

Media release

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New live ex recommendations completely ignore the science

This morning the Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud announced changes to the live export trade. He claimed that these changes would greatly improve animal welfare. But although there is the welcome change to the reportable mortality level from 2% to 1%, the only other real change is to give sheep variable amounts of space increase.

Vets Against Live Exports (VALE) spokesperson Dr Sue Foster said, “These changes to space allowances are nothing more than window dressing and will not significantly improve the suffering and death due to heat stress.

“The Minister has claimed that his response is based on facts and science, not emotion. This is not the case. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), in its independent submission to the Minister, stated clearly that the only way to avoid heat stress issues in the northern summer was to stop shipments at that time. The response of the Minister has been to ignore the facts presented by the AVA and their clear and accurate summary of the science. It is evident from both the scientific review by VALE which was published in the veterinary literature in 2014 and the more recent review carried out by the AVA that increasing space allowance will at best have a minimal effect on the suffering and mortality experienced by sheep during northern summer voyages.”

The AVA recommended 30% space increase for 40-60kg sheep on all voyages but stated that “Irrespective of stocking density, 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”.

“The Minister also announced that there will be an independent regulator and independent observers on every voyage. VALE remains sceptical of whether that will in fact allow objective scrutiny of the obvious problems on these voyages, as the Minister's Department was identified by the Minister himself as being a significant contributor to the culture of suppression of details of poor animal welfare suffered by sheep and cattle in the trade. Without details of the selection criteria for the regulator and the observers, and specifically whether they will be independent of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, we cannot know whether these proposals will improve welfare for the animals,” said Dr Foster.

“Minister Littleproud has chosen to ignore every one of the four key recommendations made in the scientific report from the Australian Veterinary Association, Australia's peak veterinary body.”

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