

Tim O'Meara



## Live Export Policy Options Submission

I have worked directly in the live sheep export industry in Western Australia for over 20 years. I started off working at Peel Feedlot in Mundijong where the sheep go for pre-export requirements and now for the last 18 years have been a sheep buyer for Emanuel Exports. I have seen the improvements in animal welfare first hand and I applaud the significant changes that has been made in recent years.

Obviously for me Option 4 (no prohibition) is my preferred option. Not only from a financial position, but also from a job security one. The last 2 years have been very stressful for not only myself but also my family. Firstly, not knowing if my job was going to continue and secondly the uncertainty from the government changes at late notice. I have lost 1/4 of my yearly income due to the 3 month moratorium. When that was extended for 22 days we were placed under even more financial pressure as we had not budgeted for it. It was not only me as a sheep buyer that was affected, there are also many people that are part of the supply chain that are affected as well. Livestock agents, transport companies, feedlot and wharf workers, shearers and many more that have had their lives impacted, it also adds financial pressure to small country towns throughout Western Australia.

There are a few issues that I see with Options 1 to 3. Firstly the uncertainty, they are open to change at any moment. This is an industry that needs certainty, it needs to be well planned. There are Western Australian farmers moving away from breeding sheep because of the uncertainty in the industry and its continuation. Plus the uncertainty would be affecting the importers, which has already been proven in sourcing animals from other countries as they can be guaranteed supply.

Secondly these options don't factor in Australia's climate. What if in Western Australia there is a drought or extended dry period? Does that then affect the sheep's ability to acclimatize during the northern hemisphere summer? Western Australia does not have the abattoirs available that the Eastern States do to process large numbers quickly, Live Exports provides this option.

Thirdly, there are financial losses, I don't know of too many people that can afford to work for 8 1/2 months a year and survive financially and emotionally.

Lastly, and most importantly we need to remember that these sheep are providing food/protein to human beings. I personally have visited some of these Middle Eastern countries and abattoirs. The people there could not understand why Australia wasn't allowed to provide them with livestock for 3 months when all other countries could. The sheep need to be handled differently and can not be purchased outside of abattoir markets.

I do believe that the increased space onboard vessels throughout the different seasons has made a positive impact, which has been witnessed in the arrival rates. The unexpected Awassi Express disaster has actually turned into a positive for the industry, there is now so much being done to improve animal welfare and husbandry that probably would not have had it not happened. Exporters are now going above and beyond what is expected in the Australian guidelines. There is always room to improve, which I believe the industry is now dedicated to doing so.

Generally during June, July and August there are less shipments due to less availability of livestock. However the option to export still needs to be there. Why with all the fines and penalties that are currently in place can the exporters not do it at their own risk? The exporters can weigh up the risk and put the models in place to decide whether they can confidently do a shipment that would not put animal welfare in jeopardy.

When I was traveling throughout the Middle East, it was very obvious to me that Australia is by far the world leader not only in animal welfare but also in the quality of the livestock. Australian sheep

are bigger, stronger and healthier than any others that I saw being processed at the same abattoirs. The work the MLA has done in teaching animal husbandry has been brilliant, I did not witness any other country involvement in this area throughout my time there.

The feedlots for pre export in Western Australia provide the sheep with opportunity to acclimatize to what feeding and watering on a boat is like through their shed setup, I question whether any other states or even countries provide this facility? Majority of shy feeders are found in this time period and subsequently removed from the consignment, this is a necessary step to ensure there are only healthy travellers.

As a sheep buyer I know from firsthand experience of the effort that is put in all the way through the process from farm to feedlot and then to the livestock vessel. My selection process includes visiting 50 plus properties per shipment, drafting thousands of sheep to select only the ones that are up to live export quality. The farmers, agents and truck drivers are accountable for inspecting for issues before the animals arrival at the feedlot, where they are subsequently inspected again. The sheep are processed individually during their stay at the pre export facility, being placed with similar kind of weight and framed animals whilst being inspected daily. They are on feed and water 24 hours a day. Before they are loaded to head to the wharf they are checked again, at the wharf they are inspected once more before making it to the vessel. If there are any issues through that process they are removed. Once on the vessel they are inspected numerous times daily and if any issues arise they are placed in a hospital pen and cared for by an accredited veterinarian. Every step of the process is done thoroughly and with animals best intentions in mind.

The Importers and their country people love the quality of our live meat. To ensure a consistent supply of our quality food there needs to be a bill or legislation that guarantees our importers of our supply.

Australia is the world leader in live exports and more so in how the animals are treated upon their arrival, the industry needs the backing and support of the Federal Agricultural Department to continue to provide these standards and also build on them.

Yours Sincerely

Tim O'Meara