

Submission to the Review by: The Commonwealth Government,
and the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture Concerning Live
Sheep Export from Western Australia and Australia

From: Philip Gardiner,

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I respect the Minister for allowing this open inquiry, where the truth, as opposed to emotion exclusive of fact may become exposed.

Firstly, we collectively, were unprofessional, and damaged our industry by the shipping practices up to around 2020. I regret not making the journey with our sheep to see the appalling conditions under which they travelled. Merino sheep farmers are the best arbiters of sheep welfare, and one needs to accompany every voyage.

Secondly, for merino sheep managers, live sheep exports cater for an uniquely differentiated international market. Such a market is the “holy grail” for agriculture when discovered – and is a critical economic complement to the wool product of Australian merino sheep.

Thirdly, merino sheep managers of the live sheep export segment of the industry, having seen the evidence of mismanagement, then got about reforming the welfare standards which the industry was applying, and by being at the lowest level of the value chain, paid the cost of rectifying them along the entire value chain. For merino sheep farmers, this is a sunk cost, partly contributing, along with the sapping of confidence in the trade, to the low numbers and price now being paid for shipper merino wethers.

Fourthly, evidence that merino sheep can sustain/endure/have comfort from long voyage sea travel under appropriate welfare

conditions is exemplified by death rates of 2-3% (annualised), matching death rate levels which apply to the same type sheep if they were managed in an open pasture paddock. Detriment due sea travel is now an assumption not verified by fact.

Fifthly, prices for wethers, the sheep shipped, have fallen from around \$150/hd to \$50/hd over the past 2-3 years, not due lack of demand, but due fallen confidence in the market as a result of government risk causing the sheep investment and supply to close. How many industries can take a 66% price hit – especially when, as of now, it is not their fault, but that of government.

Sixthly, merino wool enterprises depend on both wool and meat value. Replacing the live sheep export demand with alternate markets at the old price will take years. In the meantime, economics will cause the merino flock to shrink further, and certainly impact wool production, beginning on Western Australian and Australian farms, and extending to the fabric of rural communities, transport businesses and wool businesses along the entire value chain including downstream processors in China, India, Italy and others. For those merino sheep farmers who survive, mono culture grain growing will expand, adding to Australia's carbon emissions as organic carbon in legume pasture paddocks for merino production falls from around 1.5% to .5% with added implications for climate change, for which the south west of Western Australia is already a "hot spot" per IPCC.

Finally, Australian and Western Australian merino farmers seek a government which supports them in telling the truth of their industry, not a government pandering to interests which are both out of date and deliberately untruthful.

I would like that to be this government, and our Commonwealth Parliamentary Members of all parties.