

## **LIVE SHEEP TRADE**

### *Statement*

**HON NIGEL HALLETT (South West)** [6.01 pm]: I want to comment this evening on the amount of press coverage of the live sheep trade, which affects Western Australian producers enormously. I acknowledge the support that the Minister for Agriculture and Forestry has given to the trade. The continued attacks on this industry are certainly putting the rural community in an uneasy situation. This industry exports about 3.2 million sheep from the state and creates approximately 9 000 jobs. The claims that it is a cruel industry and that the sheep could be slaughtered and exported in a chilled state have no basis. Meat and Livestock Australia has figures that support the evidence that when live exports to certain countries have been suspended, box sales have fallen accordingly. In the interests of producers, it is very clear that bipartisan support for this industry must be maintained.

The death rates on the ships that transport live sheep have dropped to 0.75 per cent for all regions, apart from South East Asia. For ships that transport live sheep to South East Asian countries, the figure is 0.2 per cent. When we consider that five per cent is the taxable allowance on farms, these are very reasonable figures, and they will continue to drop as the trade improves.

The trade needs security. Stock being shipped to the Middle East go into undercover holding pens at Baldavis. It is a fantastic set-up. If members have not been there, it is worth visiting the facility and being escorted through it. The sheep go from there onto the upper decks of the ships. After an order is placed for a new ship costing in the vicinity of \$55 million to \$70 million, there is approximately a four-year lead time until it is delivered. These exporters will not invest in that sort of infrastructure for an industry that is being continually nipped away at. At some stage the industry will reach a point at which it will ask where it should go. I liken the former ships used for this trade to an appendix operation 20 years ago. Appendix operations were pretty cruel things 20 years ago. In 20 years' time people will say that our standards today were a bit sloppy. We must move forward as an industry. When the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals puts an inspector on a boat, as happened recently, and he comes back without one issue to raise, it is a shame that these facts do not get out to the general public, so that they can see another side to the industry. I will not go on about it, although I think the issues raised mean we must seek bipartisan support. I hope the house will support the trade and give it all the necessary credence.