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### **Live Sheep Exports to the Middle East**

Melbourne Sheep Save welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the inquiry into the Live Sheep Exports to the Middle East by the Department Agriculture. We hope this submission assists the department in its report to the government.

Melbourne Sheep Save is part of the Worldwide Save Movement – a network of organisations who bear witness to the suffering of farmed animals. Melbourne Sheep Save's intention is to expose the suffering of sheep in the wool, meat and live export industries throughout Australia and around the world. The organisation records cases of cruelty to sheep and files reports to the relevant government departments. Melbourne Sheep Save envisions a world where all sheep live free from exploitation by humans.

### **Position statement**

Melbourne Sheep Save does not believe that there is a policy statement that would support a sustainable Live Sheep Export Trade and meet the high animal welfare standards expected by the Australian community. Melbourne Sheep Save joins other major organisations and political parties who support a complete ban to the Live Export Trade.

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### **What are the impacts of Live Export on sheep?**

*“It begins with the mustering of the stock, often on remote properties, and it ends with animal slaughter in the country of destination. In between, the stock will be handled at least a further five or six times and the whole process is likely to last between one and two months. Little is known about the cumulative effects of these combined stresses on the welfare of the animals but it is possible that multiple stressors could make the animals anxious, depressed or enter a phase of learned helplessness.” [1]*

The following are the issues involved in Live Export detrimental to the lives of the sheep involved. These issues are either difficult or impossible to rectify through regulation and are the reason why a majority of Australians are in favour of an end to the industry:

1. Before boarding a ship or plane, animals may be stressed by food and water deprivation, high stocking densities and high temperatures while being transported by road or rail for up to 50 hours. These stresses can cause dehydration, bruising and salmonellosis in sheep and respiratory disease in cattle. [1]
2. Stress of loading sheep who are ruminant grazing animals onto the unfamiliar environment of the ships
3. The sheep are subjected to long voyages, high temperatures (causing heat stress) and extreme changes in climatic conditions
4. There is stress caused by the noise and constant ship movement. Rough seas and unexpected weather put animals at increased risk of injury and sea sickness.
5. Hoof damage, painful skin abrasions and lameness are common on board live export vessels due to the abrasive deck surface and inadequate drainage. This may lead to septicaemia.
6. Untreated, open wounds are at risk of infection and septic cellulitis from exposure to faeces and urine. Skin abrasions are often go unnoticed as they are covered by faecal matter. Infections can be so painful that an animal will refuse to rise, which in turn stops them feeding and drinking and leaves them lying in their own faeces.
7. Due to the typically high stocking density of the voyages, it is not usually possible for all animals to lie down but if they can then they are often forced to lie in their own waste.
8. Failure to eat onboard due to the change from a pasture-based diet to an unfamiliar feed of concentrated pellets.
9. Ammonia gas related health issues affecting an animal’s eyes, nasal cavities and respiratory tracts, resulting in crying, coughing and nasal discharge.
10. Animals are often not properly tested for pregnancy before boarding and that has led to cows and ewes giving birth at sea. Animals who go into labour on live export ships are not often given the additional space and care that they need, and their young may be trampled or injured.

11. Deaths during transit. Incredibly, government regulations allow a mortality rate of 2% of sheep on every voyage — which means hundreds, if not thousands, of animals can die at sea without any investigation into the cause.
12. At the end of the journey the sheep face unregulated handling and slaughter practices in jurisdictions that fail to monitor and enforce animal welfare laws. The sheep are taken outside the reach and protection of Australian animal welfare laws and the regulations, including being killed while fully conscious.
13. Live export has a history of disasters that have been devastating for animals – ventilation problems, engine failure and even fire have caused suffering and fatalities. Every journey runs the risk of something going wrong and animals are the ones to pay the price.

Despite multiple government and parliamentary reviews and additional regulatory requirements being imposed following these reviews ongoing suffering and deaths have not been prevented. In recent years the evidence of whistle-blowers has proven the suffering that animals endure. This evidence provided by each of these whistle-blowers also demonstrates the significant regulatory non-compliance by the live export industry.

### **The issue of Independent Observers aboard ships**

It is interesting to note that even with independent observers aboard the ships:

1. “Of the 66 livestock export voyages completed so far in 2019 with independent observers (IOs) on board, formal reports have only been published for 14 to date on the Department of Agriculture’s dedicated IO reporting website.”[5]
2. “Of the 60 voyages completed with IOs in 2018, reports for 19 are still yet to be published.” [5]

Asked why it was taking so long for many IO reports to be published after each journey, the Department of Agriculture declined to elaborate, responding to the question with a single line answer: “The department publishes independent observer summary reports as soon as practicable after the voyage is completed.” [5]

## **An account of why Live Export should be banned**

Men yelling. Dogs barking. Noise. Dust. Fear.

Hundreds of sheep were crammed into yards so tightly they had little room to move.

A shadow of an enormous truck engulfed them and they moved nervously in fear. The gates were opened.

More yelling. More barking.

They were herded up a ramp. They were all so afraid that all they could do was follow whoever was in front of them up the ramp and onto the truck. The small space in the yard they had been crammed into was tight enough but that was nothing compared to what they were now experiencing. The truck started to move and they leant against each other for support but in no time several fell to the floor, trapped by other sheep and unable to get up. Heads protruded from the sides of the truck - at least they had some air in the stifling atmosphere. Legs also protruded from the sides of the truck at awkward, painful angles. There was nothing the remainder could do but try to keep upright.

This began their journey from where they had spent their lives to horrors so bad they were almost impossible to imagine.

They travelled for what seemed an eternity. They were hungry and thirsty but no food or water was available. They were exhausted but could not sleep or even lay down for fear of being accidentally trampled and never getting up again. The fear and stress amongst all of them was overwhelming. Bodies ached from the pain of standing up for so long. The floor of the truck was soaked in urine and covered with faeces. The smell was unbearable.

The truck finally stopped for the last time. Sheep nervously waited. There was no paddock awaiting them nor grass where they could eat and drink and rest their weary bodies. They were offloaded from the truck onto a ramp that took them straight up onto a ship so big it made the truck look like a toy. Once on the ship they were again crammed into pens. They could feel the swaying of the ship, a far cry from the stable ground they were all used to.

The next stage of their journey began.

Days turned into weeks on this ship. The sheep were so hot that they gasped for air during the heat of the day. The noise and the constant movement of the ship was endless. The constant movement and the strange food they were given made many refuse to eat. None of their natural food of grass and hay were available. The floor they were standing on was constantly wet. Over the coming days numerous sheep became lame.

One day, about a week into the journey, an even worse smell became apparent. As the days passed, the smell became stronger and several sheep began to have trouble standing. One by one, they fell to the floor, suffering from terrible, open wounds. As they fell, they landed in the urine and faeces which quickly became embedded in the open wounds. As more days passed and they lay in the filth, the smell worsened. They moaned quietly in pain. Those sheep never rose again but were dragged away by men who showed little regard for the individuals with whom they were dealing. Some were dead but others were still alive and in agonising pain. Over the next little while, bodies rife with salmonella were thrown overboard into the raging sea below. Their lives ended in pain and suffering in a place they never should have been.

Days became weeks. The pungent air and fumes stung the noses of sheep causing them to drip continuously. Eyes watered and already painful bodies were racked by uncontrollable coughing. If this weren't bad enough one morning the body of a ewe, already weak from the effects of the journey, began to ache with pain even worse than that caused by standing for so long. She was just the first of a number of ewes who had been illegally transported and loaded onto this ship with a baby growing inside her.

The pain of labour grew stronger by the minute as her body contracted inside. How would she be able to give birth safely in these conditions and be able to protect and care for her baby once born? No help came, no separate pen, no veterinary attention, just hours of labour in the crushed conditions of the pen and with the stench of urine, faeces, infection and death strong. She could not lay down but if she had managed to, would more than likely never have been able to get up again. No mother would want her baby to be born into these conditions but nothing would stop the process now. With a last painful contraction and push of her muscles she felt her baby slip from her. She tried to turn around, desperate to see her baby, to lick her clean, to be close to her as any mother would. She could not get to her but could only just see her on the filthy floor. The other sheep took no notice, they were all too concerned with keeping themselves alive. Over the next couple of hours, the ewe heard a few quiet baas from her baby and then nothing. She strained to hear her cry – nothing. What happened to her, how she died, was something else that passed by unnoticed. Was she trampled under the feet of those trying to save themselves in this stinking furnace? Did she die because her mother was unable to feed her? Did she succumb to the same infections that so many others much stronger than her had been unable to fight off? What we do know is that she was brought into a world that she, and no other lamb or sheep, should ever experience.

Over the weeks of travel, many of the ship's occupants struggled to stay alive, struggled to find enough breath, struggled to cope with the furnace like conditions, the foreign food and the constant swaying of the ship.

One day the ship came to a stop. As the sheep were unloaded many found it difficult to walk, so weak and ill from the journey. Once again crammed into pens, men chose them to be taken away. The ewe who had given birth to a baby she was never able to care for, was suddenly grabbed by 2 men and turned on her back. As they carried her upside down, she froze in terror and could not even try to escape. Her legs were tied and she was stuffed into the boot of a car. Darkness overtook her as they shut the boot and drove off on a bumpy journey that threw her body around roughly within the confined space.

She was taken to a house and removed from the car. As she lay motionless with fear, she saw a man approach, knife in hand. Bound tightly by ropes there was no escape. As the knife was drawn across her throat, she was fully conscious. As she slowly lost consciousness, in severe pain and drowning in the sensation of the blood draining from her open throat, we may wonder if her last thoughts were of her dead baby, lost somewhere aboard the ship that had taken her from her homeland to a land where there were no regulations to “protect” her.

The agonising journey and death that ewe, and thousands more just like her on that ship, were subjected to were all made possible by the people who run the country of their birth. People who claim to have high “welfare” standards whilst allowing her to endure such a brutal end to her life. People who ignore all the things that caused her to suffer over those last weeks. People who claim that by not shipping her and the thousands just like her, for a few months of the year and by putting a few less of them aboard those death ships will make their suffering acceptable.

If only these people could accept that there is no way to transport sheep alive to a foreign country in a safe and humane way. These people, however, are blind to this and in reality, choose to condone the abuse and suffering of the gentle animals known as sheep.

### Concluding remarks

In reference to the question: “Is there a policy option not stated here that would both support a sustainable live sheep export trade and meet the high animal welfare standards expected by the Australian community?”

Melbourne Sheep Save does not believe that there is a policy statement that would achieve this aim but agrees with the following statements made by the RSPCA and The Australian Greens:

*“Despite the comprehensive nature of the regulatory framework there remain a number of fundamental concerns....These problems are fundamental to the regulatory framework and demonstrate the futility of trying to ensure acceptable animal welfare standards within the live export trade.” [2]*

*“Exporting livestock for slaughter in foreign countries poses significant and unavoidable risks to animal welfare. No amount of government regulation can overcome the inevitable welfare issues associated with the stress of prolonged transportation, changes in climatic conditions, and uncontrollable handling and slaughter practices in foreign jurisdictions.” [3]*

*“This is why RSPCA Australia believes the live export trade is profoundly unethical and calls upon the Australian Government to commit to an ordered phase out of the trade.” [2]*

*“Animals are not mere cargo. They are living, breathing, sentient beings. Live export cannot be made safe for sheep, cattle or any animal.” [4]*

Melbourne Sheep Save joins the following organisations, political parties and prominent figures who support a complete ban on the Live Export Trade:

Animals Australia  
RSPCA Australia  
The Animal Justice Party  
The Australian Greens  
Animals International  
Australia World Animals Protection  
Stop Live Exports  
Humane Society International  
World Animal Protection  
Voiceless The Animal Protection Institute  
Honourable Michael Kirby AC CMG



### References:

- [1] Clive J. Phillips, 'The Welfare of Livestock During Sea Transport' in Michael C. Appleby et al (eds), Long Distance Transport and Welfare of Farm Animals (CABI, 2008) 137, 139-40
- [2] <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-is-the-live-export-trade-regulated-in-australia/>
- [3] RSPCA Australia <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-is-the-live-export-trade-regulated-in-australia/>
- [4] The Australian Greens <https://greens.org.au/campaigns/end-live-exports>
- [5] [https://www.sheepcentral.com/frustration-over-delayed-live-export-independent-observer-reports/?fbclid=IwAR2cMuBe4-pewYNXTJ\\_zae1s29IVr6mDrEyWY3x1HOFIwnp66wLNee\\_x23A](https://www.sheepcentral.com/frustration-over-delayed-live-export-independent-observer-reports/?fbclid=IwAR2cMuBe4-pewYNXTJ_zae1s29IVr6mDrEyWY3x1HOFIwnp66wLNee_x23A)

### General references:

[https://hsi.org.au/campaign/animal-welfare-5/live-export?gclid=Cj0KCQjwi7DtBRCLARIsAGCJWBr-PFa-p6IJZtPHNptk7LrPir9T9kiGy-SAWOOSPNi5RHpdTcxD9FsaArDfEALw\\_wcB](https://hsi.org.au/campaign/animal-welfare-5/live-export?gclid=Cj0KCQjwi7DtBRCLARIsAGCJWBr-PFa-p6IJZtPHNptk7LrPir9T9kiGy-SAWOOSPNi5RHpdTcxD9FsaArDfEALw_wcB)

<https://www.voiceless.org.au/hot-topics/live-export>

[https://secure.animalsaustralia.org/take\\_action/live-export-shipboard-cruelty/?ua\\_s=BLE.com](https://secure.animalsaustralia.org/take_action/live-export-shipboard-cruelty/?ua_s=BLE.com)