⁰

At the same hearing, livestock veterinarian Dr Jane Vaughan noted that other than one abattoir in Jordan, "I'm not aware of any other abattoir in the Middle East that does use pre-stunning when they're killing sheep."¹¹

I could go on. And on. And on. The documented facts and evidence of suffering and cruelty, over decades, and that continues today, is extensive. It is why the industry must and will end.

It is shameful that agendas that have little to do with the welfare of sheep, or with farmers in general, or with the needs or views of the majority of Australians, are clearly driving this inquiry.

The questions that most Australians still want answered are - why was this cruel trade allowed to continue for so long and why will thousands more sheep be forced to suffer for four more long years before this grubby, cruel trade finally ends? I hope this inquiry will provide answers to those questions.

¹ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/daff-submission-house-standing-committee-live-sheep-export.pdf>

² <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/media-centre/starving-sweltering-and-sick-independent-data-debunks-industry-claims-and-reveals-the-ongoing-truth-of-live-sheep-export/>

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<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansardr%2F8ba325d4-4d2d-4a31-91b3-a83165c5a782%2F0106;query=id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F8ba325d4-4d2d-4a31-91b3-a83165c5a782%2F0428%22>

⁴ <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/media-centre/historic-moment-as-bill-to-end-live-sheep-export-introduced-by-the-albanese-government/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20science%20supporting%20this%20position,RSPCA%20Australia%20CEO%20Richard%20Mussell.>

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https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/27651/&sid=0137

⁶ <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/media-centre/historic-moment-as-bill-to-end-live-sheep-export-introduced-by-the-albanese-government/>

⁷ https://www.vale.org.au/uploads/1/0/4/3/10438895/22.3.3_vale_media_release_shep_live_ex_phaseout.pdf

⁸ <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/media-centre/starving-sweltering-and-sick-independent-data-debunks-industry-claims-and-reveals-the-ongoing-truth-of-live-sheep-export/>

⁹ <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/media-centre/historic-moment-as-bill-to-end-live-sheep-export-introduced-by-the-albanese-government/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CYear%20on%20year%2C%20sheep%20in,as%20the%20risk%20of%20being>

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https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=committees/commrep/28182/&sid=0003

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https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=committees/commrep/28182/&sid=0006