

As a Veterinary Student, I want the best welfare outcomes for animals. I do not believe that ending live export of sheep by sea will achieve this.

Australia has some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world. The sheep farming and live export industry is also very responsive to community feedback and has repeatedly demonstrated that it is responsive to community criticism. This has been proven through a number of changes to the way live export is conducted in response to videos highlighting poor welfare standards on export ships in the past.

Live export ships are well-regulated with maximum stocking densities, high quality ventilation, and frequent monitoring of ambient conditions on each deck. Illnesses and mortalities are reported and investigated. Veterinarians are involved throughout the export process in monitoring the health and wellbeing of sheep. Sheep are not allowed to be exported during months where they might be exposed to high temperatures in the Middle East.

The only way to maintain this upward trajectory of welfare standards during live export, is for Australia to maintain its position in the market. We can only impose these standards if we have the authority to do so. Rather than terminating the industry, the Australian Government should focus more on regulating the industry, and creating transparency and oversight if they are concerned about welfare standards on ships.

At the moment, the ASEL (Australian Standard for Export of Livestock) mandates the requirements for live export within Australia. This includes in feedlots prior to export, at the port, and on the ship. The ESCAS (Exporter Supply Chain Assurance Scheme) is also subscribed to by recipient countries, which set out minimum standards for Australia to continue exporting to these countries. Although Australia has no authority within these countries, countries are expected to comply with the ESCAS to continue receiving Australian stock. This control would be lost if Australia relinquished its place in the market.

Live export will not simply be replaced by frozen meat exports. In 2020, where exports from Australia were insufficient to meet the demands of the Middle East, the gap was filled with sheep from Romania, Somalia and South Africa. These countries do not have the same commitments to animal welfare that Australia does, and therefore cannot guarantee the same welfare standards for sheep that Australia will. By leaving the live export market, Australia will decrease welfare standards for sheep because recipient countries will continue to source the same number of sheep, they will simply replace Australian sheep (with a high welfare standard) with sheep from these countries (with far poorer welfare standards).

This is because there are a number of reasons for recipient countries to import live sheep. These include poor cold supply chains, meaning that frozen meat cannot be safely stored during transport or for long periods of time; the needs of these countries to provide employment to their citizens through abattoirs; the cost of processing meat in Australia vs. in destination countries; and religious and cultural traditions that involve families selecting a live sheep at the market, which is then freshly killed and packaged for the family. These experiences will not be replaced by a frozen meat trade, so these markets will simply look elsewhere for live sheep.

Furthermore, live export of sheep ensures good welfare standards for sheep in Australia. Australia does not have a market for mutton, this means that sheep that do not meet weight targets before a certain age will not be able to be sold for meat in Australia. At present, live export means that these sheep can be held back, and allowed to properly grow out. During this time, any health issues which may be present (such as poor nutrition due to lack of pasture availability, or parasite burdens) can be corrected without causing undue stress for the sheep. The farmers will hold sheep back knowing that

the sheep can be sold through the live export market, to countries that have a market for mutton. If the market for mutton goes away, it is very likely that we will begin to see a growing number of unethically killed sheep, as these sheep will not be economical to maintain without a sale market. Or sheep will be transported for slaughter whilst not fit for transport, in order to be slaughtered before the age where sheep meat must be classified as lamb.

I would strongly urge the Australian Government to reconsider their ban on live export for the welfare of sheep. Although this policy appears to support animal welfare at a superficial level; it is clear on closer inspection that a ban on live export in Australia will result in a net decrease in sheep welfare globally. The best way for Australia to maintain our commitment to the welfare of sheep, is to maintain our place in the live export market, and to continue to work both domestically and overseas, to improve the experiences of sheep involved in live export.