

LIVE EXPORT — FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [2.57 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Premier to stand up for Western Australians and outline his plan to defend the live sheep export trade against the Albanese government's ideological attack, which is already crippling regional communities and businesses reliant upon this \$130 million industry.

I acknowledge that we have sheep producers and farmers in the public gallery today, including Steven Bolt and Holly Ludeman from the Livestock Collective, who have done a fantastic job in letting people know about the improvements in animal welfare. If any government members would like to go on a vessel and look at the complex supply chain, the loading and the things that go on, they are very comfortable with organising that. That invitation is open to members from any side of the Parliament.

I acknowledge the stock agents, the Stud Merino Breeders' Association of Western Australia, wool brokers and buyers, Livestock and Rural Transport Association of Western Australia (Inc), the WA Livestock Exporters' Association, WA Shearing Industry Association and allied consultants, industry advisers and local government. We have a new Premier. I welcome the new Premier. I am looking for a new attitude. Until now, we saw lip-service from the previous Premier. Many a time the previous Premier stood in this place and said he supported this industry and did nothing about it. The new Premier can take over this legacy and do something about it.

Several weeks ago, when I called on the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Murray Watt, to come over to WA and look our producers and our industry in the eye, instead of hiding behind his phase-out panel, I received absolutely nothing. The federal minister in Canberra talks about his mandate. In actual fact, his policy was announced by animal activists about two weeks before the federal election. We have not seen him and I doubt we will see him any time soon.

I would like to refer to the Premier's answer from last week in which he said —

The WA government will fight for the best possible outcome for the sheep industry in Western Australia.

The best outcome is to keep this industry open. This is Hon Roger Cook's opportunity as the new Premier to put his stamp on things and stand up for WA. We know this government talks about the GST. We are going to fight for it. This industry has 3 500 jobs over \$100 million industry for WA. This is the member's opportunity as the new Premier. We have certainly seen the previous Premier and the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Jackie Jarvis in the other place, both admit there have been many animal welfare improvements in recent years and they have talked about their support for the industry. As I have said, it is only words. We need some action. I am calling on the Premier to speak to the Prime Minister and the federal ag minister. He has that opportunity, with national cabinet and many other opportunities, to talk to the Prime Minister and let him know in person how important this industry is to WA people and WA farmers.

It was interesting today when the Premier said the opposition has come late to the party. For the Premier's information, in 2023, I have asked questions and moved motions on 10 occasions. In 2022, I moved motions and asked questions on seven occasions. Prior to that, I moved nine questions and motions over the preceding years. I can assure the Premier that we are not late to the party. We understand exactly how this industry affects our regional communities. Today the member for Central Wheatbelt alluded to the loss of confidence that has happened in the industry and in our regional communities. I am also worried about that. What I mean by that is that as soon as this announcement was made by the federal minister, we saw sheep prices starting to drop by somewhere in the order of \$40 to \$50. We saw people making decisions about breeding, whether they would mate as many ewes. Straightaway the confidence dropped out of our farming sector in the sheep industry. Straightaway people were making breeding decisions.

The interesting thing is that we have a critical mass of 13 million sheep in Western Australia, and that is very important for a self-replacing merino flock. It is hard to describe how important that critical mass is because that sustains the merino sheep industry and the processing sector and many other parts of the industry. If we drop below that, we are in real strife so far as maintaining the sheep flock. We had a \$22 million announcement by this government about electronic ear tags in the most recent budget, and at the same time it is overseeing the demise of the sheep flock. That is another reason that the Premier needs to stand up on behalf of our industry. Certainly, the Rabobank survey identified there has been a drop in confidence in the farming and sheep sector. The Australian Wool Innovation and Meat and Livestock Australia *Sheep Producers Intention Survey May 2023* indicates that WA is the only state to report an increase in negative sentiment due to the proposed ban on live export. All

these factors are pointing to a loss of confidence in our sheep industry since this announcement was made by the federal government.

Certainly, the Premier has had a letter from Hon David Littleproud so he knows that he is keen to come across and talk to him at any stage about the importance of the industry. Hon David Littleproud understands the importance of the industry. The Premier referred in question time last week to the panel over here and how important it is to make submissions and for people to be in contact. I have certainly done that. I have made my submission. I will read my first few points —

- Decision to ban live export based on political grounds rather than scientific or economic.
- The WA sheep flock will see a decline in the critical mass of the sheep flock, threatening withdrawal of essential parts of the supply chain ...
- Once the trade goes, numbers drop which will jeopardise the entire processing industry.
- In the Electorate of Roe, most of the small towns are heavily reliant on the sheep industry and I am very concerned about the demise of our local schools and health facilities which would result in a transition to grain and the loss of many families directly tied to the sheep industry.

That is what happens on the ground.

The Premier referred to Minerva Foods today. Yes, it has set up in Esperance, but in an abattoir that already existed. That is important to recognise because at the moment seven small abattoirs in Western Australia are up for sale. This is what people need to understand. The panel is out there looking at processing options. We can process more sheep in WA and not export them. That is the thought process. But we have a real challenge in the fact that several abattoirs are up for sale at the moment. There is concern in the processing sector.

We cannot export animal welfare to these countries overseas whether it be South Sudan or Somalia. Any number of countries are happy to fit the bill if we drop out of this market. The Premier needs to emphasise that to the Prime Minister and the federal ag minister. I invite the Premier to come down during the winter break and look at the great southern. I can take the Premier to the Katanning saleyards. I can take the Premier to WAMMCO or Fletcher International Abattoir—any of those abattoirs there. I can show the Premier around to get an understanding of what is happening out there at the coalface in our regional communities. It is a real concern for me that the state government, as I have said before in this place, has conducted an assault on the regions. Whether we look at regional representation, live export, fishing, forestry, the south coast marine park, VacSwim—the list goes on, but live export is something that affects the whole of Western Australia and the whole of our industry. This is the Premier's opportunity to stand up and be counted. Unlike the federal ag minister, he should put his best foot forward on behalf of the WA sheep industry and demonstrate to all the regions, all those agricultural producers, that he can stand up on our behalf.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.09 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition; member for Roe. It reads —

That this house calls on the Premier to stand up for Western Australians and outline his plan to defend the live sheep export trade against the Albanese government's ideological attack, which is already crippling regional communities and businesses reliant upon this \$130 million industry.

From the outset, the opposition is asking the Premier to stand up for Western Australia and for an industry, the demise of which will impact the livelihood of many Western Australians. Proper consultation is key to any good government policy and law implementation. There are very real concerns on the ground. Sadly, we are witnessing how poor community consultation is greatly impacting Western Australians, particularly those living in regional areas. We have seen that already with the poor handling of the Cook Labor government's new Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021 that is due to be implemented at the beginning of July. This is despite the fact that the government has had two years to consult. It has failed on both fronts. The issue the opposition highlights today is the Albanese Labor government's decision to shut down Australia's live sheep trade and a Western Australian government that is unwilling to stand up for the best interests of Western Australians.

Australia's live sheep trade is now predominantly isolated to this state, and it is a proud Western Australian industry. The impacts will be felt across WA more than anywhere else, by not only our sheep farmers. A ripple effect will be felt by other industries as well. In contributing to this important debate, I highlight the opposition's grave concerns about the federal government's policy that has broad negative impacts across WA and will far outreach the targeted sheep industry. It will affect much broader industries than just the live sheep export trade. It will affect rural communities, the broader sheep and wool industries, other livestock industries, the grain and feed industry, trucking and transport, service providers, researchers, veterinarians, international trading relationships and many mouths to feed—and many more.

The government's approach to setting this policy is already having significant negative impacts across the broader WA sheep industry. The member for Roe outlined a significant drop in confidence and those feeling the pain of an uncertain future. The Wagin shire president, Phillip Blight, estimated that the drop in value of the 15 million sheep in WA as a result of the pending closure of that industry is just shy of \$1 billion. He calls the damage created by that decision irreversible. Although the Albanese government claims that it is consulting and that a panel report is due in September, it is clear that the damage has already been done. By signalling this intent, farmers are already having to make drastic decisions and changes to their operations. They have lost confidence and prices per head have already fallen.

In terms of the social licence, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Murray Watt, publicly stated the commitment by the Labor Party to ban live sheep exports. Apparently, that is based on a view inside Labor that the industry has lost its social licence because of past events. It is not on a thoughtful or measured assessment of evidence or a science-based approach. Australian farmers and industry have constantly improved animal welfare and are world leaders in best practice in farming. They should be encouraged and supported as they continue to work on their efforts to build in these areas. For example, in March this year, a government-mandated independent inspector report on recent voyages of live sheep exports gave a positive report on the health of the sheep. According to the Australian Livestock Exporters' Council chief executive, Mark Harvey-Sutton, this decision states that if the industry has its social licence challenged and it addresses those issues—it fixes them and reforms—it can still be shut down. Clearly this is a politically motivated, ideological decision. Members on this side of the house argue that we need a Premier who will stand up for Western Australia and for those in the industries whose livelihoods will be deeply impacted by this ill-thought out decision, on the back of an industry that continues to improve the way it operates. As the government-mandated independent inspectors stated, the industry had a clean bill of health in recent live sheep export voyages. Our livestock industry should be rightly concerned about how policy is developed and adopted by the Albanese Labor government. It sets an alarming precedent for other agricultural sectors.

My colleague in the other place Hon Steve Martin, member for Agricultural Region, supports a petition that was led by Senator Slade Brockman and other coalition members. The petition of over 10 000 signatures highlights the failures of the live sheep export ban consultation process out of Canberra. The panel that was established raised real concerns as well. There has been blunder after blunder in the consultation process. The meetings were not properly scheduled across all sheep farming communities. They took place in the midst of the seeding process at that time of year. Public servant Phillip Glyde who was given the poisoned chalice to meet with the WA industry admitted that the government probably did not get it right in the way it planned to do it, and corrected some of its blunders, and that first impressions matter. That illustrated that this government was hell-bent on destroying and significantly impacting that industry and was not interested in the consultation process. The opposition urges the new Premier of WA to stand up for Western Australian farmers and the broader industry that will be hurt by these changes that were pushed through by the Albanese Labor government.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt) [3.18 pm]: I am happy to rise to support the member for Roe; Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party in this motion. We are about to hear the Premier use the words we heard the previous Premier use on a regular basis: "We support the industry." Look at the state of this house. How many of the Premier's colleagues are sitting here? If this is an issue that they truly believe in, that they argue and would take action on, where are they all?

Ms S. Winton interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Where are they all? The Premier could not answer a very simple question in question time about whether his government had done an economic impact assessment on the decision that the federal Labor government made.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The Premier could not answer the question.

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: The member for Central Wheatbelt cannot continue her contribution because of constant interruptions from the other side.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Cottesloe. I shall not uphold that point of order. Members, the government will get an opportunity to respond in approximately nine and a half minutes.

Debate Resumed

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

The Premier could not tell us whether or not the state government had done an economic impact assessment on the decision of the federal Labor government on a very important part of our state's economy. It was a simple yes

or no question. I rise to support this motion and I welcome the delegation of people who have taken time out of their busy day and schedule to watch what their Premier is going to say and do and what words he will put on the record in this Parliament about the action that this government is going to take. These people are invested in the livestock industry and contribute significantly to our state's GDP. There are years of experience in this chamber alone and also out there in the industry. Those people are invested. They build businesses, employ people and have a passion for being part of an industry that feeds and clothes people, not just in Australia, but across the world. They are people who have the highest regard for animal welfare. They contribute to their communities, and the state and national economy and have been thrown under the bus by the Albanese Labor government. They have been left to fight the fight without the support of their own state government. It has become the calling card of this government to dismiss, ignore and attack the sector and consult on the impact of its decisions after they have been made. That is what we have seen time and again. The hollow lines of the Premier saying that he supports the industry hold no water when we fail to see any real action to support those words. It is lip-service only. Is the Premier willing to fight for these Western Australians? Is he willing to use his clout and influence, and that of his governments, to make the case for this multimillion dollar industry?

The industry has given us the facts. It is a fact that the mortality rate on live sheep vessels has gone from 0.8 per cent in 2016 to just 0.21 per cent in 2021, and with continuous improvement, that rate is likely to decrease. It is a fact that community sentiment on our sheep producers has improved. It is a fact that this industry has done everything it has been asked to by federal and state governments. It has exceeded the requirements of regulators and governments of both persuasions, and rightly so. Is the Premier going to listen to the evidence or the activists? Does the Premier's government react to polling, driven by popular opinion, or what is right? Over 3 000 jobs in this state depend on that.

I ask the members in the chamber today to take the opportunity to speak to these individuals. They would welcome the opportunity to speak about the industry that they love, are proud of and passionate about. It is simply not good enough to have a Minister for Agriculture and Food and a government that puts their hands up in the air and says "We have pushed the issue as far as possible and federal and state government parties will just have to disagree." Would the Premier do this on GST or when it came to pressure from the federal government about borders during the COVID pandemic? No. This Labor government finds a backbone when it is an issue that it actually wants to fight for. When it is an issue that impacts the communities and industries close to it, it mobilises, organises, engages and fundraises. I see none of that; all I hear are empty words.

The member for Roe spoke earlier about data released from an independent survey by Rabobank Australia, which the Premier dismissed as part of the question I asked him. It showed that while industry confidence had edged higher nationally, WA had bucked the trend and slipped into negative territory. Overall confidence in the sheep industry is down from the last quarter. A survey by the Australian Wool Innovation and Meat and Livestock Australia showed a staggering 90-point drop in sentiment among WA sheep producers. We are the only state to have a negative outlook for the coming 12 months.

Premier, I want to talk about what this looks like in my electorate. I want to go back to 2010, when WA experienced some of the lowest rainfalls in recorded history. Without a diversified farming program, there is bigger risk. A diversified farming enterprise manages risk in years of drought or when frost cruelly cuts a cropping program. Livestock can be mobilised and shifted quickly with a domestic and live export market in the event that poor weather conditions prevail. Having options beyond just a domestic market assists in underpinning the sustainability and productivity of many farming enterprises and the communities and businesses that they support. It reduces risk for individual businesses, financial institutions and, ultimately, for governments. Where does the industry turn when there are challenges impacting these businesses? It turns to government. Likewise, the argument that the industry can shift directly to a domestic processing sector is flawed and run by people who do not understand the industry or the dynamics of Western Australia's production systems. Shutting down live export is likely to kill the domestic processing sector. We are seeing the removal of the market. People are reducing their risk and exposure by decreasing the size of the sheep flock in Western Australia. That will ultimately mean that there will not be sheep to put through domestic processors. To save domestic processors and grow the industry, we need to keep those markets that we have available for those growers.

I have seen Labor fight for what it believes in, including a rail manufacturing industry that was long gone in WA; an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act that is flawed, but necessary and the ideological principle of one vote, one value to cement its electoral success. I have seen the efforts of the government mobilised when it believes in something. The Premier has a responsibility to care and connect with every Western Australia. We should be proud of this industry. I am proud to represent the hundreds, if not thousands, of people involved in this industry. I am proud to stand here in this Parliament as a product of a farming family on both my mother's and father's sides. This industry has fed, educated, supported and sustained my family and many others alongside our communities, electorates, state and nation. It is not too much to ask every Western Australian, our Premier and the government to step up and support them. We need more than just words. We need action. Does the Premier dismiss the impact that this will have on our trading partners and the fact that we are putting the food security of other nations at risk? Does he dismiss the fact that there will be long-term impacts in the communities that are so important to the state's future?

Our population's businesses, families, education system and medical services will be impacted because those communities were built on this industry. It is the cornerstone of those communities.

The Premier, in his role, must take care of every Western Australian. That is his duty. A significant number of people sitting in the chamber have come out of their businesses and communities. This is during a time when they are being consulted again and again after the fact by state and federal Labor governments having made decisions that will directly impact their livelihood, our state and our nation. We need more than just words from the Premier; we need action. He has an opportunity to take a different tack to the previous Premier and his government. I ask him to set the example and do the right thing, and I urge him to support this motion.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Premier) [3.27 pm]: I thank members for the opportunity to speak on this important motion today. It is important that we make sure that members of our important industries understand that the government has their back. The government's position on protecting our live sheep exports has not changed. The state is committed to ensuring the best outcomes for the WA sheep supply chain and the wider regional communities that will be impacted. As I have said time and time again, with members opposite having made this observation as well, this is a federal government initiative. It is based on a policy that it took to the last election. We have assurances that the federal government will consult widely and that nothing will happen in the current term of Parliament. We are working hard with both the previous and current federal government to make sure that they understand the perspective of WA farmers and the community to protect this industry.

This is something that we have fought for in the past and we have succeeded. The member for Central Wheatbelt does herself no credit by drawing attention to the state of the house and reflecting on the reasons people may or may not be in the chamber, particularly given that she could not even muster all her numbers to be in the chamber and she was actually the mover of the motion. I welcome back the member for North West Central and thank her for being part of this debate today.

This is an important industry. It was worth at least \$87 million in 2020–21, and we will continue to stand by it. I take the points that the member for Central Wheatbelt made about it being an important adjunct to state-based processing of meat and exports to the east coast because it allows farmers to have larger flocks with the confidence they can undertake a range of different measures to ensure they can trade those sheep. These are lessons ingrained in me by my extended family, who were wheat and sheep farmers. It is an important industry for Western Australia; it always has been and it will continue to be.

I acknowledge the people in the public gallery today, and I hope that they appreciate that we consider this an important issue and one on which I will obviously speak with the federal government about. I apologise that in the few short weeks that I have had this job I have not had the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister or any of his cabinet. I am fairly new in the chair, but we will clearly articulate the position of the state government when we do have those opportunities and we will make it clear that we want the Albanese government to stick by the Western Australian community and its farmers. It does not matter whether it is about issues with the GST, our fair share of federal support for transport or making sure that laws implemented by the federal government do not adversely impact Western Australians. We will stand up for Western Australia and the Western Australian economy and make sure the federal government understands that we are the engine room of the nation's economy and it needs to take notice of our issues, particularly when they impact on people so gravely.

We have undertaken a range of measures in relation to this issue and have ensured that we keep Western Australia's position on the federal agenda high. That was recognised by Hon David Littleproud in his letter to me earlier this month, which the member for Roe has already cited, so I hope Hon David Littleproud does not mind me also quoting from it. He says —

... the former Premier, the Hon Mark McGowan MLA, and the Minister for Agriculture, the Hon Jackie Jarvis MLC, have been consistent and clear in affirming the WA Government's support for the continuation of the live sheep export industry.

That is a pretty clear endorsement of our position, and it is a position that has not changed and will not change under my government. We will make sure that we continue to put Western Australia's best foot forward in spreading understanding of the importance of this industry. As I observed in question time, there continues to be growth in the number of live sheep exports from Western Australia, and we welcome that growth. It comes at a time, since, I think, 2019–20, that Qatar, which was previously our second-largest market, cancelled the subsidy for Australian sheep, so we continue to meet headwinds, not just from Australia but from international markets. It is important that these industries can be more resilient in how they continue to grow.

We continue to make sure that we defend this industry, which the member for Roe has said is worth \$130 million. Hon David Littleproud says that it is worth \$85 million and our numbers are around \$89 million. Is the member for Roe including other elements of the industry?

Mr P.J. Rundle: Yes, I am including other elements.

Mr R.H. COOK: That is fine; that is good. I thank the member very much for that.

As I said, the Western Australian government has not been backward in its support for the industry, and that is largely acknowledged by a range of people. I present for the benefit of the chamber some quotes about this from industry stakeholders. Mr Tony Seabrook, the president of the Pastoralists and Graziers Association said —

“Both the Premier and our WA ag minister have come out of this smelling of roses, they have not in any way sold us down the drain,” ...

Mr John Hassell, president of WAFarmers said of Minister Jarvis —

... she can only do so much. I still hold Jackie in high regard ... it’s a Federal Government decision.”

Mr John Cunningham, chair of the WA Livestock Exporters’ Association said —

“For the Premier and the new Agriculture Minister to actually come out supporting the live sheep trade has been fantastic ...

The comments from the industry and from Hon David Littleproud suggest, in stark contrast to what the opposition is saying, that we have stood up for the industry, and we will continue to do so. We will make sure that people understand that the Western Australian government stands by its industries, in this case our farming industries, and that they appreciate the nuances associated with sheep processing and exporting, both interstate and internationally.

The member for Central Wheatbelt rightfully made the comment that the work that we did in partnership with the federal government to make sure we safeguard the welfare of the sheep in live sheep exports has produced outstanding results in reducing the number of avoidable deaths. That should produce greater confidence and understanding by the federal government about the importance of this industry and how it has pivoted in relation to this issue. The member for Vasse made the comment that the industry has a social licence to operate, and that is a really good example of how an industry can respond to criticism and public debate and make sure it can both continue to operate and be cognisant of that critique.

As I said, the Western Australian government continues to back the industry, and it is an incredibly important industry that for all intents and purposes continues to operate well despite the challenges it is currently confronting. During question time, I observed that since 2020–21, the number of live sheep exports from Western Australia has increased significantly. In 2020–21, the number of live sheep exports was almost 576 000. In 2022–23, it is already over 603 000. So we can see that the industry is sustaining and resilient despite those subsidy cuts by the Qatar government. We see a significant drop in the number of interstate transfers and, as I have said, the information I have received is that in 2019–20 and 2020–21 the substantial majority of those transfers were for breeding ewes, so we would anticipate that in subsequent years the number of sheep needed has probably reduced. Nevertheless, well over 200 000 sheep are transferred interstate. The industry has pivoted, and as the previous Premier, and now I on record, have said, we believe that the safeguards that have been put in place for the industry are sufficient for the federal government to have confidence that this industry is doing everything necessary to make sure it safeguards livestock to the extent that it can. That has come about through the banning of northern summer exports, through increased oversight by welfare officers on board ships and by making sure that industry can self-regulate and continue to pivot to ensure that it protects the welfare of the livestock and can continue to operate.

We see a healthy future for that industry, and that is why we have continued to stand by it. The federal government, as the member has observed, has a panel that is undertaking a consultation process on and investigation into the future of this industry. That panel will make recommendations to the federal minister, and the federal minister will potentially act on that advice. Our strong submission to that panel will provide an analysis of the economic impact of a ban on live sheep exports and will state, in very clear terms, the importance of this industry and why it should continue. When I have an opportunity to meet with Senator Hon Murray Watt and Prime Minister Albanese, I will take that opportunity to explain to them the importance of this industry and the importance of Western Australian industry generally, so that WA can continue to be the engine room of the nation’s economy.

I am very familiar with the work of the farming community; it is an industry that we are very proud of, and I thank the member for Roe for his invitation to travel to Katanning to see the saleyards, although he may have forgotten that the last time I was there, he was actually my host; I think he was a shire councillor at the time.

Mr P.J. Rundle: Well, come for another look!

Mr R.H. COOK: Thanks to the expertise of the member for Roe’s pre-parliamentary days, I have had that opportunity, and it is an impressive facility and a very important piece of economic infrastructure, so I thank the member for that opportunity.

The member for Roe also talked about the dwindling confidence of the farming industry in the sheep trade. I accept that the current federal government investigation may or may not have some implications in relation to that. As I said, the federal government is fulfilling an election commitment it made, but when we look at the industry now

we see strong investment in farming infrastructure, which gives me confidence that the future of the industry is bright. As I said in question time, Minerva has purchased both the Esperance and Tammin abattoirs. Although, as the member observed, they were already existing abattoirs, there are significant upgrades —

Mr P.J. Rundle: We welcome the investment.

Mr R.H. COOK: Yes. There will be significant upgrades to make sure that they meet Minerva's standards and, obviously, the standards of modern abattoirs. I also understand that Emanuel Exports has bought abattoirs in recent years, so maybe that is an indication of where it believes the industry is heading, but I am saying that these are good signs. V and V Walsh has also announced significant upgrades of its facilities in Bunbury, so people in that part of the industry are obviously voting with their feet and their wallets as a result of their confidence in the industry. Obviously the farming community will benefit from those investments, and they will create more and more opportunities for a full and vibrant future for the industry.

As I said earlier, this is an important industry and one that the government supports. We will make our views very well known to the commonwealth government when we have the opportunity to meet with it. The Department of Agriculture and Food is doing a lot of work on articulating those arguments and particularly, as the member for Central Wheatbelt observed, on helping the commonwealth government understand the economic impact of that industry. Of course that work is going on, and it will continue to go on. We will make sure that the commonwealth government is apprised of those arguments and we will ensure that it is under no illusions as to our position.

The Cook government is in lockstep with the former McGowan government in our view of the future of live sheep export: we believe that it is important for our community and for our agricultural industry. We believe it is one of our greatest legacy industries that has made Western Australia proud and has underpinned the economic growth of our state for more than one and a half centuries. It will continue to do so into the future.

There will be modern iterations of the industry. At the moment all our industries are changing and adapting to, benefiting from, and in some cases being challenged by, the technological changes that we are all experiencing, changes in social attitudes and changes in consumer behaviour. Obviously we all have to be cognisant of that and continue to adapt as we move forward. That is what the industry did in 2019 when we brought about changes, in partnership with the federal government of the day. We will continue to work with federal governments on this because we know that a partnership approach is the best approach to ensure that our interests are observed, taken notice of and taken care of, and that people act in the best interests of Western Australia.

We will make sure that the commonwealth government understands our views and I am sure I will have an opportunity in the coming weeks and months to meet with the Prime Minister and Minister Watt. I will make it very clear that we stand by this industry and that the interests of the Western Australian economy are not served by a blanket ban on live sheep exports. I will also make clear the changes the industry has made to safeguard the welfare of animals and reduce avoidable deaths in transit; I will make sure the commonwealth government understands that. That will be my focus.

Ms M.J. Davies: Will you publish the work the department is doing, Premier?

Mr R.H. COOK: I cannot answer that question off the top of my head, member, but in principle, yes. Obviously we want people to see the nature of the department's submission to make sure that they understand the arguments our team are putting forward, so I do not see why not. I will take advice on that.

We stand by this industry 100 per cent. We want to make sure that the work of Hon Jackie Jarvis in standing up for the industry as our Minister for Agriculture and Food is backed up with the full force of this government. It is an important industry and that is why people are so passionate about it. That is why we see people in the gallery today. We acknowledge and salute them and the incredible work they have done on behalf of the people of Western Australia, the Western Australian economy and their communities, and we will continue to stand up for their communities and make sure we protect the interests of the Western Australian farming community.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (6)

Ms M.J. Davies
Dr D.J. Honey

Mr R.S. Love
Ms L. Mettam

Mr P.J. Rundle
Ms M. Beard (*Teller*)

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 21 June 2023]
p3179a-3185a

Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Roger Cook

Noes (39)

Mr S.N. Aubrey
Ms H.M. Beazley
Dr A.D. Buti
Mr J.N. Carey
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms L. Dalton
Ms D.G. D'Anna
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms E.L. Hamilton
Ms M.J. Hammat

Ms J.L. Hanns
Mr T.J. Healy
Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston
Mr H.T. Jones
Mr D.J. Kelly
Ms E.J. Kelsbie
Ms A.E. Kent
Dr J. Krishnan
Mr P. Lilburne

Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr D.R. Michael
Mr S.A. Millman
Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr P. Papalia
Mr S.J. Price
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson
Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Ms J.J. Shaw

Ms R.S. Stephens
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Dr K. Stratton
Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Ms C.M. Tonkin
Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms S.E. Winton
Ms M.M. Quirk (*Teller*)

Question thus negatived.