

OPEN LETTER to the Minister of Agriculture in South Africa

Minister John Steenhuisen
Minister of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
Agriculture Place, 20 Steve Biko Road
Pretoria, SOUTH AFRICA, 0002
Copy to the Director-General: VPH@dalrrd.gov.za

29 August 2025

Dear Minister Steenhuisen,

Australian and New Zealand organisations unite to call for South Africa to ban live animal exports

We, the undersigned, represent leading animal protection organisations actively working to improve the welfare of animals in Australia, New Zealand, and around the world. We write to you in response to the South African government's calls for public comment on the draft Regulations for the Exportation of Live Animals by Sea.

The Australian government introduced legislation to phase out live sheep exports by sea, with an end date of May 1, 2028. This historic move followed the recommendations of an Independent Panel who submitted their report¹ to the Australian government in October 2023 after a six-month inquiry, and having received over 4,100 submissions.² The New Zealand government banned all live exports by sea from May 2023.³

Live exports by sea subject animals to prolonged and unavoidable suffering. Extensive evidence has shown that the suffering associated with these long-haul voyages from Australia by sea cannot be addressed through regulation or improved standards. Despite regulatory oversight via Australia's Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) and Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) schemes, animals continue to suffer.

The animal welfare issues associated with live export by sea are cumulative, and the risks are inherent to every voyage. The animals suffer from the impacts of transport stress, heat stress, the effects of humidity, overcrowding, hunger, increased risk of disease, infection, and injury, as well as the risk of being slaughtered fully conscious at their destination. Analysis of data from live sheep export voyages from Australia to the Middle East between 2018 to 2023 showed that more than 60 per cent of Independent Observer reports documented heat stress in sheep.

Any confidence in the level of protection of human lives and animal welfare during sea voyages relies on high standards of vessel safety, yet livestock ships are twice as likely to sink as cargo vessels.⁴ Since 2009, at least six livestock export ships have sunk, causing loss of human life and the death of thousands of animals. In each instance, suffering in the process of drowning and other injuries sustained is inevitable, and extreme.

The Australian community overwhelmingly supported the Australian Government's policy to phase out this trade. Almost 44,000 Australians signed a Parliamentary petition⁵—one of the largest official e-Petitions in Australian history—calling on the government to legislate the date to end live sheep

¹ Glyde, P Middleton, S, Neil, H, Snowdon, W, 2023, Independent Panel report: Phase out of live sheep exports by sea, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra [DAFF](#)

² Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry [Submission](#): Inquiry into the Export Control Amendment (Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea) Bill 2024, June 2024

³ Beehive.govt.nz, Releases: [Government to phase out live exports by sea](#), 14 April 2021

⁴ The Guardian, [Exclusive: livestock ships twice as likely lost as cargo vessels](#), 28 October 2020

⁵ Parliament of Australia, [Petition EN5323](#) – Legislate an end date for live sheep export this term, Closing date: 31 August 2023

exports as soon as possible. The phase out will bring an end to decades of suffering. No amount of regulation can adequately address the inherent cruelty of long sea voyages for sheep, and years of scientific evidence proves that sheep suffer in live export, both during the voyages and at their destination. In 2024 in New Zealand, a petition to safeguard the ban on live animal exports from there was signed by more than 57,000 New Zealanders.⁶

Australia and other countries have recognised the practical impossibility of ensuring basic welfare standards through regulatory schemes on live export at sea. Your own strategy to formalise this controversial and harmful trade in policy may seem to offer short-term opportunities for South Africa, but the long-term consequences should not be overlooked. Animal welfare is increasingly recognised as a key requirement in international trade agreements. Codifying live export for slaughter from South Africa is out of step with global sentiment and will serve only to undermine your international reputation as a reliable and ethical supplier into the global market.

The best way to prevent more suffering and any inevitable livestock export maritime disasters in future is for your government to join the Australian Government in banning this trade, and to transition to more humane alternatives.

Minister, we respectfully urge you to demonstrate that you care about the welfare of South African farm animals and ban live exports by sea. This would help to ensure a more humane and sustainable future for animal welfare and would be applauded by the global community.

Yours sincerely,



Bruce Poon
President
Animal Justice Foundation



Dawn Lowe
Project Manager
Animals' Angels Australia



Glenys Oogjes
Chief Executive Officer
Animals Australia Federation



Dr Bidda Jones AM
Director of Strategy
Australian Alliance for Animals



Rebecca Linigen
Director
FOUR PAWS Australia



Ms Erica Martin
Executive Director
Humane World for Animals | Australia



Debra Ashton
Chief Executive Officer
SAFE (Save Animals from Exploitation)



Dr Rosemary Elliot
President
Sentient



Dr Arnja Dale
Chief Scientific Officer
SPCA New Zealand



Angela Martin
Stop Live Exports



Dr Sue Foster
VALE Spokesperson
VALE (Vets Against Live Export)



Dr B. Helen Beattie
Managing Director
Veterinarians for Animal Welfare Aotearoa



Ondine Sherman
Managing Director
Voiceless: the animal protection institute



Mr Ben Pearson
Country Director
World Animal Protection

⁶ <https://petitions.parliament.nz/79ff1ae2-f2e8-43c5-6c98-08dc33f5abe2>