



SHEEP LIVE EXPORT – SOME KEY FACTS

The latest revelations of severe suffering and deaths on voyages of the *Awassi Express*¹ have stimulated renewed focus on live export of sheep and have prompted investigations by the federal government and a commitment by the federal Labor Party, if elected, to phase out live export of sheep.²

Brief overview of welfare Issues

There are numerous health and welfare issues that must be considered in the live export of sheep, from land transport of livestock from source to feedlot, management of livestock in registered premises, transport of animals from feedlot to the vessel, loading the vessel, and the voyage itself. There is cumulative stress over this extended period including transportation and loading stresses, high-stocking densities, exposure to loud noise, human handling, transport to a different climatic zone, heat stress, and diseases such as inanition, salmonellosis, scabby mouth and pink eye.

The stresses continue at the end destination, with unloading, transport, feedlotting and slaughter. End destination problems are not under Australian control. Some attempts have been made to ensure that animals stay within recognised facilities with the introduction of ESCAS (Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System) but ESCAS is breached repeatedly and there have been no penalties applied to exporters for these compliance breaches.

The government does little to assess ESCAS and most reports of serious breaches come from Animals Australia, the unpaid auditor of the trade. Despite ESCAS being frequently cited as a panacea for all live export welfare issues, it is important to note that shipboard animal welfare issues are not covered by ESCAS.

Export of sheep from an Australian winter to a Middle East summer

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has now released a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the role of heat stress and space allowance in contributing to poor welfare and mortality in the live sheep export trade.³ This definitive analysis pre-empts the report commissioned by the federal Minister for Agriculture. That report is being prepared by Dr Mike McCarthy, a longstanding contracted employee (onboard veterinarian)

¹ See Voyage 69, www.vale.org.au/high-mortality-voyages.html and

www.vale.org.au/uploads/1/0/4/3/10438895/vale_media_release_15.02.2017.pdf

² www.joelfitzgibbon.com/transcript_television_interview_sky_news_may_7_2018

³ www.vale.org.au/uploads/1/0/4/3/10438895/ava_literature_review_live_sheep_export_may_2018.pdf

of the live export industry, who VALE believes should never have been appointed because of his apparent conflict of interest.

The AVA Review concludes that heat stress, causing poor animal welfare and deaths, is an inevitable consequence of sheep shipments to the Middle East during the northern summer. This is because the temperature and humidity encountered at that time overwhelms the animals' ability to thermoregulate. The Review also concludes that space allowances under the federal legislation governing live export are inadequate. The Review makes several recommendations, including that northern summer shipments of sheep to the Middle East cannot be recommended, and that space allocations for those shipments at other times of the year be increased by 30%.

The economics of sheep live export

- Australia is not the largest exporter of live sheep to the Middle East; there is significant competition from Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti.⁴
- About 411kT of sheepmeat is exported from Australia each year and of this, about 20% goes to the Middle East, mostly by airfreight as chilled meat.⁵
- Just under 2 million sheep go for live export each year, mostly to the Middle East;⁶ of these, about 1.64 million go from Western Australia (i.e. about 82%). 28% of the WA turnoff goes to live export; the bulk of the rest of the WA turnoff (72%) goes for export as sheepmeat. The major impact of any change in live export of sheep from Australia will be on WA.⁷
- Live exports of sheep from WA are worth about \$200 million.⁸
- The total value of sheepmeat production to WA is about \$513 million; sheepmeat exports from WA have increased about 40% in value (from 2010) to \$323 million, as a result of increased demand from China, UAE, Jordan and the USA.⁹
- The total value of the Australian live sheep export market is about \$250 million; the value of sheepmeat exports (lamb and mutton) is about \$2.65 billion, and the gross value of sheep and lamb disposals (slaughter and live export) is about \$3.9 billion.¹⁰

⁴ ABARES (2014) Live export trade assessment.

http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/publications/display?url=http://143.188.17.20/anrdl/DAFFService/display.php?fid=pc_leta_d9abca20140708_11a.xml

⁵ <http://www.mla.com.au/globalassets/mla-corporate/prices--markets/documents/os-markets/export-statistics/1904-australian-sheepmeat-exports--globalsummary.pdf>

⁶ This represents a decrease of over 3-fold from the 1980s, when annual exports could exceed 6 million per year.

⁷ Western Australia's Agrifood/Fibre/Fisheries/Forestry Industries 2017

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/sites/gateway/files/Western%20Australia%27s%20Agrifood%2C%20Fibre%2C%20Fisheries%20and%20Forestry%20Industries%202017%20-%20PDF.pdf>

⁸ 2014 figures; Western Australia's Agrifood/Fibre/Fisheries/Forestry Industries 2017

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/sites/gateway/files/Western%20Australia%27s%20Agrifood%2C%20Fibre%2C%20Fisheries%20and%20Forestry%20Industries%202017%20-%20PDF.pdf>

⁹ Western Australia's Agrifood/Fibre/Fisheries/Forestry Industries 2017

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/sites/gateway/files/Western%20Australia%27s%20Agrifood%2C%20Fibre%2C%20Fisheries%20and%20Forestry%20Industries%202017%20-%20PDF.pdf>

¹⁰ ABARES (2018) Agricultural Commodities

http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/publications/display?url=http://143.188.17.20/anrdl/DAFFService/display.php?fid=pb_agcomd9abcc20180306_6R2bY.xml

- Live export of sheep in Australia accounts for less than 10% of the value of sheepmeat exports, and about 6% of the value of all sheep and lamb disposals.

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this. First, the significant export of sheepmeat (which is chilled) to Middle Eastern countries indicates that there is no shortage of refrigeration in those countries. A 2014 survey by ABARES concluded that in the Middle East ‘substitutability between Australian live sheep and sheep meat imports has increased in recent years, largely reflecting growth in incomes, urbanisation, refrigeration availability and popularity of western style supermarkets’. This is underscored by the experience regarding Bahrain, which stopped importing Australian sheep in 2014, after which sheepmeat imported from Australia increased over two-fold.¹¹

One item which is missing from this consideration is the value which is added by processing animals locally, as opposed to exporting them live.

The law governing live export

Live export is governed by federal law. Under federal law, an exporter must have a licence, and must get an export permit for each shipment. It is a condition of an exporter’s licence that the exporter must comply with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL). An exporter can be penalised (quite severely) if it intentionally or recklessly breaches a licence condition. However, there is an anomaly here, because ASEL itself does not impose a broad requirement on an exporter regarding the welfare of animals on board live export ships. ASEL says that exporters ‘must ensure that stocking densities meet all legislative requirements (these are set out in various appendices – they have remained unchanged since 1978), that there is adequate provisioning of the vessel before departure ... and that accredited stock persons¹² and, when required, an accredited veterinarian have been engaged’. It goes on to say, ‘Once loading begins, the master of the vessel assumes responsibility for the management and care of the livestock to the point of disembarkation.’

ASEL Standard 4.12 refers to the need to comply with an ‘agreed heat stress risk assessment’. This is not published and is not available, because it is commercially confidential. However, as is evident from the AVA Review, whatever it is, it is not adequate.

There is no requirement for a veterinarian to be on every shipment. That requirement is imposed at the discretion of the Department. Moreover, the role of the veterinarian is not to look after animal welfare; rather he or she must monitor animal condition, and report to the Department. Care and management of animals is the responsibility of the ‘stock person’. The veterinarians and stock persons are usually employed by the exporter (or importer) so there is no independent observer on these vessels.

What this all means, crucially, is that the requirement to treat or euthanase sick or injured animals (ASEL Standard 5.2) is probably not the responsibility of the exporter. Likewise, the

¹¹ ABARES (2014) Live export trade assessment.

http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/publications/display?url=http://143.188.17.20/anrdl/DAFFService/display.php?fid=pc_leta_d9abca20140708_11a.xml. Note, however, that Middle Eastern importing countries still have a preference for live animals on religious grounds.

¹² Standard 4.5 says the stock person must be employed or contracted by the exporter.

requirement that ventilation must 'ensure adequate thermoregulation of the livestock' (ASEL Standard 5.6) is probably not the responsibility of the exporter.

It is possible that the Western Australian *Animal Welfare Act 2002* applies to live export. However, this means that while an exporter may be prosecuted for 'transporting an animal in a way likely to cause it unreasonable harm', this is not something which can be lightly or quickly undertaken. The last time this was done (in 2005), it was two years before the prosecution was commenced and another year before the decision was handed down. There is also the possibility that a court might find that the WA law does not apply, given the provision in the Australian *Constitution* which says that where there is an inconsistency between federal and state laws, and where the federal law 'covers the field', then the federal law prevails.

The prospect of stopping live export vessels from sailing, using powers under the *Animal Welfare Act* does seem theoretically possible, but is probably unlikely to happen, given the enormous commercial consequences of such an action.

REFERENCE LIST

Australian Veterinary Association

AVA Submission: A short review of space allocation on live export ships and body temperature regulation in sheep. May 2018.

Note: Critical reference given the independent nature of the review and the traditionally conservative stance of Australia's peak veterinary body.

Government

1. Keniry J. Livestock Export Review. A final report to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. 2004
2. All High Mortality Investigation Reports for voyages to the Middle East (these are no longer available on the government website but can be accessed from the VALE website. <http://www.vale.org.au/high-mortality-voyages.html>. Summary will make it quick to pick up exact voyages
3. Australian Government, Department of Agriculture (various names depending on year), National Shipboard Performance Reports for the last 10 years eg Norris and Norman, now just Norman eg Norris, R.T., Norman, G.J., 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 (2016 is Norman only). National Livestock Export Industry Shipboard Performance Report 2011. Meat and Livestock Australia, North Sydney, NSW, Australia

Peer reviewed scientific papers

1. Caulfield MP, Cambridge H, Foster SF et al. Heat stress: A major contributor to poor animal welfare associated with long haul live export voyages. *The Veterinary Journal* 2014;199:223-228. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tvjl.2013.09.018>
2. Foster SF, Overall KL. The welfare of Australian livestock transported by sea. *The Veterinary Journal* 2014;200:205-209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tvjl.2014.03.016>

Note: general overview with helpful footnotes for unusual references

3. Higgs, A.R.B., Norris, R.T., Baldock, F.C., Campbell, N.J., Koh, S., Richards, R.B., 1996. Contagious ecthyma in the live sheep export industry. Aust Vet J 1996;74, 215-220.

4. Norris, R.T., Richards, R.B., Norman G.J., 1992. The duration of lot-feeding of sheep before sea transport. Australian Veterinary Journal 69, 8-10

Note: this paper demonstrates why inanition/salmonellosis still occurs on ships..it is not worth identifying shy feeders as some of them will start eating onboard (ie more expensive to remove than to load and lose a few).

5. Petherick JC, Phillips CJC. Space allowances for confined livestock and their determination from allometric principles. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 2009;117:1-12

Note: this paper demonstrates that current space allowances are inadequate

6. Pines, MK, Phillips, CJC Accumulation of ammonia and other potentially noxious gases on live export shipments from Australia to the Middle East. Journal of Environmental Monitoring 2011;13, 2798–2807.

7. Phillips CJ, Pines MK, Latter M, et al. Physiological and behavioural responses of sheep to gaseous ammonia. J Anim Sci. 2012; 90:1562-9

8. Petherick JC, Phillips CJC. The Ethics of a Co-regulatory Model for Farm Animal Welfare Research. J Agric Environ Ethics 2014

Note: this paper demonstrates the issue of industry funding and bias

9. Stockman CA, Barnes AL, Maloney SK et al. Effect of prolonged exposure to continuous heat and humidity similar to long haul live export voyages in Merino wethers. Animal Production Science 2011;51:135-143

Note: the heat stress threshold demonstrated in ideal situation (individual pens, low stocking density on land) is much lower than that used by the government

Meat and Livestock Australia documents

1. Ferguson D, Fisher A, White B et al. Review of the Livestock Export Heat Stress Risk Assessment Model (HotStuff). Meat and Livestock Australia, North Sydney, NSW, Australia 2008

Note – this paper details the exporter objections to Hotstuff and how they try and avoid heat stress in the Middle East

2. Ferguson D, Lea J. Refining stocking densities. Meat & Livestock Australia Limited, Sydney, NSW, Australia 2013

Note: fundamentally flawed as addressed by Petherick and Phillips 2014

3. MAMIC (2001). Investigation of the Ventilation Efficacy on Livestock Vessels. Meat and Livestock Australia, North Sydney, NSW, Australia 2001

Note: essential for understanding ventilation

4. McCarthy M., 2012. Investigating incidence of scabby mouth during live export. Meat and Livestock Australia Limited, North Sydney, NSW, Australia

Note: shows the extent of the scabby mouth issue and the fact that it could be addressed (but not economically viable to do so)

5. McCarthy M (2005). Pilot Monitoring of Shipboard Environmental Conditions and Animal Performance. Meat and Livestock Australia, North Sydney, NSW, Australia

Note: critical paper as demonstrates in depth knowledge of ships and how difficult it is to assess different conditions on different ships and what monitoring should occur (never implemented). It also documents that *33% of the studied voyages to the Middle East between April and October 2004 had severe heat stress and that an unspecified percentage of other voyages had mild heat stress.*