

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: Agriculture.reps@aph.gov.au

Wednesday 5th June, 2024

Dear Committee Members,

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

My husband and I have been involved together in a mixed enterprise family farming business on the South Coast of Western Australia for 33 years.

Over the course of our farming career, we have sustained and largely overcome significant challenges, most of them, such as seasonal conditions and fluctuating commodity prices, completely out of our control.

The day our Federal Agricultural Minister Murray Watt announced the phasing out of our Live Sheep Export Trade however, was one of the darkest days in the history of the Australian Agriculture Industry. Who could ever have imagined it would be politically motivated, uneducated and poorly researched Government policy that would potentially sound the death knell to our life's work?

This is what has motivated me to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

The submission I present to the committee vehemently opposes the Australian Government's policy to phase out live sheep exports!

Immediate ramifications of the Announcement:

The announcement in 2023 by Minister Watt regarding the phasing out of the Live Sheep Export Trade, had an immediate detrimental impact on the overall confidence of livestock farmers, particularly in Western Australia. Incentive for Exporters to invest in the industry disappeared overnight, leaving no future direction to increase capacity for exporting sheep.

At the same time, sheep numbers were rising in WA creating a surplus of sheep beyond WA Abattoir capacity. This ripple effect had a devastating impact on sheep prices. Add to this an unseasonably dry spell, farmers were pushed to their limits trying to manage flock numbers, while trying to maintain their high standards of animal welfare practices.

This announcement effectively created a "perfect storm", with many farmers incurring severe economic losses and compromising their pastures due to limited de-stocking options. The most concerning consequence, we believe, is the uncertainty many of us are facing and the devastating toll this is taking on our mental health.

The personal actions we took on our farm involved but were not limited to:

- We could not secure an Abattoir booking for 300 green/purple tag ewes but knew our pastures would not sustain feeding them. We gave 50 ewes away for free and another 50 were given to a pet food supplier for free. Eventually a booking became available for the remaining 200, however at a heavily discounted price based on historical records of sales.

- Countless extra hours incurred by our Employees, feeding sheep and managing rotation of mobs to preserve the pastures as best as we could to minimise erosion
- When we were able to get bookings, selling Lambs for up to 50% less than previous years and Ewes as much as 60-70% less
- We have spent approximately \$40,000 on feed due to lack of reliability of abattoir bookings

Future Impacts:

The Live Export Industry underpins strong rural and regional communities , ensuring vital employment for shearers, fodder suppliers, livestock agents, truck drivers, veterinarians, farmers, producers and their families. Removing this trade will have flow-on effects right throughout regional communities, extending to critical community hubs such as schools and sporting clubs.

How will the future of our family business be impacted?

- We will not be able to justify/afford our current staffing allocation, so unemployment within our business is a certainty
- We will be forced to go down the line of more chemical farming practices. Removing sheep from our weed-management rotation will mean less-sustainable farming practices
- More reliance will be placed on nitrogen application due to the removal of legume pastures
- The desecration of many years of work dedicated to improving the genetics of our Shedding sheep breed
- Potentially losing our son from the farming sector due to his passion being directed more towards livestock than cropping

I reiterate.....we could never have imagined that it would be our own Government who affectively destroyed the very Industry that our country was built on, rather than an “out-of-our-control” act of Nature.

The lack of consultation and due diligence undertaken by the Government in the delivery of this devastating policy is breathtaking.

The continuation of Australia’s world standard Live Sheep Export Trade is a must. Too much damage has already been inflicted on our farmers. Abolish this phase out policy immediately, if we are to have any chance of saving our Industry.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Joanna Slattery