



## National Sheep Association

### NSA policy position on the live export of sheep for slaughter

- NSA believes it is preferable for sheep to be slaughtered as close to home as possible, as this brings economic and environmental benefits. However, the choice of where to send animals for slaughter is an economic decision and, with an ever-decreasing number of UK processing facilities, sheep often travel some distance to an abattoir. NSA believes it is preferable for sheep to be slaughtered within the UK rather than overseas, as exporting carcasses and, preferably, cuts brings a number of economic benefits. However, there is demand for sheep for further finishing or slaughter overseas and NSA supports live exports at their current level as a legitimate activity that helps put competition into the marketplace; it is a valuable and legal trade with a particular role for certain parts of the UK and at certain times of the year. Maintaining sheep prices means sheep are valued and invested in, which improves health and welfare and stimulates investment in farm businesses and the environment.
- NSA feels the perception that transporting animals for live export is bad for animal welfare is not supported by science, and that all transport of live animals should be undertaken with welfare as the highest priority.
  - Research shows the main stress for transporting animals is associated with loading/unloading and not the length of the journey. And given the proximity of England to France and Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland, journey lengths for live export routes are sometimes shorter than domestic journeys anyway.
  - All animal transport, domestic or overseas, is regulated by EU regulation that dictates high welfare standards and additional rules for both longer distance journeys and journeys where animals leave their country of origin. Animals can only be moved if fit for travel and it is the responsibility of the livestock keeper (the seller) to ensure this is the case at the point of loading. Animals being exported are subject to additional veterinary inspection before loading. Journeys over eight hours carry additional requirements to protect welfare, including provision of water, insulated roofs, air circulation and ventilation. Journeys over 28 hours are very rare but require unloading, rest and feed and water. All journeys are undertaken by specialist hauliers using dedicated transport systems.
  - Livestock transport vehicles are also regulated by the EU and lorries involved in live export are licenced, high spec vehicles with sophisticated loading and transport conditions and appropriately trained and qualified drivers. It is the responsibility of the destination keeper (the buyer) to arrange transport and appoint a licenced driver. That driver is responsible for the animals during transit and must abide by the law and protect stock throughout the journey.
  - Transporting livestock across water is not a welfare issue in itself in fair weather, and is a vital activity given the number of islands and archipelagos within the UK. NSA regrets that pressure groups have persuaded deep hulled ferry companies against transporting animal destined for slaughter across the English Channel, driving the activity into dedicated vessels less suitable for rough seas.
  - EU regulations extend to welfare at slaughter as well, and this is the responsibility of the end processor.

- NSA believes EU regulations should be interpreted and enforced to an equal standard in all EU member states.
- NSA acknowledges the level of concern among the general public about live exports, and the position of pressure groups that welfare problems come from a lack of regulatory compliance outside of the UK. Therefore, NSA supports the idea of an assured route scheme and is willing to work with others to establish this and give confidence of optimum welfare conditions within trusted routes with known start and end points.
- In a post-Brexit situation, NSA would look to the UK Government to maintain the standards currently achieved through EU regulation but ensure the situation does not arise where we are either unable to export any live animals, or become more reliant on live exports than we are now. A critical issue in this is that we would lose UK processing capacity if abattoirs cannot access migrant labour. This would force more live animals overseas or, if live exports were unjustifiably banned, would decimate the UK sheep sector with damaging effects for the economy, environment and rural communities.

October 2014  
Updated March 2017 and October 2017  
Updated January 2019  
Updated May 2019  
Updated Jan 2021