Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture
PO Box 6021
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: Agriculture.reps@aph.gov.au

 9/6/2024

Dear Committee Members,

**Re: Inquiry into Export Control Amendment (Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea) Bill 2024**

This submission opposes the Australian Government's policy to phase out live sheep exports and this bill that seeks to legislate the policy. It highlights the vital role of the live sheep export industry in promoting farmgate competition and ensuring a sustainable sheep industry. It also points out a few problems with the way the legislation has been arrived at which are at odds with the way government business should be done and the way animal activists have behaved which could be the subject of criminal charges under animal cruelty and bribing of foreign officials.

The export of live sheep by sea from Australia is a long-standing industry and has contributed considerable value to Australian agriculture and the Western Australian economy. In Western Australia, the live export industry underpins strong rural and regional communities, ensuring vital employment for shearers, truck drivers, fodder suppliers, livestock agents, veterinarians, farmers, producers, and their families. It also contributes very strongly to the wool industry which seems to be overlooked and is worth an additional cash boost to our economy which hitherto seems to have been disregarded. Removing this trade creates uncertainty for farmers and their families and has detrimental flow-on effects on regional communities. In fact saying detrimental to regional communities is understating the case very badly. THIS WILL BE AN ABSOLUTELTY KNOCKOUT TO REGIONAL COMMUNITIES WIPING OUT SOME SMALL TOWNS.

This committee inquiry has not provided adequate time or opportunity to present the complex impacts of this bill and there must be a Senate inquiry held over an extended period with the opportunity for hearings in the Sheep producing and southern cattle regions of WA where local businesses and communities will be affected.

**For our farm alone we have nearly 20% of our property which would be impossible to use for other purposes. It is full of agricultural obstacles such as rocks trees and gullys which make it perfect for running sheep. But we cant just continue to run sheep there if it is going to be at a loss. Some of us remember the mudjinberry dispute and the abattoir at Albany where the unions wanted large pay rises and in the end shut the abattoirs down rather than take a pay cut. We don’t want to be at the mercy of abattoirs who always pay the bare minimum. We need the competition so we can stay competitive ourselves. We paid top dollar for that land and while it will remain able to be grazed if we cant make a profit out of it then it is a huge burden on our balance sheet.**

**Off farm is also a huge issue. Our local town has seen demise over many years and is keeping afloat…just. If we take out a number of our community through the stock handlers, shearing teams, trucking contractors our town is gone. We have only just got back out local grocers after having been closed for a while and it needs to make money to stay. Our school (albeit when I was there nearly 50 years ago) once had over 300 students. It now struggles to maintain 100 with having lost our high school and kids going off to high school elsewhere a year earlier.**

**Our nearest town is 25km away, then the next is 30. The nearest regional centre is 50km. I’m not even sure how well that will survive with the axing of an industry which is pivotal to its survival.**

**Worst of all this policy is going to hurt these regional communities in WA which are so far removed from Canberra.**

**The policy is based on preference deals with the animal justice party (long before the Dunkley by election) to protect Albanes and Plibersek. It is founded on vision that was paid for and created by the RSPCA’s Lyn White and Animals Australia (evidence supplied). This is industrial sabotage of the worst kind and in my view should be attracting criminal charges but the case was mysteriously dropped by the department and the prize witness mysteriously disappeared.**

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**It means that nay time a small group has an issue with any kind of activity they can start a two bit political party and do a preference deal and BOOM and industry is sacrificed on the altar of political gamesmanship. This is not a way to run a country.**

Moreover, the Australian live export industry has made significant investments in animal welfare and transport standards and has strict regulations and self-imposed standards. Australia is the only country that regulates animal welfare standards in other countries and invests in training and auditing to ensure those standards are met.

Given the indifference to the outstanding improvements and performance of the trade since 2018 and the lack of consultation and due diligence completed by the Government when recommitting to this policy, an alarming precedent has been set for future agricultural policy decision making. The policy decisions made for Australian agriculture must be evidence-based, strategic, inclusive, and collaborative. To divert from this threatens the future of the industry, businesses, families, and communities. Government has a responsibility to ensure that no Australian is worse off or left behind. However, should this Bill be passed, that is what will occur for thousands of Australians in Western Australia.

There is no doubt in my mind that the only place for this bill is in the bin, for the long term betterment of Australia and Australian politics.

Yours Sincerely,

John Hassell (President of WAFarmers and VP of NFF)

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