Australia's Livestock Export Industry

The Australian livestock export industry is a highly regulated, export-focused sector supplying cattle, sheep, goats and buffalo to key international markets. It plays a critical role in supporting regional economies, strengthening trade relationships, and contributing to food security across South-East Asia and the Middle East.

Australia is recognised globally as a leader in animal health, welfare, traceability and shipping standards.

Economic value

Contributes approximately **$1 billion annually** to the Australian economy. More than 80% of Australians believe live export makes an important national economic contribution.

Regional & rural employment

Supports more than **13,000 jobs**, primarily in regional, rural and Indigenous communities. These range from station hands, transporters, stock agents, rural merchandisers and veterinary services to local grocery stores, cafes, schools and health services.

Reliable markets

Provides **market options** for producers in northern Australia where alternative markets are limited. Live export accounts for approximately 70% of cattle sales in northern Western Australia, and more than 90% in parts of the Northern Territory.

Global nutrition support

As a trusted supplier of high-quality, safe and affordable livestock, Australia's live export industry plays a vital role in **strengthening global nutrition and food security**. By providing reliable access to protein in regions where local production cannot meet demand, the sector supports food availability, affordability and dietary diversity for millions of people.

This includes contributing to initiatives such as Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program which provided meals to around 55 million school children in 2025.

Local investment

A key driver of **sustainable economic opportunities** in regional, rural and Indigenous communities with producers retaining approximately 40-57% of the revenue generated in Australia by live cattle exports.

Animal welfare excellence

More than 14,000 international supply chain participants have been **trained in animal welfare** and biosecurity since 2021.

Community benefits worldwide

Contributes to the **progress and prosperity** of communities in destination markets by supporting local jobs and economic activity across the feedlot, processing and retail sectors.

The industry also supports local capacity building programs in animal welfare, husbandry and handling.

Market suitability

Livestock exports are particularly important to northern Australia given the significant distance to major feedlot operations and processors which are located primarily in the eastern states and south-western WA. Nationally it provides market competition and price stability in periods of high turn-off such as leading into a drought.

Cattle bred in northern Australia are tropically adapted and the lean meat is ideally suited to South-East Asian-style meals. Australian consumers tend to favour primal cuts.

Australians prefer lamb whereas our major live export markets prefer mutton. This provides a market option for older sheep. Goat meat is not regularly consumed in Australia so domestic markets are limited.

Many of Australia's live export markets also import chilled and frozen meat. Live export is a complimentary market as consumers in some of our foreign markets favour traditional wet markets or have a cultural preference for live animals.

Key markets

Australia exports livestock to more than 20 countries, with major markets including: Indonesia, Kuwait, Jordan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, China, Malaysia, Philippines.

Exports include feeder, slaughter and breeder cattle, sheep and goats to support local processing, religious festivals, breeding programs and food security initiatives.

Animal welfare & regulation

Australia operates one of the world's most stringent regulatory frameworks for livestock exports.

The entire livestock export supply chain from on-farm preparation to point of slaughter is regulated and controlled by the Australian Government under two main regulatory systems, the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) and the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS).

Exporters and supply chain participants must comply with a range of strict requirements associated with licencing, quarantine, biosecurity, professional training, maritime regulation, animal welfare during land, sea and air transport, slaughter, in-market training and reporting. This ensures an exceptional level of performance and professionalism.

99.9% of cattle exported from Australia arrive safely at their destination

In 2025, Australia exported a total of 1,169,405 livestock by sea and air. Annual mortality rates were a record low of 0.04% for cattle and 0.13% for sheep. More than 50% of cattle voyages had zero mortalities

Strategic importance

Strengthens bilateral trade relationships and regional diplomacy.
Supports Southeast Asia's food security objectives.
Provides market diversification for Australian producers.
Enhances Australia's reputation as a reliable agricultural trading partner.