

**Submission
No 105**

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

Name: Ms Jenny Brown
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Dear Members of the Inquiry,

I have grave concerns for the welfare of all animals exported live for slaughter offshore, knowing they are likely to suffer on the voyage and once landed in importing countries with lower animal welfare standards than Australia. I support the RSPCA's stance that animals that live animals should be slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production to reduce the stress associated with their transport. The trade in live animals from Australia, which requires transporting millions of animals over thousands of kilometres on arduous journeys which can last several weeks, could not be further from this principle

My connection to the farming industry through my husband's family, who until recently owned a sheep property in Tasmania, has provided me with insights into sheep farming and the importance of good animal welfare. My husband grew up on the property and although he later moved away, he often returned to help his father and brothers with farm work as I have done since our marriage.

Australia has been exporting live sheep since the 1840's and live cattle since the 1880's, in that time public opinion on what constitutes acceptable animal welfare standards has changed. Conditions during live export cannot support what contemporary animal welfare science considers acceptable.

Contrary to industry claims, the trade has not been "fixed." Animals suffer throughout the live export journey due to heat stress, overcrowding, limited access to food and water, injury, and disease. The fact that animals survive the voyage does not mean they did not suffer. Mortality rates are an extreme indicator of poor animal welfare and signal an underlying level of suffering and stress in the broader population. That the industry continues to rely on mortality rates as a measure of performance, despite the 2018 McCarthy Review's central recommendation to shift away from such metrics following the MV Awassi Express incident, only underscores the industry's lack of change

No amount of regulation can fix the inherent and cumulative animal welfare issues that the live export trade causes. Existing regulations are already failing to do so. An analysis by RSPCA Australia of Independent Observer (IO) reports from 2018 to 2023 shows the trade, despite some improvements, continues to cause animal suffering. The data from 53 journeys of live sheep export which included in total approximately 2.5 million sheep recorded 6551 sheep deaths. Around 70 per cent of reports noted animal welfare issues onboard live export ships inconsistent with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) including poor loading, poor handling, poor management of sick sheep, long horns, lambing on board, and sheep not fit to load for transport. Over 60% of IO reports (32 reports) listed indicators of heat stress from score 1-4, ranging from increased respiratory rates through to sheep with neck extended and open mouth panting.

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Independent-Observer-Report-Analysis-Live-Sheep-Export-Journeys-2018-2023.pdf> No Independent Observer reports are available for sheep exported to the Middle East this year, as the department has effectively ceased the deployment of observers on voyages carrying Australian livestock to ports in the Middle East due to the "uncertain security conditions."

Once animals reach their destination they are outside the control of Australian law. Despite claims by the government and industry that the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) protects Australian animals, the reality is that Australian Government regulation does not have legal effect in foreign jurisdictions. I am concerned that the monitoring of compliance and reporting of ESCAS breaches in importing countries appears to have been left mainly to animal welfare groups. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) website lists three reported breaches of ESCAS guidelines in 2023 and one in 2022, all relating to sheep exported to the Middle East. Three of

these reports were made by Animals Australia. It is hard to believe that with over 1 million sheep exported during 2022 and 2023 there were so few instances of non-compliant handling and slaughter of sheep exported to the Middle East. The DAFF website does not show any reports of ESCAS breaches being received so far this year despite 279,727 sheep being exported to the Middle East during the first six months of 2024 (DAFF figures). Rather than suggesting total compliance with ESCAS in importing countries, this lack of reports suggests that animal welfare groups are having trouble operating in the region due to the war.

The current practice in the Middle East, where Australian sheep are slaughtered while fully conscious, is in stark contrast to the Halal-accredited slaughtering in Australia, which involves stunning. The absence of stunning during slaughtering inflicts considerable pain and distress on sheep, and there is little hope that Middle Eastern abattoirs and Halal authorities will change this practice in the foreseeable future. However, Australia's participation in live sheep exports is not a prerequisite for improving global animal welfare standards. We can effect long-term and extensive animal welfare benefits by advocating for improved standards through international organisations such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and during international trade agreement negotiations.

Public sentiment also supports a phase-out of this trade. National polling conducted by McCrindle Research in 2022 revealed that 78% of Australians support the phase-out of the live sheep export trade and a subsequent poll in May 2023 showed that 71% of Western Australians also support the phase-out. This overwhelming public support, including from rural and regional areas, signifies a collective desire to end the suffering and cruelty associated with this trade, and a belief in the existence of more humane alternatives.

The live export trade has not been a significant aspect of the NSW sheep industry for several years. No NSW sheep have been sourced for live export by sea since at least 2018 when exports from Port Adelaide ceased. Even then, the numbers were negligible. A small number have continued to be exported live to SE Asia by air, 7,261 in the 2023-2024 financial year (DAFF figures). The 2023 Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports found that an increase in interstate trade between WA and NSW following the phase out is unlikely. This is due to the barrier of high freight costs making it an unsustainable and unreliable market for WA producers. Therefore, no notable impacts on the NSW sheep industry are expected due to the phase out of live sheep exports.

Continuing to participate in the live export trade will not reduce animal cruelty in other countries, simply continue the suffering for Australian animals. It is time for Australia to end ALL live animal exports, starting with the planned phase-out of live sheep exports in 2028, and create a more humane and sustainable future that respects animal welfare and protects Australia's international reputation.

The welfare of our animals, the public sentiment, and the minimal impact on the local sheep industry all argue strongly for live sheep exports by sea to be phased-out as planned in 2028.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Brown