



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

Submission from Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics

Sentient is an independent Australian veterinary association dedicated to animal welfare advocacy based on the ethical implications of animal sentience and the findings of animal welfare science. Our members are represented in academia, private practice (companion, equine and large animals), non-government, government and industry settings, with expertise in many fields including animal welfare, animal behaviour, clinical medicine, zoo and wildlife medicine, epidemiology and the use of animals in teaching and research. A number are qualified specialists in particular disciplines or have extensive experience within industries such as live export, horse racing and greyhound racing. Sentient has presented at international and national conferences, published papers, contributed numerous submissions to state and federal government inquiries, and provided evidence at parliamentary public hearings. We also host final year veterinary science students for Public, Industry and Community placements in animal welfare advocacy. Sentient is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit our views on the Export Control Amendment (Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea) Bill 2024, which will end the live sheep export trade by sea from 1 May 2028.

As a veterinary organisation dedicated to promoting animal welfare, Sentient supports the proposed introduction of the Export Control Amendment (Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea) Bill 2024. We commend the current Federal government for addressing community concerns about the cruelty involved in the trade, and for providing measures through the 2024 Federal Budget to assist producers to transition towards more sustainable markets for their sheep.

Sentient urges the committee to support this Bill on the following grounds:

- No matter how many strategies are put into place (whether these be heat-stress models, independent observers, reduced stocking densities etc), this trade is and has remained inherently dangerous to the welfare of the animals being exported. No regulations other than a ban can reduce the ongoing mortalities or the extensive and extreme suffering experienced by sheep on live export ships. This is due to a combination of their inherent biology – sheep are highly prone to heat stress, which they experience during live export irrespective of stocking density and can only attempt to regulate by panting or decreasing their food intake – and also to the inevitable risks onboard, which have never been eliminated. These risks include an environment contaminated with excrement, high temperature and humidity levels, the general impacts of overcrowding, vessel breakdowns or sinkage and the now very real risk of ships being turned back due to political conflict in



the Middle East, leaving animals to languish for extended periods in a state of hunger, fatigue, heat stress and poor health due to gastrointestinal disease or injury.

- The live sheep export trade is bringing our nation into international disrepute on the grounds of animal welfare. The trade has been phased out in New Zealand and the UK has recently introduced legislation to end the export of live animals (including sheep, cattle and pigs), with a move towards domestic slaughter to reduce animal suffering during export journeys.
- These problems have never been rectified. Data from 64% of Independent Observer reports on voyages to the Middle East between 2018 and 2023 document heat stress in sheep.
- We can never have any control over what happens to our exported livestock once they reach their countries of destination. They are routinely subjected to harsh handling, being thrown and sold from car boots and are slaughtered inhumanely (i.e., without prior stunning), so are fully alert when their throats are cut and they bleed to death. This is overt cruelty over which our government has never been able to influence.

The live sheep export trade is unsustainable, antiquated, cruel and presents risks to the environment and to human health. We predict that, if the committee rejects this Bill, it will be a bitter blow to the majority of Australians, over 78% of whom support an end to live sheep exports to the Middle East. Of immense concern is the inevitability of further animal suffering and of producers being lulled into a false sense of security about their futures in what is a declining market – live sheep exports make up less than 0.1% of Australia’s agricultural exports.

Sentient urges the committee to support the Export Control Amendment (Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea) Bill 2024, which would be phased in with sufficient time for producers and farmers to find alternative, sustainable markets for their sheep. The Bill is a positive and progressive step for animal welfare, producers and Australia’s reputation as a humane country.

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