

## The ALP promises to phase out live sheep export

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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The Labor party has pledged that in government it would phase out the live sheep trade, but has not tied itself to a specific timetable.

The undertaking represents another stage in the toughening of Labor policy on the issue. The opposition had a bipartisan approach a few weeks ago. Then it called for the northern summer trade - now underway - to be suspended until the government receives the report it commissioned after pictures were aired on TV showing appalling shipboard conditions.

The report is due in a fortnight. It is expected to recommend stronger rules rather than ending the trade.

Animals Australia and the RSPCA on Thursday [announced](#) each would give \$500,000 towards a structural adjustment package for sheep producers if the Turnbull government agreed to phase out the exports.

The opposition's agriculture spokesman, Joel Fitzgibbon, said: "Labor sees no future for the export of live sheep, we want that value adding here.

"We know the transition cannot happen overnight. It won't take months, it will probably take years. But it absolutely can't take something like a decade, it has to happen more quickly than that," Fitzgibbon said.

But the government is digging in. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull accused Labor of acting emotionally. "We should make decisions about our big export industries with the benefit of science and information," he said.

Agriculture Minister David Littleproud said Labor was punishing farmers who had done nothing wrong. "The farmers whose lives Labor is playing with are real people with real children and real bills to pay".

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But Fitzgibbon said farmers could actually benefit. He said market was moving anyway, with sheep exports in decline.

“If you didn’t do anything here, consumer preferences in those overseas nations are changing - this thing would ebb away anyway but it would take a long time.

“What we are talking about ... is doing it in a smart and orderly and strategic way, creating value here, creating jobs here. I believe this can be done to benefit the farmers as well, because if we can pursue those high value markets they will benefit.”

On Monday Liberal MP Sussan Ley plans to invite MPs across parties to discuss her proposed private member’s bill to end the trade.

Animals Australia said the trade, worth about \$250 million annually, was in terminal decline, with exports dropping 60% over the last decade, as air-freighted fresh meat was flown into the Middle East.

“A well-structured adjustment package can provide a painless solution for farmers while giving the trade the dignified death it failed to give to countless animals,” it said.

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*

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