



# *The Australian Merino Society Inc*

*“Generations Ahead”*

## **Inquiry into animal welfare standards in Australia’s live export markets**

### **Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport**

Dear Committee Members,

The Australian Merino Society Inc. is a group of sheep breeders that for the past 39 years have been focused on breeding sheep using the best available science and genetic tools to meet the needs of future markets for sheep products (mainly wool and meat) whilst also selecting for traits that maximise profits from the sheep enterprise (eg. high quality fine wool, high growth rates, fertility, resistance to worms, flies and selection against other undesirable traits).

The AMS sheep type that has evolved, as a result of this focused breeding program, such that it now exhibit traits including high quality fine fleeces, large framed plain bodied animals with desirable carcass characteristics and improved fecundity (weaning rates of members flocks are generally around 30% higher than state averages). These sheep adapt quickly to changes in environment and feed conditions and feedback to members over the years has confirmed the suitability of AMS sheep to live export because of their demonstrated adaptability.

Most AMS members operate mixed farming operations that include grain and livestock production components. The recent suspension of live cattle trade to Indonesia has highlighted the increased risk to livestock businesses of relying on either single or minimal markets. AMS members believe that to remove potential markets, such as live export, greatly increases the financial risks to Australian livestock businesses in that it will remove competition from the market place. Generally speaking, members believe that Government should be focussed on expanding market options for livestock producers, not restricting market options.

From a Western Australian perspective members believe that if live export is removed as an option then their farm incomes will be reduced as a result of reduced competition for their livestock and their spending opportunities will be reduced, adding additional financial pressure on their rural communities. The timeliness of being able to move large numbers of livestock quickly at a time that best suits property management (especially in the rangelands) is also a key factor in sustainable use of the resource base and also helps minimise potential animal welfare issues on farm that arise from overstocking and the potential of long haul transport. A 300km trip to the live export yards or feedlot is a much better option than a 3000km trip to an abattoir

With AMS members sheep flocks achieving weaning rates in excess of 100% (usually in the range from 90% to 130%) members have many more sheep to sell annually than used to be the case, therefore it is very important to them that potential markets are not unnecessarily constricted.

AMS members are very passionate people and therefore the welfare of their animals is of great importance to them. Members believe that in animal production systems, poor animal welfare practices reduce enterprise profitability. An unhappy animal is a less profitable animal.

Members recognize that most countries have animal welfare standards that are of a different standard to what Australian producers uphold, however members do not believe that it is the role of Meat and Livestock Australia to impose our animal welfare standards on other countries. When was MLA anointed as the international regulator for animal welfare of world farm livestock?

Members believe that it is the role of the Australian Government to highlight to other countries Governments why Australia has mandated high animal welfare standards in Australia and encourage and help them to improve the treatment of animals within their various countries. Members believe that it is a proper role of MLA to help facilitate change in animal handling practices that improve animal welfare, however that can only be achieved by being involved in those countries and working with them, not excluding ourselves from those markets.

AMS members believe that many producers in the eastern states have not really considered the potential impacts on their markets and prices that they currently receive for surplus stock, if large numbers of WA sheep and cattle, that are currently exported live, were to compete in their markets for abattoir space and grazier re stocking. We believe that there would be considerable downward pressure on the prices that they would receive for their livestock as most WA livestock is destined for the export market. A removal of the option of live export would necessitate significant numbers of WA livestock competing in existing eastern states markets..

Chris Richardson

On behalf of AMS Executive for AMS members.  
15 July 2011