

Live Exports

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN
LIVE EXPORTS
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

The live export trade is inherently cruel, is costing Australia jobs and national income and could be effectively replaced by a chilled meat export trade, with positive economic, employment and animal welfare outcomes.

Petitions containing the signatures of over 150 000 Australians expressing concern about livestock exports and calling for an end to the trade have been tabled in the Senate over the last few years. This has been by far the biggest petition tabled in that time.

Our Action Plan

- end Australia's live export trade while simultaneously supporting the development and expansion of Australia's chilled, frozen and refrigerated carcass trades;
- ensure Australia's animal welfare standards are applied throughout all phases of the livestock transportation, handling and slaughter;
- employ RSPCA representatives as independent observers;
- establish the Democrats' National Animal Welfare Bill (2005) as law; and,
- devise humane methods for slaughtering livestock at sea, in the event of another Cormo Express-type incident occurring during the phase-out period.

The Issues

Inherently cruel

The entire live export journey – from farm-gate to destination – involves stressful and painful experiences for the animal. Transport conditions result in suffering and many deaths due to starvation, heat stress, disease and pneumonia. Under normal circumstances hundreds of animals will die but there have also been repeated tragedies such as the Cormo Express disaster in 2003 which resulted in the deaths of 5, 500 sheep.

Between 2000 and 2005, over 28 million live sheep and 4 million live cattle were exported from Australian ports, along with hundreds of thousands of goats and buffalo. During this same period 322 222 sheep, 7327 cattle, and 4202 goats and buffalo have died unnecessarily in transit on livestock vessels under the most miserable of circumstances.



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There is also a lack of control over what happens to animals once they reach their destination. Each year Australia ships over millions of animals to countries with no animal welfare standards. The Australian Government can not make sure that animals are treated humanely once they have left the country. There is also considerable evidence that practices that would not be acceptable in Australia are common in countries importing our live animals. Footage aired on “Sixty Minutes” showed the harrowing **inhumane handling and slaughter practices** of cattle in the Middle East, including cutting leg tendons and eye stabbing of cattle to cripple them, followed by rough throat-cutting and a slow agonising death. Sheep are also killed without pre-stunning, have their throats roughly cut and bleed to death. All while other animals look on. Despite this the Australian Government continues to allow the export of animals.

It doesn't add up

Research shows that a switch from live export to a chilled trade need not impact adversely on the economy. Australia's live cattle and sheep export trade is worth roughly \$695 million annually, while Australia's fresh, chilled and frozen export trade is worth more than \$6.5 billion – more than nine times that of the live export trade.

According to the Heilbron report, live exports cost Australia some \$1.7 billion in lost GDP; around \$280 million in household income; and about 12,000 jobs – mostly in regional areas. Protection and promotion of the live export trade diminishes the capacity of Australia's accredited halal and kosher abattoirs to attract new overseas markets. Australia already provides sheep-meat and processed beef to every significant market for live sheep and cattle – debunking the myth that countries in the Middle East and across South East Asia will only accept live animals on religious and cultural grounds. But, as long as live exports continue, chilled meat exports will not realise their potential. The Democrats have maintained for more than twenty years that it makes more sense to value-add here, not overseas.

Government must do more

The Democrat-initiated Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare, established in the early 1980s, declared that if the industry was assessed solely on animal welfare grounds it would be banned immediately. It also recommended that the live exports trade be substituted with a refrigerated meat trade to the Middle East and other countries. The Government continues to ignore these recommendations. An Inquiry that followed the public outcry over the Cormo Express incident in 2003 made eight recommendations on the conduct of the live export trade. Unfortunately some of the recommendations were not fully adopted. The full and proper adoption and implementation of the recommendations would have seen improvement in how the trade was conducted, but animals would still suffer in the process and at their destination.

The Australian Democrats are the only political party to consistently raise the live export issue in the Senate; and are responsible for the first significant political condemnation of the live export industry in the mid-1980s. We will continue to push for the end to this barbaric practice.



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