



Live Sheep Export: Transition Support Program

Curtin community submission

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Introduction

The phasing out of the live sheep export industry is a deeply divisive issue in my electorate.

In my constituency we have passionate ex-farmers and people involved in the live sheep export supply chain on the one side and people who care greatly about animal rights on the other. I have met with advocates on both sides, and it has reinforced to me the conflict between deeply held values.

I have also received a significant amount of correspondence in both directions.

As live sheep exports occur only from Western Australia, the ultimate banning of the live sheep export industry disproportionately affects our state.

The phasing out of the industry has been on the political agenda for some time with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) announcing it would phase out the industry in 2018. The ALP took this position to the 2022 election and re-iterated the position with an announcement on 11 May 2024 that a Bill to end live sheep export would be presented on 1 May 2028.

In conjunction with the formal phasing out announcement, the federal Labor Government announced a \$107 million Transition Support Program (TSP).

A number of affected constituents have objected strongly to the phase-out of the industry.

Given the Government has committed to the phase-out and is unlikely to change position, I am focused is on giving voice to affected constituents about how to best structure the TSP

I thank the Minister for considering this submission when developing the TSP.



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Federal Member for Curtin

1. The announced transition package

On 11 May 2024 the Government announced that live sheep export by sea from Australia would end on 1 May 2028, with legislation enacting the phase out to be introduced in this term of Parliament. A \$107 million TSP was announced as part of the phase-out plan.

The transition support is intended to include:

- \$64.6 million to assist sheep producers and the supply chain, particularly in Western Australia, to capitalise on opportunities to expand domestic sheep processing capacity. It will also support community wellbeing activities.
- \$27 million to enhance demand within Australia and internationally for sheep products to maintain and develop market opportunities. Support will be provided for diverse trade to and relationships with the Middle East and North African Regions.
- \$2.6 million to continue to improve sheep welfare standards so they are practical and meet sheep welfare standards.
- \$1.7 million to appoint a Transition Advocate to facilitate communication between industry and government and advise the government on how the transition is progressing.
- \$11.1 million for the implementation of the phase out and facilitation of ongoing engagement with industry, communities, trading partners and other stakeholders.

The Government intends to provide more details on the TSP in the second half of 2024.

2. Background to this submission

In light of these announcements, I contacted constituents who had expressed a view in support of continuing live sheep export or who had concerns with the phase-out.

I asked for their input on the structure of the TSP, and asked three questions:

1. What are the biggest needs for affected farmers and others in the supply chain during the transition?
2. What is the best way to support more onshore processing of sheep in Western Australia?
3. What other types of support should be included in the program?

I received 30 email responses from constituents in the three-week period I provided for input.

3. Key themes

The following themes were evident in the constituent feedback.

3.1 Broad objection to phase out

All 30 constituents reiterated their strong support for continuing the live sheep export industry rather than a government led transition out of the industry.

Respondents reiterated the importance of the live sheep export industry to affected Western Australian farming communities.

3.2 Long-term perspective

Respondents noted that significant funding is required to help the industry transition.

Many considered the TSP amount to be grossly inadequate.

They noted that the TSP should apply to the entire supply chain- from farmers to exporters.

The focus should not be on short-term cash handouts but on genuine transition.

3.3 Abattoirs

Expanding onshore processing of sheep will require more abattoirs.

Currently, abattoirs in Western Australia require migrant labour and associated accommodation to operate.

This will need to be factored into an expansion of onshore processing and will be a challenge given the current housing affordability crisis.

3.4 Mental health

Mental health support for affected individuals and communities will be required and will be significant. When livelihoods are jeopardised, the impacts cut deep and undermine whole communities.

3.5 Supply chain issues

The lack of refrigeration in largely Middle Eastern country importers needs to be addressed to facilitate the market for packaged meat.

Freight subsidies for processed meat should be considered and new markets for processed meat need to be opened up to enable a proper transition pathway.

4. Specific feedback from respondents

Feedback received from the 30 affected constituents has been summarised below by guiding question, with the number of occurrences of each issue identified in brackets.

4.1 Biggest needs for affected farmers and others during the transition

- Sentiment that the package is grossly inadequate and the focus should not be on cash hand-outs (7)
- Mental health support required will be real and significant as livelihoods are significant (6)
- There should be a focus on light industries and regenerative farming practices (1)
- Support needs to be given if participants want to transition to cropping/grain (1)
- All businesses in the supply chain need to have access to the transition package (1)

4.2 Best way to support more onshore processing of sheep in WA

- Abattoirs are struggling in Western Australia and rely on migrant workers. Expanding abattoirs will need more trained migrant workers, which issue is exacerbated in a housing affordability crisis (9)
- Lack of refrigeration in largely Middle Eastern country importers needs to be addressed to facilitate the market for packaged meat (8)
- Incentives to build infrastructure and housing to encourage abattoir labour (1)
- Reduce barriers restricting people from living in regional towns (1)
- Ensure a fair priced farm gate sheep price and the swift processing of, and payment for, sheep going to the abattoirs (1)
- Financially assist new meat processing firms (1)
- Subsidise onshore processing as the cost is too high (1)

4.3 Other types of support to be included in the program

- Provide air freight subsidies for packaged meat (2)
- Marketing and support with sheep meat customers to promote packaged meat (2)
- Ensure more middle-eastern flights to facilitate the export of chilled sheep meat (1)
- Find new markets for meat (1)
- Help workers transition with other machinery and livestock skills (1)
- Support for schools who feel the effects of people leaving country towns (1)

I urge the Minister to take account of this constituent feedback when further developing the TSP.