

**Submission
No 106**

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

Name: Ms Debra Edmonds

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Impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales - Submission by Debra Edmonds

Dear NSW Parliament

I am an animal welfare advocate with a particular interest in live export, and appreciate the opportunity to contribute my perspective to this inquiry.

My interest in this matter was ignited by the shocking revelations of the Awassi Express incident. Prior to that I was a meat consumer with little knowledge of animal agriculture, but the distress of seeing such animal suffering led me to become a vegetarian, and inspired me to delve deeper into the industry, which I've been advocating against ever since. While I reside in Western Australia, I've met residents of NSW who were also compelled to become vegetarian due to live export, thus impacting the state's sheep industry. One former NSW resident even moved to Perth to better advocate against the trade!

The live sheep export trade does not align with acceptable animal welfare standards. Even recent regulatory reforms, rather than mitigating the inherent animal welfare issues, have only accentuated the depth of these problems within the trade. Such as the Independent Observer Program, which has revealed high levels of heat stress and inanition on almost every sheep consignment. RSPCA analysis of IO reports from 2018 to 2023, found 80% documented sheep dying of inanition and 60% reported cases of heat stress. With inanition the leading cause of mortality, it's certain many more sheep would suffer the effects, but survive. The minimal number of crew and single vet on board cannot possibly monitor every one of up to 60,000 sheep, so it's inevitable some shy feeders and sick animals get overlooked. Further data from IO reports appear to confirm this, with a number of deceased sheep on most consignments unable to be examined post-mortem, due to autolysis. I can only assume they suffered, died and decomposed before being found.

The industry's claim that death rates have fallen doesn't constitute a scientifically valid measure of animal welfare. It's misleading and often overlooks the distressing conditions animals suffer before they die. The 2018 McCarthy Review, in the wake of the Awassi Express incident, advised the industry to stop using mortality rates as a performance indicator, yet the industry continues to do so, indicating a lack of progress in resolving welfare issues.

ESCAS was formulated to ensure the welfare of animals during the live export journey and in importing countries, however it is regularly breached. A fact Australians only become aware of when organisations like Animals Australia expose the mistreatment of animals supposedly protected. Any regulatory system tasked with protecting animal welfare should ensure a humane slaughter, which ESCAS fails to do. All sheep live exported by Australia to the Middle East are slaughtered without pre stunning. A practice not permitted in Australia, where sheep are stunned before slaughter, sparing them the harrowing experience of a conscious, painful death. This includes Halal accredited slaughter for meat exported to the Middle East. Meat that is safer for consumers than live sheep, which regularly arrive at their destination with medication in their systems. Administered on board for various illnesses caused by long sea voyages and living in faeces.

Our clean, halal certified, high quality Australian sheep meat has the potential to replace our live sheep exports, and not the inferior, poorly treated live sheep from other countries, that the industry predicts will take over. The Middle East already import more of Australia's chilled and frozen lamb and mutton than live sheep, at eight times the value to Australia.

Australia does not have to participate in live sheep export to influence animal welfare standards globally. Through international platforms like the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and international trade negotiations, we can lead by example and encourage nations to elevate their animal welfare standards. Additionally, infrastructure and systems put in place by ESCAS are likely to remain in use with non-Australian sheep, therefore maintaining some standards.

Ultimately all sheep are slaughtered fully conscious in the Middle East, so the lowest welfare bar is already in place. Australia's participation has not improved that outcome, nor will its withdrawal make it worse.

Support for ending live sheep export is extensive among Australians, with 78% supporting the phase out. In the 2023 Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports, over 80% of the 800 submissions and 3,300 survey responses supported the phase out. This was echoed in the House Agriculture Committee Inquiry into the Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea Bill 2024, where over 85% of the 13,000 submissions and items of correspondence expressed support for the Bill.

The impact of the live export trade on the community extends beyond animal welfare. Research by the University of Queensland has established that exposure to images of animal suffering in the live export trade can negatively affect people's psychological well-being, causing distress and feelings of helplessness. Something I experience, and have witnessed in others. The only form of control available to us is to reject meat which, as mentioned, many have done, negatively impacting not only the sheep industry in NSW, but the meat industry Australia wide.

The NSW sheep industry has not relied on the live export trade for many years, so the phase-out of live sheep export is unlikely to have a significant impact. The interstate trade of sheep from Western Australia to Eastern states is inconsistent. Even in years of high interstate trade, the numbers represent less than 10% of the average annual sheep slaughter volumes in NSW. The most crucial factor influencing farm gate sheep prices is international commodity prices for lamb and mutton, considering Australia exports over 65% of the sheep meat it produces. The 2023 Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports supported this, stating that high freight costs would likely discourage sustainable and reliable interstate trade between WA and NSW.

The discontinuation of live sheep export can only benefit the NSW sheep industry. Our country's reputation has been tarnished due to these exports, affecting our high-value meat export markets. Improving the welfare of our sheep will enhance our global reputation and potentially expand the sheep meat market, to the benefit of NSW.

Regards
Debra Edmonds