

29 May 2020

The Hon David Littleproud MP  
Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management  
[David.Littleproud.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:David.Littleproud.MP@aph.gov.au)

CC. The Hon Joel Fitzgibbon, Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Resources  
[Joel.Fitzgibbon.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Joel.Fitzgibbon.MP@aph.gov.au)

Dear Minister Littleproud,

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the only professional association representing veterinarians within Australia. Our 9,000 members work in all areas of animal science, health and welfare.

As President of the AVA, I am writing to seek your assurance that you will uphold the new regulations prohibiting the export of sheep to the Middle East between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 14<sup>th</sup> September. We have become aware that the *Al-Kuwait* is seeking an exemption to this, following an outbreak of COVID-19 amongst its crew.

In the past two years the AVA has been an active participant in both the ASEL review and the review of the Heat Stress Risk Assessment (HSRA) model, as part of the Government's technical reference panel. We are also current members of the Government's Live Export Animal Welfare Advisory Group (LEAWAG). We have undertaken extensive analysis of the science and available data on stocking density and heat stress in sheep as part of this process, and have provided this to the Government via a series of submissions.

AVA has consistently stated that:

*"Irrespective of stocking density, thermoregulatory physiology indicates that sheep on live export voyages to the Middle East during May to October will remain susceptible to heat stress and die due to the expected extreme climatic conditions during this time. Accordingly, voyages carrying live sheep to the Middle East during May to October cannot be recommended."*

In February this year we provided input to the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) process for the 2020 northern hemisphere summer trade. We supported (in part) the option to cease trade from 1 June to 14 September, however, we recommended an earlier cessation date be implemented, such that sheep are not on the water for any days in June. This is because of the demonstrably increased animal welfare risks as we move from May into June.

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We understand that further research is being conducted on board ships and look forward to release of new data gathered in 2019. We also understand that this data was used to inform the 2020 RIS decision. At this time, and based on the information to hand, our position is the same as advised in our February 2020 submission.

Historically, mortalities in sheep travelling to the Middle East have been greatest in June to September. We know that voyages that begin in May and end in June have historically resulted in higher mortalities than voyages undertaken wholly in May. Further, those sheep that do not die will suffer moderate to extreme heat stress for days to weeks during any voyage to the Middle East during this time.

The paradigm has moved away from only assessing mortality, to considerations of animal welfare, and the expectation is that sheep should not suffer throughout the many weeks they are on board. Using the HSRA model, we know that sheep will be subjected to ambient wet bulb temperatures which exceed their Heat Stress Thresholds during June; and no amount of increased space or ventilation can reduce shipboard temperatures below ambient temperature.

For these reasons, and consistent with the advice we have provided previously, we believe that the welfare risks to the animals are unacceptably high in June, and that no exemptions should be granted. It is critical that the Government upholds the regulations, to ensure that animal welfare standards during live export of sheep are in line with the expectations of the veterinary profession and the wider community.

We are happy to meet with you to discuss in more detail.

Yours sincerely



Dr Warwick Vale

President

Australian Veterinary Association

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