

12 June 2024

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture
PO Box 6021
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into Export Control Amendment (Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea) Bill 2024

I write to extend my unequivocal support for this Bill and to commend the Government for its decision to legislate the end of the cruel live sheep export trade from Australia.

My background in relation to the subject of this Inquiry is as Co-founder and Director of Strategy for the Australian Alliance for Animals, Honorary Affiliate at the University of Sydney School of Veterinary Science, and previously Chief Science and Strategy Officer for RSPCA Australia, where I worked to improve animal welfare in live exports for over 25 years.

I make this submission in a personal capacity. The Australian Alliance for Animals has also provided a submission to the Inquiry which I fully support. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide evidence in person to the Inquiry as I am currently on leave overseas, but I understand you will be hearing from colleagues representing the Alliance and other allied animal welfare groups and I commend their evidence to the Committee.

As an experienced animal welfare scientist and advocate working to improve the lives of non-human animals, I have been deeply concerned about the welfare of sheep subjected to live export for several decades. Since 1997, when I wrote my first detailed report for RSPCA Australia which highlighted the suffering and mortality endured by exported sheep, I have been involved in ongoing efforts to both improve animal welfare standards within the trade (while it continued), as well as campaigning to bring it to an end.

I have authored multiple science-based reports, submissions, and other publications on animal welfare in the live export industry and have been appointed to several government committees responsible for reviewing aspects of the trade. Some examples include:

- ☐ Live Export Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (2018-2024)
- ☐ Review of the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock - Reference Group (2017-2019)
- ☐ Steering Committee for the Review of the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (2012-2014)
- ☐ Steering Committee for the Review of Inspection Regimes at Fremantle Port (2012-2013)

- Live Exports Standards Advisory Group (2009-2012)
- Jones B & Davies J (2016) *Backlash – Australia's Conflict of Values over Live Exports*, Finlay Lloyd, 210pp.
- Fisher M & Jones B (2007) Australia and New Zealand. In: Appleby M et al. (eds) *Long distance transport and welfare of farm animals*. CAB International, pp324-354.
- Jones B (1997) *Report on the livestock export trade*. RSPCA Australia, 29pp.

When it comes to the transport and slaughter of farmed animals, it is a fundamental global principle that livestock should be slaughtered as close as possible to their point of production. The live sheep export trade from Australia to the Middle East has ridden roughshod over that principle since its very inception, with export companies blatantly ignoring evidence of mass suffering, morbidity and mortality for decades. The time for it to end is long overdue.

Rationally, there is absolutely no argument for subjecting sheep to the cumulative stress and suffering of land and sea journeys of 3-4 weeks, to face slaughter while fully conscious in their destination, when there is an available, normalised alternative where sheep are slaughtered in Australia instead. In 2024, with export numbers now a tiny proportion of Western Australia's sheep turnoff, any justification for the trade that once existed has been completely eroded.

The question facing this Committee should not be whether to support the Bill, but why it has taken so long for the decision to end live sheep exports to be made. Parliamentarians will be aware of the cycle of disasters, inquiries, reports and recommendations that have served to document the suffering of sheep over the past 6 decades. For so many years, the strength of influence of the live export industry on government was such that these disasters led to only minor improvements to the treatment of exported sheep. In 2018, the gruesome footage from the Awassi Express meant that the Australian public finally saw for themselves what exported sheep were forced to endure – extreme suffering that those involved in the trade were aware of and accepted as business-as-usual. Two important reforms occurred as a result of that public exposure – sheep were given a little more space (a reform that the industry had vehemently resisted for decades) and exports during the peak heat of the Northern Hemisphere summer were halted – but still the suffering continued.

I am aware of claims from industry proponents that the welfare issues associated with live sheep exports have now been 'fixed', as mortality rates during recent voyages have fallen. This is at best, misleading, and at worst, untrue. The reason fewer sheep are dying is because they are no longer permitted to be exported during the NH summer and avoiding death does not equate to good welfare. Sheep continue to be inevitably stressed during live export by sea due to close confinement with unfamiliar animals, handling, loading, adapting to a pelleted diet, lack of space, weather and climate extremes and, once in importing countries, poor conditions and handling, and the intense pain of unstunned slaughter. Even during a period when the industry has been under the closest scrutiny, exporters have demonstrated that they cannot prevent suffering, with heat stress continuing to be recorded in over 60% of voyages to the Middle East between 2018 to 2023.

I recognise that the Government must consider the impact of ending live sheep exports on Western Australian farmers and those allied industries involved in the supply chain. Unfortunately, these people are being very poorly served by their leaders. The fearmongering promoted by agricultural peak bodies does nothing to help farmers adjust to the transition. It is clear from the report of the Independent Panel that the phase out is entirely manageable and that the WA sheep industry will continue to be profitable and sustainable beyond the end of live sheep exports. The transition package that accompanies this Bill will more than adequately support any adjustments required by industry participants in WA. There is no cause for alarm. Rather, this Bill provides much needed certainty to the industry and the community about the end of this cruel trade. Instead of opposing the Bill, agricultural leaders should recognise that times have changed, and the Australian community expects a much higher standard of animal welfare than the live sheep export industry can ever provide.

It is a source of national shame that this Bill has come decades too late for millions of exported sheep, but now it is time to act to prevent future millions from such a cruel and avoidable fate. I urge the Committee to support this legislation.

Yours sincerely,

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