**Broadcast Session 2**

Program overview transcript

(Duration 1 hr, 2 mins, 8 secs)

15 May 2023

## Introduction

This is the transcript of a Broadcast, presented by the Independent Panel for the phase out of live sheep exports by sea. There were 64 participants. The broadcast sessions were intended for large audiences to hear from the panel. Attendees were able to submit questions via the Teams Live moderated Q&A tool, while their microphones and camera were not enabled. At the start of these forums, the panel shared information before providing attendees with the opportunity to ask questions and participate in an online discussion.

## Transcript

[Webinar begins]

**Phil Glyde:** Hi everyone, my name is Phil Glyde. I'm the chair of the independent panel appointed by Minister Watt to consult with stakeholders on the how and the when of the government's policy to phase out live sheep exports by sea. Before we begin today's session, can I acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of Australia traditional owners and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and can I also welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people who might be joining us here today. I'm also pleased to be joined by my fellow panel members and I'm just going to ask them to introduce themselves. I'll start with Heather Neil, who's here in Canberra with me.

**Heather Neil:** Hi everyone. I'm Heather Neil. Up till 2019 I was the CEO of RSPCA Australia and that was a role that I held for 12 years. I now work in the round safety and mental health area.

**Phil Glyde:** Sue how about you?

**Sue Middleton:** Hi everyone, I'm Sue Middleton. I’m a farmer from WA until 2 years ago, we were also broad-acre are farmers. We had a piggery and a self-replacing Merino ewe enterprise and were involved in live export. We also developed a citrus business that we're still involved in. And then I've also had a 30 plus year career in community and regional development, the majority of which has been WA.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks, Sue and Warren, I hope you're with us.

**Warren Snowden:** I'm with you. Good morning everyone, my name’s Warren and I live in Alice Springs. I was formerly for 33 years a member of the federal parliament as either the Member for the NT or the Member Lingiari, and I've been a minister across the range of portfolios in the Rudd/Gillard governments. Very much looking forward to discussions.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks very much, Warren. That's excellent. I was just going to run through, for the attendees at the meeting, what our task is. So on the 3rd of March, Minister Watt opened the consultation process to inform the how and when the government will implement its policy to phase out the live sheep exports by sea. The panel was formed to undertake the task to engage with stakeholders and to get feedback from you, and all the people who are interested in it, on the best way to go about the phase out. And he's tasked us with three things. First of all, is the how and when the phase actually take place. The second is what is needed to help those who will be adversely impacted by the phase out. And finally, how can we tap into opportunities such as expanding domestic meat processing and evaluating, and increasing exports of our high-quality sheep meat products to the world. We’re really conscious that there are many views that are held on the trade and that people and businesses stand to be greatly affected by the phase out, and this is especially the case in Western Australia, which accounts for the majority of live sheep exported recently from Australia. The Prime Minister and Minister Watt have already indicated that the phase out will not be implemented during this term of government, but will be introduced should they be re-elected in the next term of government. And that provides time for all of the impacted parties, for the exporters, the farmers, supply chain participants and communities who depend on the trade to consider their options and adjust. The panel's already met face to face with many people and also virtually, like on meetings such as this, over the last few weeks. And we're trying to gather as many perspectives as we can on the trade and what might be needed to help participants transition to other opportunities.

Alongside the feedback that we are getting from these forums, and this is the fifth of eight online forums that we are conducting over the course of last Friday and today, can we also encourage people to put in written feedback. You can do that by visiting the department’s website Have Your Say, you can participate in a survey, but you can also make a written submission and this is particularly important for us as we'll be able to use those to inform us and write our report. Those written submissions are due by the 31st of May, so it's only a few weeks to go and on the website you can also find a copy of the consultation paper that was released at the time Minister Watt announced the start of this process. The next steps for us are to continue the consultation and to seek further information from consultants and experts in order to collate all that feedback and develop recommendations for the government to consider. Our task is to complete that report and give it to the Minister by the 30th of September. For this particular meeting that we’re having today, it's a Teams broadcast event, which means that all the video and microphone features for participants in this broadcast are disabled. So to raise a question for us, you need to type into the text chat tool and submit your questions. I should advise that all the questions will be moderated, in that we'll put together similar questions. So while we might not have the exact wording of your question asked, if it's similar to another person's question then you'll see that on the screen.

And we'd also like to involve as many people as we can in this process. So we may only respond to one of your questions if we run out of time, but if not, we'll come back to you. And we're trying to answer as many questions as possible in the time available. So that's it from me, by way of introduction, and I'd invite people to put in some questions so that we can do our best to answer them. Over to you… Sorry, I forgotten one important item, we’re going to be recording the results of this and we've also done the same for the live broadcast session that we had on Friday. We'll be publishing this on our website later on as well, so that people can see all the questions that have been asked as well.

Got the first question, which is, does the panel support the phasing out of live sheep exports by sea? It's a good question. It's one that we've been asked in almost all of our face-to-face meetings that we've had in WA. It really is out of the remit of our terms of reference to comment on that. We've all signed up on the basis that we're not questioning why the policy is in place. That's a decision that the Albanese government came to as part of their election campaign. And they're in the process of implementing that election commitment. We've signed up on the basis to advise on what's the best way to go about that phase out of live sheep by sea, and you know, how much time should be allowed, what sort of adjustment time is needed. By the same token, we will and are required to document, what we've believed to be the best estimates of the likely impacts of the cessation of the trade on sheep producers. So we will be doing our best to document the impacts, to enable us to understand where we need to be recommending how things might be improved, or how those impacts might be ameliorated. So that's our job. It's not really to engage in whether it's a good idea or not. That's really a matter for the Minister and the government.

We have a question which is what proportion of the WA sheep flock actually goes into live export now? How much is exported as meat, not live? Off the top of my head, I actually don't know the exact answer to that. But that's a good question and I might ask one of my colleagues to see if they can answer that. Either the panel members or the secretariat supporting it might give us an answer…

**Heather Neil:** So I think we know that last year there was around 500,000 sheep that went out of Fremantle as live animals. That was quite a considerable drop from a number of years previous to that. 20 years ago, there was about 6 million sheep that went out of live exports and I think the turnoff rate of animals going into live export from farms is quite low compared to sheep meat exports, which is substantially higher in value than live exports. However, I’ll let the secretariat come back with the exact numbers.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks Heather. And Sue…

**Sue Middleton:** I was just going to comment that based on the processing numbers as we understand them, and we're doing a more in depth analysis of this, we’ll definitely have numbers over time, so we'll have trend lines to be able to explain this to people in our report. But we know that the processing sector is, in terms of the numbers of sheep that are being processed, is much larger than the live export market in WA. But the live export market is more, I guess, the comment I would make is more a risk management tool and turn off option and related to a couple of other factors that are very Western Australian related. So there's some other factors there. Thank you.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks Sue for that. And as I said, we'll hopefully get the answer to that during the course of this this broadcast.

The next question I've got is when will the phaseout take place? That's a really good question, and indeed that's the question that the government has posed to us. What is the best time? If you do it straight away like almost immediately, then that will have larger impacts and if you give people time to adjust, how much time should be provided? We've had suggestions from right across the stakeholder spectrum saying that we really should phase this trade out over 20 years, and other suggestions at the other end of the spectrum is we should phase the trade out as soon as the Albanese government is re-elected. And so somewhere in the middle of that we’ll be looking to better understand how farm systems work in WA and what's that sweet spot where we provide some sort of certainty to the industry going forward, and the government policy is delivered on, and people adjust properly. So that's the question that has yet to be answered.

The next question is does your comment that the phase will not happen in this term of government, mean that the commitment of the phase out of live export might not happen if the government is not re-elected. That's a very good question and it goes to what is the policy of the Coalition, the current opposition? My understanding of that policy is that the Coalition has made it clear that they would not be phasing out the live export of sheep by sea if they were elected. That's certainly their commitment at this stage.

**Sue Middleton:** Ah Phil can I also just comment please? It's also just important to note that because of what the existing government has said about this, that live exports will continue in its current state under the conditions of Exporters Supply Chain Assurance Scheme (ESCAS) and the current summer moratorium. That’s important for growers to know because there is obviously this concern that people have around it being a ban. Well, the ban is yet to be determined. When that's put in place, it will be after the next election. So the current market continues. It’s just important to note that. I’ve had a lot of other things said in WA in recent weeks. Thank you.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks Sue that's a that's an excellent observation. And yeah, it's very clear that the government won’t be introducing the phase until it is re-elected.

We have another question which is, is one way forward to put money into processing the new products here, and engaging the farmers to ask them how to change away from live exports? That's an excellent question. And we've met with almost all the meat processors in WA and will continue to finish that process. We’ve heard from companies as well, about what the prospects are that they see into the future and how they might handle the potential arrival of an extra 500 or 600,000 sheep that would normally go to the live export trade. And one of the questions that's come up there, almost unanimously across the stakeholder spectrum, is the belief that the current processing capacity in WA isn't adequate to support the task. If there's not enough processing, and right at the moment, for example, it’s impossible to get animals processed until after July of this year. There's a real backlog at the moment. A lot of people have suggested to us that before the phase out occurs, there needs to be some sort of investment in making further processing capacity. And that's not just in relation to the infrastructure, but also the staff that would be required to do extra shifts or extra half shifts. One of the chokepoints at the moment for the meat processors is finding staff invariably from oversees to fill these roles. That requires them to get visas and the visa processing times are long. It requires the companies to find housing for those staff, there is a critical shortage of housing across WA, particularly in the Southwest. That’s one of the things in there that we're looking at, how do we encourage the further development of the meat processing sector? The second part of that is, it's one thing to have the capacity there, the capability to process more animals, but the animals that currently go overseas, they're bred to a particular specification that suits the markets in the Middle East. How long might it take farmers to, you know, in a financially viable way, try and change their practices to make sure that the animals that are currently going overseas might be suitable for processing in WA. There's a lot of other threads in that question that we're trying to get to the bottom of.

And the next question is, what is the long-term effect of phasing out live animal export from New Zealand? And again, another excellent question. We spoke last week with the officials from the New Zealand department that was responsible for the most recent round of the phaseout. They phased out all export of live animals, and they have previously, sometime ago, I think around 2007, 2008, phased out the export of sheep and cattle for slaughter. Now I think they're down to breeder cattle and sheep. But that’s now finished. We’re trying to understand what those impacts have been over that period of time, but also the most recent thing, which is a complete phase out. While the circumstances are quite different in New Zealand, they didn't have ESCAS or the moratorium that we have in place, but nevertheless there were large parts of the industry that were engaged in live export. And so, we were trying to understand that as well. But the long-term effect I think we can certainly go back and look at is what's been the impact of phasing out animals for slaughter in New Zealand? How did the farmers and the people in the supply chain adjust to that? The other side of that question is what measures did the New Zealand government put in place to assist or encourage farmers to stay in the overall livestock industry?

The next question is will the panel be making recommendations on a financial support package to enable business to adjust? I think certainly, we're considering that. The second part of our terms of reference is about what is needed to help the industry adjust or offset some of the impacts that might be, given it's quite a challenge. But that's certainly within our remit and we’ve been specifically asked that by the Minister. Now what sort of assistance could be provided to help farmers? We've had a range of things discussed at some length with some of the ideas around improving the meat processing sector. There’s also been suggestions in relation to further opening up overseas markets for the type of meat that might come from animals that have been previously going to the live trade. Are there greater markets for mutton, for example, that are currently being exploited at the moment? It could also be assistance to Meat and Livestock Australia, or assistance to the various external meat processing companies. They all have their own markets they have to meet. And they're always in the business of opening up new markets and maintaining existing markets. Is there something in the research, development, demonstration and extension area where you might be able to help farmers move more quickly than they might otherwise be able to, in terms of changing flock composition or changing the way in which they run their mixed farming business? So there are things in that space where the provision of funding might help. There’s a few ideas that have come to us and we're going through, as I said before, sorting out what are the things that are really going to help in the long run? Whilst government assistance can be provided in the shorter term, what we're really wanting to do is make sure that the sheep industry, the wool industry and the people that depend on it, have a longer-term future and can see a bright future, for meat and wool production in WA, and also more broadly in Australia. So one of the things that we've asked at every meeting is, well, what would you want if we could wave the magic wand? What would be the sort of thing that you, your industry, your business, your community would need to adjust? Whilst the four of us have some experience, some quite deep experience in relation to WA, we really think that the best ideas will come from the people who are involved in the trade, and the communities and industries that are involved in supply chain. So we're really quite hopeful that we'll get some good ideas from sessions such as this and our more detailed discussions. One of our concerns is, understandably, with some of the industry groups that do not want to engage on the question of how, when to phase out. They want to be more engaged with fighting the government decision. That could mean that, we're a bit worried that, over the next couple of weeks and months, we won't be hearing from some of the people that are critically involved in the trade. Their ideas about how we could adjust, help people adjust more quickly and smoothly to this new world. Without the risk management tool of live export and that competitive pressure within the domestic WA market.

The next question is, does your consultation process include affected trading partners? In the short answer is yes. We've already met with some of the representatives of the overseas company, the companies who are actually importing live sheep into the Middle East. We're also going to be meeting with the diplomatic representative of those countries that are based in Australia. So the ambassadors, etcetera that are here in Canberra, to understand better what the impacts are going to be for them and what can be done, what they might hope for to help smooth their businesses transition to an area like Australia, which, I think currently supplies about 6% of the world's live sheep. If we pull out of the market once the phase out occurs, what impact is that going to have on those countries involved in the trade?

The next question. Is the option of exporting frozen meat from animals slaughtered in Australia being considered instead of live export? And again, the short answer to that is yes. I've already said that that's one of the critical questions. There seems to be unanimous support across the stakeholder groups. If you're going to do this, there needs to be a market for the sheep that were previously going on a boat. Whether it's chilled, frozen, how it's done, that really is one of the questions that we're grappling with. As well as what support might be needed to make that transition as smooth, as financially pain free as possible.

And to the next question, how does the panel think the phase out will impact WA farmers? Following your visit to WA, will the panel be visiting WA again? I'll answer that second one first and say yes, we will be visiting WA again. We're coming back in the second half of June for face to face meetings and more to the north of Perth, we've sort of covered the south and southwest of Perth, but we're planning to try and cover the towns and communities and farmers that we haven't had the opportunity to meet with, in the north, out in the eastern wheatbelt and also down to Bunbury. We're really keen to come back and we'll do so. We're also going to be continuing with virtual meetings with the various people that want to meet us on a smaller basis.

Just going back to the first question, which is does the panel think that the phase out will impact WA farmers following a visit to WA? Yes, definitely. We've heard from a lot of farmers who are not only concerned about the longer running impact of the phase out, but they’re also fundamentally concerned, indeed worried deeply about, what the announcement of the phase out will have on their business right now. What we have in WA at the moment is a surplus of sheep on farm that can't find a market. It’s that question of imbalance between supply and demand that’s developed over the last couple of years. There’s anywhere between 100,000 and 1.8 million sheep that you know, in normal circumstance would have already gone to processing or overseas, but for a variety of different reasons they’re on farm now. So, farmers right at the moment, are living with what might be the prospect of a further 500 or 600,000 head of sheep coming onto the domestic market. People are worried about that dimension. They're worried about what impact it will have. Farmers worry about the impact this will have on their business if live sheep aren’t an option anymore and if they stay in the sheep production business. Do they go into more grain production if their farm would allow that? What's going to happen to the shearing industry, what’s going to happen to wool? There's a whole range of things that we've heard from WA farmers, but there's a deep concern there will be an ongoing impact that will mean some farmers will have to leave the industry. They’ll leave as quickly as they can, so there's quite a lot of concern that we've heard in not just our community but also in our one-on-one meetings with the representative groups etcetera. Lot of people see it as the end of wool growing, there’s quite a range of views.

The next question is if the coalition are successful at the next election, then it's likely that the live sheep by sea phase out will just be undone and trade resume. But will your legislation ensure that that's not possible? That's a question for the future as we see it. My understanding is that the government does want to introduce legislation in this term of Parliament to give effect to a phase out, should they get re-elected. Then the question will be how that legislation is put together, and then, what the coalition, should they be elected at the next parliament, what would they need to do? The panel's advice is really about the how and when of it. The question about putting in place legislation might come later, after we make our report about what the impacts are, what the timing should be and what could be done to offset the impact of the phase out. That legislative question really comes after our report. So we're not going to, at this stage, whilst we're contemplating all those things, we’re certainly not going to be recommending a piece of legislation. That's a role for the federal government after we've reported. Thanks. It's a good question.

The next question is, the live export industry exports store sheep for fattening in market and the meat processing industry processes fat sheep in Australia. Are you going to review the total change in production system? Live export also plays an important role during droughts to export store sheep. If there is no live export, what will be the damage? The environmental damage from sheep that are not fat and have no ships to get on to? That's a great question. And we've been grappling with that question and trying to answer that in all of our stakeholder meetings we've had to date. I think there's some people, some of the stakeholders, I think, think it's a really simple question that a sheep is a sheep, and a farm is a farm in WA, and nothing could be further from the truth. The processors have targeted particular parts of the market that they service in terms of their own exports. The sheep growing industry has targeted different parts of that market as well, and what was learned, certainly what I've learned in the last few weeks has been, how different the farming systems in WA are and indeed, how different they are from the East Coast farming systems. This is partly due to geographical distance, but largely due to climatic differences, being a Mediterranean climate where there's really no food during the course of summer. So the live export trade provides an outlet, should a farmer be caught with too many sheep because the season’s suddenly changed. They’ve got that that option of getting those larger heavier sheep that aren't necessarily suitable for domestic processing off their properties and overseas to where they, as the question says, they get fattened on the way to the market and also when they get into feedlots. So there's a concern that has been expressed that if the live sheep trade is phased out, then this could mean that farmers are caught with animals on farm and that might mean that they are putting pressure on their pastures during difficult dry seasons. Also, we've heard that there's a lot of concern about the mental health impacts that this might have on farmers if they're obliged to shoot their sheep, because they can't find a commercially viable way of getting them off their properties. And so we are in the process of reviewing the total change in the production system. If this avenue is removed, what impact will that have on these mixed farming systems, what impact will that have on grain production, what impact will that have on wool production and how do you help farmers move through that significant change from a system that is evolved over the last 50 years? I'm sort of out of my depth here, I’m wondering if Sue wanted to add anything more from your perspective having been through this process yourself?

**Sue Middleton:** I actually thought you did a really good job, Phil. But I think it's just worthy to say that this is because WA is a really different system to over East, which has got a much more domestic market focus. WA is very export driven. The type of product that we're looking for with the export market, is in many cases different to what the on-farm production of what a sheep may be, and at different times it gets stressed by different stresses. Therefore, what we have to do as a panel is just make sure we understand how this is used as a risk management tool and how it's used as a diversity tool, once again coming back to that idea of how on farm you manage risk, and then how that’s an important part of the resilience of your farming business, and how that then has an impact on a flow through to all parts of the farming business including the financial health of that business, and then the emotional health of the business. Phil you said all of that, but I just wanted to say it again for anyone who's online in this meeting, we do understand the ramifications are significant. Thank you.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks, sue. And Heather also wanted to add a bit to as well.

**Heather Neil:** It's been really useful to hear people's individual stories, to understand their individual production systems on their farms, and it's also been really instructive to hear about, for those people that don't use live export, what do they do differently? We know that there has already been significant adjustment in WA away from live export over the last 20 years, and so we're keen to understand from people’s submissions and other discussions, what have people done slowly to move away from using live export as a particular outlet in terms of managing risks? I also just wanted to come back to, we were asked about a few specific numbers that we didn't have at hand. So just to reply to that, the number going up for live exporting in the last 12 months or so is about 11% of turn off in WA, the value of live exports in 21-22 was $83 million and that involved exporting 488,000 sheep. That was about a quarter of what it was four years prior to that. The value of meat exports from WA is $612 million. So you can see meat exports is already a very significant part of the WA story and far exceeds the value of live exports.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks, Heather. And both of those comments reminded me to say how important submissions are going to be for us. Whilst some of the stakeholder groups, the industry groups and the animal welfare groups are coming up with broad scale estimates of what the overall impact might be on employment, numbers and what some of the likely scenarios might be going into the future, what we are particularly keen to have, as Heather mentioned, are those lived examples of what's going to happen to your personal business, or particular part of WA. That sort of information is critical for us to sort of develop an understanding that goes beyond those overarching figures. As many people know, averages mask a lot of the important detail that we'll need to understand if we're going to be recommending packages that are actually going to make a difference on the ground. It's always dangerous to just focus on the average and the general and I think that it is really quite complex. What's going to benefit a particular farmer in a particular part of WA, and indeed what's going to benefit the meat processors? What’s going to benefit the people employed in the industry, whether they’re processing meat, there’re shearing, or they’re truck drivers, whatever they might be. We want that finer grain detail, which we think we’ll only get from submissions, to learn about that lived experience that we know WA farmers have got.

OK, just check if there's any more questions. Oh yes there was one. Could sheep be transported to other states for slaughter? Could transport be funded by the government to allow the phase out to occur earlier? So very good question. We've observed in the last couple of years following the drought on the eastern side of the country that a large number of sheep were transported to the East Coast for stock rebuilding after the drought and for enhancing the flock that has decreased during the drought. We also understand that that movement was facilitated by some incentives that were put in place by the NSW government and Queensland governments to cover the freight differential because it's quite expensive to move animals from one side of the country to the other. So that has been going on and there have been some worked examples of what it would take to encourage that. However, we've also heard from animal welfare groups and some of the farmers themselves that there's a concern about the animal welfare impacts of those long-distance trips. It seems to be that it’s highly desirable the animals are killed as close as possible to the point of production. There's been a lot of concern about the transport of sheep over long distances over the equator to the Middle East, there’s just as much concern being expressed about the transport of sheep by truck over long distances as well. So that's one of those areas we're looking at as to what might be done. Is there anything in this space where, through government intervention, that might encourage that sort of thing into the future? So that is one of the areas we’re looking at. But as I said, we're rapidly learning and I'm rapidly learning, the more questions you ask about this, the more detail we’ll understand.

Another question is what research have you been provided with from the government on impacts to industry? You're asking industry for this, but good decision making practice assumes the government had all this prior to making this decision. I can answer that in two parts. Certainly in terms of the research that we've had on the impacts of industry, we've benefited greatly from the fact that there was quite a bit of research done at the time at which the moratorium was introduced in I think around 2018, following an incident with a large number of sheep dying on route to the Middle East. First industry imposed a moratorium on itself and then the government regulated that moratorium. So the sheep don’t travel overseas during that period of time. So considering that moratorium, the industry provided some work by some consultants from Mercado, that was the name of the company, and that looked at a 50% decline in the trade because of the moratorium. Similarly, the animal welfare groups, through a company called Pegasus, provided an assessment of their own. On top of that, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences did their own assessment. So we’ve been looking at those two studies, and so we've got an estimate, certainly from our perspective, we got an estimate of what a 50% cut might be, in those very broad terms that I talked about earlier on. You know, what’s the impact on jobs, the sector and the flow on impacts through multiplies, etcetera. What we don't have though, is a study of a 100% phase out of the trade, though I am aware that both the industry and animal welfare group groups are in the process of preparing those for their own submissions to the panel. We're very much looking forward to that. We're also aware that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in WA, so the WA department, is also undertaking its own work to get their assessment of what some of the financial, economic and agronomic impacts are likely to be. So we're looking forward to that in submissions. On the question of the government having all that prior to making this decision, certainly those earlier studies were available to the government. All the four members of the panel were outside government at the time that the election commitment was made in the lead up to last year’s election, so I'm not sure, and we don't know what other information the government had at its fingertips when it took that decision to include this in its election platform and subsequently make the decision to create a panel to create a consultation process.

The next question is, will the panel be recommending an end date to live sheep exports to give suppliers and animal protection body certainty? The answer to that is yes. Specifically, one of the questions we've been asked is, when's the best time to do it? That certainty question is a really critical thing right at the moment. In every meeting we've had with farming groups, farmers, industry and others, and indeed animal welfare groups, the farmers want some certainty, so they can plan. They're worried that this process even now has created a chilled environment for investment and stopped people investing. Indeed, from the perspective of the animal welfare organisations, they want some certainty that the government is actually going to be delivering on its commitment. So that certainty question comes up a lot and really, what the government’s asked us to do is find out what's the best time for everybody across the stakeholder spectrum for the phase out to occur? We've also had a number of suggestions about the ways the phase out might occur. Do you just say put a date up and say, as of date ‘X’ sometime in the future, that's it, no more exports and export happily up to that time? Or do we phase it down over a period of years? So look, we're expecting to have more information on that from submissions as well, but the simple answer is yes.

Umm. And I think that question’s been asked before, it's will you consider the option of expanding WA abattoirs, the entire process of export so that live export is not needed anymore? I think that the intent of that question is, could you just expand WA abattoirs and processing and then not have a phase out? Because if the abattoirs provide a competitive price and they, if you like, outcompete the live exporters in the market, then we don't need to ban it. I think that's what's behind that second question, and we’ve certainly heard that we don't need to be recommending a phase out. But as I said earlier on, our job is to recommend the best way to implement the policy. The policy is to have a phase out of live sheep exports by sea, so I think that might be behind that question. I don't know if you want to add anything, Heather?

**Heather Neil:** And I think there's also a question in there about what do trading partners actually accept? Trading partners in the Middle East currently receive much more sheep meat than they do live animals, and that sheep meat is both chilled and frozen. So, there is already a really strong market in in the Middle East and you know, hopefully with the sort of support to the MLA, processors and others that we might be able to give, an option exists for that market to expand further.

**Phil Glyde:** You know, it's a really good point and I think this comes back to this question about market segmentation. So some of the countries that a lot of our sheep have gone to in the past are rapidly developing economies and in fact some of the wealthiest people in the world live in the Middle East. So they have tastes and desires for meat, which happens when economies develop for the high end cuts of our quality lamb. By the same token, there are also people in those markets who don't have that disposable income and do need to have meat provided to them more cheaply, and it's cheaper cuts of meat. So, at the moment, a lot of the live export animals are going to satisfy that part of the market, but that's one of those things where we are trying to get a better understanding of. Gain a better understanding of the complexity of what the demand is overseas and what will happen to the demand for our chilled and frozen products over time when the ban is introduced?

There's another question, will cattle export be banned also? I think the short answer that is our task is specifically in relation to the banning of live sheep exports by sea, and the only thing I could add to that is that the government has made it very clear that it's an election policy. It's election commitment, and indeed, the policy is simply live sheep by sea. However, I would have to acknowledge that in a lot of our meetings, we've heard from people concerned that the next step, in who knows how long, might be to move towards banning all live animal exports. We know that is the policy of quite a few animal welfare organisations.

**Warren Snowden:** The minister made very clear that from his perspective, there will be no ban to live [cattle] exports.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks Warren, correct. Uh, the next question is a good one. Why has the panel not already published information about the types of support and packages recommended to allow farmers to transition? Why don't make these available now so that farmers can transition now if they'd like? The industry has so much uncertainty, surely it can't remain viable. That's a really good question. And indeed, I think this comes back to doing this in an orderly way and in an organised way. The government hasn't asked for the trade to stop immediately. In fact, it's set up a process to deeply investigate what the impacts will be and get a really detailed understanding, which I said is one of our tasks and the second thing is, what's going to really make a difference for the specific circumstances of WA sheep industry? So, coming out with an answer before we actually do the analysis is probably the wrong thing to do from my perspective. We need to have a better understanding as a group about what the effects are and what might be the sort of things that will work in WA. We've certainly got access to and have been contemplating what some other structural adjustment mechanisms, options and tools that have been used in other industries. So we've had adjustment in the dairy industry. We've had adjustment in the forest industry. We've had things like adjustment in the Murray Darling Basin, which I'm a bit familiar with in terms of farmers not having access to amount of water they previously might have had access to. So we've got those things, but I think what we're trying to do here is tailor and design a package to recommend, at least to government, a package or a range of measures or some types of measures that will actually have a beneficial impact in WA. Remembering that the phaseout itself won't be happening until the next term of government, you know, is there a phase out from the announcement time? That’s one of the things we’re contemplating. So, we think this is putting the horse in front of the cart, if we do the analysis properly and understand the impact, if we do the analysis properly, we’ll understand what a long run benefit to the farm sector would actually be, and to sheep producers in particular. So, I think that's where we're heading. And then it’s up to the government, of course, should they accept some of our recommendations or all of our recommendations, they’ve got to do a number of things as we’ve discussed earlier on. They’ve got to go and secure legislation and get through the parliament. They also have to secure funding to support farmers and others involved in the supply chain through that transition if we do recommend that and if they do accept our recommendation. So that's one of the real difficulties here, I think, a lot of people would like that certainty now. So, they can make their investment decisions but the reality of that decision to not introduce the phase out until the next Parliament and the reality of having a thoughtful consultation process means that uncertainty will remain for a little while to come.

Will you be holding meetings in Perth so you can meet and hear from West Australians who support the phase out, not just sheep farmers who don't? The short answer is yes, we have held those meetings in Perth and we're happy to continue to meet with other people and whilst a lot of the focus today has been on the impact, and understandably so, on people’s financial futures and futures of their families, we've also heard a lot from people who are really deeply concerned about the ongoing trade and want it stopped. And so we have met, when we first ran meetings, with representative groups based in Perth. We continue to hold meetings not just in Perth but also we held some meetings earlier last week with representatives of groups who don't want to have the phase out occurring. Indeed, we had a virtual forum last Friday where we examined the question of animal welfare, hoping to extract views from across the stakeholder spectrum about what the animal welfare views might be and those of the people who don't support the trade. That was quite a good meeting we had. So, we'll continue that process of engaging and meeting with people and anyone across the stakeholder spectrum. That's part of our role. To understand all of the views, and they’re many and varied. As I said, they range from people who want to stop 10 years ago to people who want the trade to continue at infinite into the future. We need to understand their perspective so that we can faithfully report them.

Really good question just arrived, in WA we are already seeing the financial, animal welfare and mental health impact of the live export scenario. Will there be funding support to get the farmers impacted now? I see this as an urgent matter to address. That’s a really good question. What we've observed and experienced in our face-to-face meetings is, I think a lot of anguish, simply about the announcement of the decision and what impact that is having on farmers’ outlook, and the outlook of anyone involved in the supply chain. I should also add that we’ve heard from people who continue to be deeply troubled by the existence of the trade, you know, in terms of being, you know, being mentally affected by the trade. That is very unfortunate and by the same token, understandable. We've had some very frustrated, exasperated and upset people raise this very issue with us in these meetings. One of our frustrations as a panel is that we can see that happening. We can. It's a logical extension of the announcement of the government decision and yet the support packages and what we might do to try to encourage people to see a future in the industry despite the announcement of this decision, that’s still some time off. So, it's a really good question about what can be done about that. We can certainly point to institutions, and Heather, as she mentioned earlier in her introduction, can talk about that and Sue was going to mention this as well. But I might turn to Sue first, then come back to Heather.

**Sue Middleton:** Yeah, I just wanted to flag with people that we have heard about the short-term situation on farm and the thing that we will be designing is more medium-term. So, I strongly encourage everyone to look to any opportunity they have to make this case to either government (WA and federal) around the short term needs you have because whilst we can flag it and we have flagged it, it is outside of the time frames we will be designing that would then lead to a transition. So, it's really important that given the level of emotional distress that people are describing to us at the moment, that you do take this up with any existing avenue that you can and we will obviously continue to flag it with organisations that we can as well. I’ll hand over to Heather.

**Heather Neil:** Thanks Sue. Just briefly we know that many people are finding the sort of the issue of live exports and change really difficult at the moment on all sides of this debate. There are already a lot of services in communities, you know, many community-based services which are much easier to access and we do encourage people to do that now. We've also met with the NFF and discussed a couple of their initiatives that they're looking at with other organisations, but there are services that exist in WA and in regional WA in particular right now, and really we do encourage people to reach out to those, if you feel like you would like to talk to someone, there is absolutely no shame in talking. Thanks.

**Phil Glyde:** I'm conscious we've got to the advertised time, but we did start a bit late because we're having some problems there with the IT, but what I was going to do is just enter two further questions and then call it quits.

**Warren Snowden:** I just wanted to make an additional contribution to that last question. I think we need people to understand that we're not only concerned about the impact on farmers and those people affected by animal welfare issues, but we’re clearly conscious of the regional and local impacts flowing on to communities and what those regional impacts might be. So, if anyone out there has information they’d like to provide us on what they think the impacts will be, to help us with our decision making, it will be very helpful.

**Phil Glyde:** Thanks very much Warren, that’s a really good point and one we sort of haven't quite come to as yet in our discussion this morning.

The second last question is Western Australian producers are expressing concern they can't get their sheep into abattoirs. Has interest been shown in potential new abattoirs? The short answer to that is yes. People are wanting to see greater competition in the meat processing market as well and we did observe that over the last couple of years there have been some new players coming to the market and looking at that.

The final question is how do you put in a submission? The best way to do that is to go to the Department of Agriculture’s website [haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/live-sheep-phase-out/](https://haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/live-sheep-phase-out/)

I think this is probably the best way. But anyway, go to the department's website, put in live sheep phase out and you will get a plethora of information. I just also say that I'm conscious there are questions that come up that haven't been answered and we'll do our best answer those when we publish this recording on our website. But there are three further sessions for those of you have had a chance.

We've got three further sessions today and there’re sort of focused on particular areas of interest. So these are eastern state times. 12:30 to 1:30, there's a discussion with the theme of exporters and ports, from 3:00 o'clock to 4:00 o'clock, there’s a session focusing on the WA farm sector and then from 4:30 to 5:30, there’s a general discussion around First Nations issues, government people, researchers and the border community. So if you are happy enough to come along with those, please do so. Everyone's welcome, there’re not just for people who are exporters or just for farmers or just for First Nations people. They are for people have an interest, and we found that from the ones we did last Friday, people from across the stakeholder spectrum were attending, and we’d certainly invite and welcome anyone to attend those sessions if you are so inclined. But can we just thank you all for your participation to date. And please don't hesitate to contact us by the website if you’d like. But look, thank you very much for that and have a good rest of your day.

[Broadcast ends]

Note: Every effort has been made to transcribe the broadcast accurately, however slight discrepancies may occur between the spoken word and written word.

**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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