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## **Livestock exports crucial to livestock producers**

The Sheepmeat and Cattle Councils of Australia, the nation's peak livestock producer bodies, have emphasised to all political parties that the livestock export trade is crucial to the sustainability of Australia's sheep and cattle farmers and rural communities.

These comments follow the weekend debate on ABC TV's *Landline* program where the issue was debated between Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran and the Opposition's Agriculture spokesperson, Senator Kerry O'Brien.

Sheepmeat Council President, Chris Groves, said livestock producers are looking for a government that will work collaboratively with the livestock export industry to build its sustainable future and ensure that it retains the highest animal welfare standards in the world.

"Animal welfare is the number one priority of the livestock export trade, so the industry is committed to meeting genuine community expectations in regard to the care of livestock," Mr Groves said.

"It was pleasing to hear Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran's strong and positive support for the livestock export trade into the future. The Minister quite rightly highlighted that the trade operates to world's best practice.

"Senator O'Brien also acknowledged that there are parts of Australia that totally depend on the livestock export trade and that he wants to work with the industry to continue to improve.

"However, in respect of Labor's comments that public pressure will determine the future of the livestock export trade, it must be remembered that some examples of pressure on the industry are generated by extremist animal rights groups that not only want to shut down the livestock export trade, but all livestock farming."

Cattle Council President, Bill Bray said that producers do not want to see a situation where organised letter writing campaigns by extremist groups dictate the future of this trade.

"Extremist groups will never acknowledge the ongoing and significant improvements within the livestock export trade and its continual investment to deliver the best welfare outcomes amongst any exporting nation," Mr Bray said.

"Let's be clear about the value of live exports to Australia – the industry contributes \$1.8 billion to the Australian economy and employs 13,000 people.

"The livestock export trade invests \$2 million annually in research and development to continually improve animal welfare outcomes.

"Australia, unlike any other country, has animal welfare experts based in the Middle East, to provide practical training to stockman and veterinarians on how to work with Australian animals, plus upgrade infrastructure, such as abattoirs, ports and feedlots. If we are not in the Middle East the rate of progress and improvement in animal welfare will slow, or worse, stop," concluded Mr Bray.

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