

Dear Technical Reference Panel

I am the chairman of the Katanning Regional Business Association. We represent a whole variety of businesses within our town and the surrounding areas. Some of these businesses are directly involved in the operations of live Export, whether stock agents, transport operators or shearers, but many are not directly involved. Yet all have been affected by the sudden cessation of the sheep live export trade over the last year.

Within a radius of 300km of Katanning I think you would find the bulk of the West Australian sheep population.

As such, our community of Katanning has strong ties to all facets of the sheep trade. We have the WAMMCO abattoir in town, our largest employer. We have the largest single species (sheep) undercover saleyards in the southern hemisphere. We host a variety of stock agents, transport operators and many shearers are based around here. The local ag supply companies are all represented and carry all the animal husbandry products a local farmer could want or need.

The economic flow on effect from all of these local businesses, as well as the producing farmers, support the other businesses and services in our community. But it's not just the dollars and cents that flow through that counts. It affects not only the turnover of the local supermarket and furniture store, but whether there are doctors, dentists and nurses in our town, how many children there are at school, how many teachers are available and even down to what subjects are able to be taught. It affects the price of fuel and whether there are trades and skills like mechanics, cabinet makers, electricians, welders and engineers in town.

So our whole community are beneficiaries of a strong and vibrant agricultural sector and the live export trade is an important part of that sector.

We all support animal welfare. It is in the markets best interests to get the sheep to the end user in the best condition that it can. It wouldn't make sense from a business model to do it any other way. The furore that resulted from the video footage of the Awassi incident was fully justified at the time at face value. However, knowing what we know now, we think the incident must now be looked on as perhaps suspect and contrived. Certainly the allegations of payments must be looked at carefully and thoroughly. If there is the slightest chance that situations were made worse for the prospect of payment by animal activists to staff then everyone involved must be made accountable.

Our understanding is that the recommendations you have made are unrealistic and unachievable. You have set a heat and risk threshold that is impossible to meet and unprecedented globally. Not only will the current draft recommendations effectively shut down live sheep exports, it has the potential to detrimentally effect the export of live cattle as well. Should a heat stress risk assessment as you have proposed be applied to cattle, the viability of the live cattle will also be at risk.

The sheep and cattle industries are putting together a practical, evidence-based approach, that can put in place good animal welfare practices, as well as allowing a viable trade to be maintained. We request that the panel carefully consider the evidence and develop a more comprehensive solution.

The objectives should clearly be about improving and assuring animal welfare outcomes rather than stopping this viable industry in its tracks.

The livelihoods of thousands of Australian farmers and hundreds of Australian communities are resting on your shoulders.

Yours sincerely,

Alan McFarland