

## NSW Liberal Jason Falinski adds voice to push to phase out live sheep trade

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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Another government MP, NSW Liberal Jason Falinski, has urged the phase-out of live sheep exports, saying there are sound economic as well as animal welfare reasons for ending the trade.

Falinski, who has a degree in agricultural economics, said the trade – currently worth about A\$250 million annually - was going to come to an end anyway, and the transition would be better handled under a Coalition government.

His stand came as former Liberal minister Sussan Ley [introduced](#) her private member's bill for a five-year phase out; it would also end shipments for three months in the northern summer from 2019. The bill was seconded by Victorian Liberal Sarah Henderson.

Falinski said he did not yet have a position on the Ley bill but he did have one on the principle.

He told The Conversation that even when he finished his degree in the 1990s “the economic rationale for continuing the trade wasn't strong”. In recent years the numbers of sheep exported have declined.

It was more efficient to have the sheep processed in Australia, Falinski said. “It creates more jobs in Australian abattoirs – there's more value-add.” Also, “if there's a way to minimise the distress of the animals, why wouldn't you take it?”

The government last week [announced](#) tougher regulation of the trade, but refuses to stop it even in the hottest months. This followed a review of the northern summer exports. The inquiry was sparked by footage showing appalling on-abroad cruelty as sheep sweltered and died in the heat.

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### trade

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Agriculture minister David Littleproud has gone to the Middle East to give reassurances that the trade will continue.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull told parliament on Monday that the government supported a live export trade that “respects community views on animal welfare.”

“We are taking immediate action to ensure that animal welfare is maintained”, he said.

Introducing her bill, Ley said she had spent more than half her life close to Australia’s rural and pastoral industries.

“I know all the arguments that are used to support the live sheep trade because I ran them myself for 15 years.

"Recently I found cause to look at the industry with fresh eyes. I have been shocked, angered, bewildered and disappointed. I have researched the science, the facts, the economics and the opinions. I have not allowed emotions to overcome reason.

"The case for continuing long-haul live sheep exports fails on both economic and animal welfare grounds," she said.

She said the cruelty “makes a mockery of the industry’s ‘No fear, no pain’ mantra.

"If the rules were actually enforced — access to feed, water and rest, avoiding high heat stress,

no commercial operator would undertake the trade.

"Exporters have explained to me that it would not be viable. Unfortunately this is an industry with an operating model built on animal suffering."

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**Read more:** [Liberal rebel will proceed with bill after government preserves sheep trade](#)

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Henderson told parliament that it was significant that she and Ley were both Liberals representing large regional electorates including many farmers and agribusinesses. "Overwhelmingly, the people of [her electorate of] Corangamite are saying, 'Enough is enough'".

Henderson said the industry's transition was already underway. "Where the live sheep trade is in rapid decline, we are seeing a dramatic increase in the export of Australian chilled lamb and mutton by air to the Middle East.

"This can, of course, only continue. Western Australia has the processing facilities to make this transition. The challenge is in securing and training the workforce, and that's where governments can play a major role," she said.

The Ley bill is also supported by Victorian Liberal backbencher Jason Wood.

It will be up to the government as to whether it allows the Ley bill to come to a vote at some point. Ley and Henderson have indicated they would not support a Labor attempt to suspend standing orders to bring it on.

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With Labor down four votes and the crossbench down one because of the multiple by-elections, the sponsors would not want support for the bill to be tested at this point anyway.

Former deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce, who was agriculture minister, weighed in on Monday to strongly defend the continuation of the trade.

Joyce said exporters who were doing the wrong thing “should get kicked out of the industry”.

“But we should not be in the game of making people unviable”, he said. There would always be deaths on these ships “but what we have to do is make sure it’s not excessive”, he told Sky.

“I’m going to be looking out for those people who are in the Mulga areas, who are in the Western areas, who for the first time have made a dollar, have got some dignity back in their lives, have got some money back through the farm gate. We want this industry to continue so that the upturn in their life continues,” Joyce said.

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

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