

Submission
No 85

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

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Submission

I have had the benefit of reviewing the submission of Stop Live Exports and would like to see the end of the cruel live sheep export by sea industry. I do not understand why taxpayer funds are being spent on a NSW inquiry into live sheep exports by sea legislation when there is no such industry in this State! As a NSW taxpayer, I object to this.

I support the Federal Labor Government in legislating to end this industry, by 2028 and endorse the following submissions:

1. Ethics, Animal Welfare and Widespread Community Opposition

I, like the great majority of Australians, do not want Australian sheep sent on lengthy sea journeys where they face stress, heat and humidity, as well as the risk of injury, disease, overcrowding, hunger and mistreatment.

RSPCA surveys indicate that 78% of Australians want this industry to end, subject to sheep farmers being supported (McCrindle 2022). This includes 71% of Western Australians and 69% of Australians in regional areas (McCrindle 2023). Also, a huge 80% of written submissions to the Independent Panel looking into the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports by Sea supported the end of the trade. Critically, there is not a city/regional divide on this issue.

Animal welfare issues are at the base of strong community opposition and I note the following in respect of the obvious animal welfare issues:

- Heat Stress and Mortality Rates

Despite measures to avoid summer shipments, heat stress remains a significant issue in this industry. In 2017, the Awassi Express disaster saw over 2,400 sheep die from heat stress during a voyage from Australia to the Middle East. These deaths were not isolated incidents, as similar conditions have been reported on other voyages, leading to high mortality rates. The problems with this cruel industry have not been fixed and are incapable of being fixed.

- Inadequate Ventilation

Even with the best intentions, the live export ships often lack adequate ventilation, leading to suffocating conditions for the animals. In 2018, footage emerged showing sheep gasping for air and covered in excrement, indicating that ventilation and waste management on these ships are insufficient to ensure the animals' welfare.

- Regulatory Failures

Despite regulation of the live export industry, enforcement has been inconsistent. Reports and footage from various voyages have revealed systemic failures in ensuring that the standards are met, leading to repeated instances of suffering and death. RSPCA analysis of reports of 53 live sheep export journeys between 2018 and 2023, shows that 80 per cent of reports recorded sheep starving, and at least 60 per cent reported animals suffering with signs of unacceptable heat stress.

While the meat and livestock industry refer to declining mortality rates, the McCarthy Review into the export of sheep to the Middle East explicitly indicated that mortality rates

should not be used as the test, rather animal welfare is the test and, on this basis, the live export industry continues to fail.

- Handling and Slaughter Practices

Upon arrival in destination countries, the animals often face handling and slaughter practices that are cruel and do not meet Australian animal welfare standard. This includes un-stunned slaughter, leading to painful and terrifying deaths. While accredited feedlots and abattoirs are part of the process, there are numerous reports and evidence of mishandling and inhumane treatment that the animals endure upon disembarkation. There is evidence of sheep being sold for private slaughter every year, in addition to them being stored in car boots, left tied up in scorching heat, dragged and handled in cruel ways and killed in the streets or backyards by untrained slaughtermen.

- Shipping Delays

Ongoing piracy, rebel activity and geopolitical conflict have caused significant disruptions to shipping routes, particularly through the Suez Canal. These delays exacerbate the already challenging conditions for live sheep on board, leading to prolonged voyages that increase the risk of heat stress, dehydration, and death. These disruptions further highlight the risks and uncertainties involved in live sheep export by sea.

As recently as the beginning of 2024, the regulator approved a shipment of sheep and cattle to Israel (onboard the MV Bahijah) which ultimately took 3 months! This included a significant period of time during which the ship was moored off the coast of Perth, during heat wave conditions, after it was forced to return from the Red Sea conflict zone, an eventuality which was highly foreseeable. This conduct is barbaric and effectively amounts to treating sentient beings as inanimate objects.

While the industry may have protocols in place and improvements have been made, the reality is that the live export process is fraught with inherent risks and cruelty that cannot be mitigated. The stories and footage from recent years illustrate that, despite best efforts, the welfare of the animals is often compromised.

The Export Control Amendment (Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea) Act 2024 will see an end to such cruel voyages and supports sheep farmers to shift to better, more sustainable options – such as the booming industry of sheep meat exports, with the added value of helping create jobs in rural and regional communities.

2. Economic Considerations

Live sheep exports make a comparatively tiny contribution to Australia's total agricultural exports. The trade is in long-term structural decline and accounts for 0.1% of Australia's agricultural exports.

On the other hand, Australian chilled sheep meat exports are 58 times the value of the live sheep export trade (\$4.5 billion v \$77 million, 22/23, based on ABS data) and the chilled sheep meat export trade to the Middle East alone is 8 times the value of the entire live

sheep export trade (\$632 million v \$77 million, 22/23, also based on ABS data).

As to the position in New South Wales, the Independent Panel Report: Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports by Sea did not identify any adverse impacts for the State.

3. Successful transitions

Other countries, including New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Denmark, have successfully transitioned away from live exports, demonstrating that such a shift can be beneficial both economically and in terms of animal welfare.

In New Zealand alone, following their ban of live exports for slaughter, the country has seen growth in its processed meat exports and developed a reputation for high-quality, ethically produced meat products. This is a local example Australia can follow, with the attendant positive consequences.

4. Regional New South Wales communities

As noted above, the Independent Panel Report: Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports by Sea did not identify any adverse impacts for New South Wales as a result of the phasing out of live export of sheep. The State does not export live sheep by sea. Therefore, it follows that there will be little or no impact on NSW farmers.

However, benefits of the ban include:

- the opportunity for the development of more sustainable and ethical farming practices, which will ultimately benefit the economy and society as a whole. This will bolster Australia's reputation as a rising leader in ethical and sustainable agriculture, potentially opening up new premium markets.
- Environmental benefits in that the minimisation of long distance animal transport will contribute to lowering the carbon footprint of the livestock industry, aligning with broader sustainability goals. This is a critical factor when the world faces the dangerous consequences of climate change and the compelling need to urgently reduce green house gas emissions.

Instead of questioning the necessity of the ban on live sheep export by sea, the inquiry should focus on how best to support those impacted by the transition, if it all. The debate regarding the cruel live sheep export trade is well and truly over. The focus must be on implementing the ban effectively, supporting regional communities through this necessary transition and positioning Australia as a global leader in ethical and sustainable livestock practices.

Carole-Anne Priest
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