THE HON DAVID LITTLEPROUD MP

LEADER OF THE NATIONALS

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PERTH ROYAL SHOW PRESS CONFERENCE WITH WA LEADER OF THE NATIONALS SHANE LOVE, WA LIVESTOCK COUNCIL PRESIDENT GEOFF PEARSON, CEO LIVESTOCK AND RURAL TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION WA JAN COOPER, WA SHADOW MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FOOD LACHLAN HUNTER, WA SHADOW MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND FISHERIES KIRRILEE WARR; LIVE SHEEP EXPORTS; HOUSING; BHP; RENEWABLES; SUPPLY CHAINS.

SHANE LOVE

Well good morning everybody and it's a lovely day down here at the Perth Royal Show and I'm very pleased to be joined by a number of my colleagues here today, including our Federal Leader David Littleproud, who's come over to talk to West Australians about the effects on our industry and our regions due to Albanese Government's closure of the sheep live export by sea industry.

Also joined by a number of other people in the sheep and transport industry who are willing to share their concerns about what we know is a completely inadequate transition package being offered by the Albanese Government. We know that the West Australian sheep flock continues to dwindle in number as confidence has left the state and left the industry. The future of our sheep industry is at stake and this transition package needs to be much more effective and much more targeted than what we've seen thus far.

I'm going to take some questions on afterwards but I might hand over to David Littleproud, the Leader of The Nationals.

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well thanks Shane, it's great to be back in Perth in WA and to be here at one of the pre-eminent agricultural shows and while many people of West Australia and Perth will be here today to come and cuddle a little lamb and see the primary producers that have brought them in. Just understand behind that is a human toll of men and women that are doing it very tough in the agriculture sector, because of a senseless decision by the Albanese Government to cut and run.

To cut the live sheep industry out from underneath the Western Australian producers is pure madness. There is no scientific or economic reason why they would do this in any way, shape or form. And in fact, the Prime Minister has not even had the courage to come to Western Australia, look producers in the eye, look the trucking industry in the eye, look the vet industry in the eye and tell them why. There is no reason.

It was all a dirty deal with the Animal Justice Party to get their preferences in the 22 election and the 25 election. There is no reason to do this. And in fact, what you will see is the perverse death of millions of sheep from countries like Sudan, Ethiopia, South Africa, who'll take this market up, because Anthony Albanese has cut and run. What you will see is sheep being shoved in the back of vehicles in the Middle East, because we don't have the influence to be able to make sure that the processing of those sheep in the Middle East is to our standard. That's what these animal activists have done.

That's what Animals Australia, that's what RSPCA has done. They are valuing the welfare and the life of the sheep in Australia above that from a country like Ethiopia and Sudan.

Where is their moral compass? Where is their moral values? They are morally bankrupt.

We have led the world and Western Australians should be proud about how they have reformed the industry after one mistake. Let me tell you, the cattle industry had an issue in 2011. We didn't shut the industry down for good, they were given an opportunity to reform.

Why hasn't the Western Australian sheep industry been given an opportunity like the cattle industry? And they have and they've taken it up and we lead the world.

And for this Government to continue on this pathway, to phase out an industry for no reason, is pure insanity, it is ideological and it is politically driven. I give this commitment, that a future coalition government that The National Party is part of will reinstate the live sheep industry. In New Zealand at the moment they are reinstating the live export industry of dairy cattle. We will do the same. We are sending investment signals to Western Australians so the Coalition government will reinstate this industry.

So please, there is hope and this will be reinstated. But in the meantime, what this Government has done in a mean spirited way has put $139 million out to try and transition this industry.

Just understand the best that they've spent of this so far is about two and a half million dollars on an advertising campaign, educating East Coast people in capital cities about them phasing out the live sheep industry, who have no knowledge of the animal welfare standards that Western Australians have put into this industry.

It is all a political ploy and now some months after the election they are still not even helping the truck industry, who have seen a 30 to 40 per cent reduction in their turnover, because we've had a herd in Western Australia that's gone from about 12 and a half million to less than 9 million. And as someone from Western Queensland, let me tell you, that frightens me.

Because if it wasn't for Western Australia, my home electorate would be buggered now, because after the last drought there were two million sheep that came from Western Australia and saved the day on the East Coast.

I can tell you East Coast is just as worried as what Western Australian producers are, because you are the ones that have saved the day for this country so many times. So what we're saying to this government, if you are fair dinkum, explain to these people why they're taking away their livelihoods and then explain to them why you can't even help them in their hour of need. Absolute contempt that this government is showing. When the people of Western Australia effectively handed the keys to the Lodge to Anthony Albanese, and now in their hour of need he turns his back on them. And there is a human toll to this that Western Australia should understand.

So when you come and cuddle this lamb and you think about what these producers do and how they do it, they have the best animal welfare standards in the world. We should be proud of these people about how they handle our lifestyle and what they do.

And you should understand that they are going to hell and back because of a government that doesn't give a rats about them.

So Jan Cooper, I'd like to ask you as part of the livestock industry, because you understand this is not just farmers that are hurting, this is all the way through the supply chain. Jane represents the Livestock Transport Industry.

It's important you understand that it's these people as well, these family businesses that are also hurting. So do you want to say a few words?

JAN COOPER - CEO LIVESTOCK AND RURAL TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION WA

Thanks, David. It's no secret that we certainly oppose this decision and now that it's been made, we have a number of members who are hurting quite badly, they are considering their future in the industry.

We pleaded with the government to be rapid in rolling out the so-called transition package because our people were making decisions now and that's what's happened. They have started to sell their equipment and downsize their businesses.

And these are the people that in local communities, they are the sponsors of the local football club, the basketball team, they are the emergency ambulance drivers, they support the SES.

That is now going to come to an end or it will be massively reduced. These are proud mum and dad businesses, they're not big corporate businesses, they are small family-owned businesses that are supporting their local communities and they are now starting to consider their future in those local communities.

We were disappointed with the transition package and how that's been rolled out. As I said we asked for it to be done early in the piece, because we had people who were making decisions, you know, months ago and now we've got the package rolled out in the middle of harvest, probably the next busiest time for our members.

They're not going to have the resources to put into making submissions, so obviously people like ourselves will have to help them through that.

But to us it seems more like a tick box exercise than a genuine transition. If this was a genuine transition, they would have worked with us to make the impact more sustainable and pick up on some of the ideas that we asked for through the co-design process, but unfortunately they've been ignored.

JOURNALIST

Jan, speaking with some of those people, politicians who said that they've had conversations with key stakeholders, they're adamant that they have done enough. You're saying that they have not. Where does that fit? What more would you want to see or talk about with the government? On what's happening?

JAN COOPER

Well, I think we would like to see some genuine engagement. I don't think it's sufficient for an organisation like ours to make a submission on behalf of our members. And the next we hear about it is, you know, the total package is released as to what's going to be on offer.

We made some very practical suggestions about things that would genuinely help our members, and we've had no feedback whatsoever from either the government or the department on those.

JOURNALIST

David you said that the was still hope for change. Where are you at with that hope? How are you feeling that potentially something's going to change?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well, hope is always a very healthy thing. We all need hope. So it's difficult to see much hope just at the moment, but I guess things change.

JOURNALIST

Jen, tell me what the industry thinks about the co-contribution requirement.

Do many trucking businesses have that kind of cash laying around?

JAN COOPER

Well, they certainly don't. I mean, they have to spend $80,000 in order to get $40,000, and so they've got to make that payment upfront before they stand a chance of getting anything back. And $40,000 needs to be put into perspective. A new set of tippers is around about $400,000.

Their fuel bill is $80,000 for a small company, a small family company, so the $40,000 probably won't go very far. And as you say they have to have it upfront to begin with.

SHANE LOVE

We have also got Geoff Pearson here from the livestock side of things. Would you like to say a few words?

GEOFF PEARSON - WA LIVESTOCK COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Yeah, thank you very much for that. Yeah, look obviously in the livestock sector the damage was done from the day the announcement was made.

The confidence was shot out of the industry and everybody exited and wrapped up their place and we're in the situation where we've got flock numbers at an all-time low, putting pressure on the processing sector and obviously the live trades.

Pretty much stopped now because of the numbers that are around. But look, we look at markets and alternative and the government's pushed us very hard into going chilled frozen, but that's not our market. Our biggest market is the live trade and that's shot already now. So you look at the alternatives, the processing sector is under pressure at the moment for volume and the live trade's pretty much shot as well.

So anybody that's got out of sheep potentially would have liked to be in there now, but their hands have been forced and it's been hard. The compensation package of $130 million won't even touch the sides. It won't even get there and that's the issue, which is no amount of compensation in this industry that'll fix it, other than leaving the industry where it is. It was a thriving industry, it had its problems, it got over that and it needed to move forward and the government has forced its hand into a corner and we're all in trouble. We're all in trouble, the cost of red meat's going to skyrocket and the supply's not there.

Other markets aren't supplied as well so it's a difficult situation to access the transition package. Like you said, you know, you were dipping into our pockets for matching dollars, well our pockets are already empty? How are we going to do that? They've been shot. So moving forward it's going to be very difficult for the sheep industry and as David said not only for Western Australia but for the East Coast as well.

The rebuild there is going to be very, very difficult.

JOURNALIST

We're currently seeing sheep meat and wool prices quite high at the moment. Can you tell us a little bit about that from a supply and demand point of view and whether that's sustainable for the industry right now?

GEOFF PEARSON

Yes, that is exactly what it is. It's a supply and demand issue and the flock numbers have gone from 12 to 9 million and it's put the processing sector under pressure, so therefore they've had to forecast ahead to try and get volume.

So there's going to be, we're going to have plants drop out, some of the small plants will probably drop out of Western Australia, Cally, because the volume might be there and it's going to be a long time to rebuild if it rebuilds at all.

Yeah, so that volatility, it might be exciting for producers right now, but long term it's not necessarily, long term it's going to be very difficult for both trades to keep continuing.

JOURNALIST

We've also seen a lot of reluctance from the Albanese Government to potentially increase that transition package. You said it won't touch the sides, how much money needs to be spent? For a transition like this?

GEOFF PEARSON

The figures are astronomical. I mean, the damage is done. It's cost the industry millions and millions of dollars to bring it back. Who knows what the figure's going to be, but it's definitely not going to be $130 million.

JOURNALIST

And what's the sentiment among sheep farmers in WA at the moment?

GEOFF PEARSON

Look, it's good while prices are high, but the volatility in the market is the issue. It's great to get record prices, but you've got to hold them. You've got to make the industry sustainable.

If you take the value out of the industry, which it has, it's dropped the value, it makes it very, very vulnerable.

JOURNALIST

Could we just get your name and title for the record?

GEOFF PEARSON

Yeah, Geoff Pearson, WA Farmers Livestock President.

JOURNALIST

And could we just get you to spell your first and last name for us?

GEOFF PEARSON

Geoff Pearson.

JOURNALIST

Thank you.

David, would you support the expansion of the 5% deposit scheme if it resulted in a half per cent increase in house values over the next six years as Treasury modelling suggests?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

I wouldn't trust much that Jim Chalmers models. This is going to fuel demand, simple as that. We have a supply issue and you don't need an economics degree to understand that. In fact, grade eight business economics will tell you that if you continue to fuel demand, then you're gonna have pressure on supply.

And that is exactly what's happening. We at a federal level have a real opportunity without spending a cent of Australian taxpayers' money to actually play our part. And that's a proper immigration policy. One that understands the number of people that we should be bringing in this country, but also the skills that we need.

We've had a government for the last three years that's prioritised dog groomers and martial arts instructors instead of some brickies, some tilers, some roofers, some plumbers that would be able to help increase supply.

We need to get back to some common sense and unfortunately these announcements are nothing more than electioneering by the Prime Minister spending your money to become more popular.

Until we face up to the fundamental problems in this country around housing, which is supply, rather than fuelling demand by handing more money out, we are going to kick this problem further down the road and we are going to continue to push young people out of the market.

At some point we're going to have to take our medicine, we're going to have to understand what the issue is and fix it rather than trying to have a political…

JOURNALIST

Will bringing back income caps make this expansion more suitable?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well, again, I think what a federal government should be focused on is not fuelling demand.

What we've got to do is fix supply. Now, state and local government need to focus on supply and planning and making sure that that's done efficiently and at a costly basis.

But the reality is, at federal level, we have a real opportunity, a real opportunity around pulling the immigration lever that will cost the Australian taxpayer enough and we've also got the opportunity, as we took to the last election, around making sure that foreigners who come to this country can't buy residential properties for two years, to get some breathing space into increasing that supply, and about pausing and also reviewing our construction codes, the seven-star construction code that has added over $60,000 to the construction of a new dwelling in this country.

We've got to get back to some common sense, and unfortunately this government is all on political ideology that might seem popular in the short term, but is running away from the fundamental fixes of getting young Australians into properties sooner.

JOURNALIST

Now I know you just touched on it with immigration and things like that, but how does the Coalition propose to better support first home buyers?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well the best thing we can do at a federal level is have a proper immigration policy, an immigration policy that works for our country, that brings the people into this country that we need. We're giving the greatest gift we can give to any person on this planet, a ticket to Australia. So we should choose who comes to this country, the skills they have and where we want them to live, where we want them to how they can actually solve our nation's problems. That's what our country's been built on. That's what we should return to.

That doesn't cost us a cent. That's just common sense.

JOURNALIST

So just shifting from housing, how concerned are you by reports China has temporarily banned iron ore shipments from BHP?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well, ironically, I was up in the Pilbara yesterday, actually, in Newman, with BHP. Look, I'm concerned, but I think we need to be calm and work through a process and allow both BHP and China to work through this process.

I'm concerned that a state-run organisation may use their power in negotiating against a corporate. What I'd like to see is some transparency in it, but I think what we need to be is just stand back and allow dialogue to take place and create an environment for that dialogue to take place.

And obviously appreciate that there is still global demand for iron ore and that while there may be differences and may be changes in contracts between BHP and China, that it also means that there would be opportunity for other Australian companies like Rio Tinto and Fortescue to fill that void.

So the supply elements of the market will recalibrate and so I think we need to be calm and stay out of the negotiations but the only concern I have is that you have a state-run organisation backed by the Communist Party of China negotiating with an Australian company. There needs to be the transparency of WTO rules and that it is done in a fair and weigh with respect to the rules-based order of trade.

JOURNALIST

Do you feel this is a negotiation tactic and will be resolved quickly as a result?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well, I hope so, but I think it's important at this stage for politicians not to enter commentary when they're not fully briefed in terms of the detail because that could actually bring detrimental aspects and negotiations between BHP and China. So I think it's important that we're calm, we monitor the situation, but we hope that China respects the rules-based order of trade and that they don't use undue power and influence over BHP in this instance.

JOURNALIST

The Treasurer says he will set up a meeting with the Chief Executive of BHP. Do you support government intervention here?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well, I think it may be that the government would be also well advised to talk to their counterparts in China to make sure they send a strong message that this should be a transparent and fair negotiation, one in which the state of China, a Communist Party of China, does not have undue influence in, so that jobs, particularly in Western Australia, are protected. So it's not necessarily having a conversation with BHP, it may be a juncture where the government needs to have a conversation with the Chinese government.

JOURNALIST

What is your reaction to Rio Tinto announcing the Gladstone power station could close six years early? Is this the result of the company's transition to renewables or something else?

Of course it is.

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

This is the stark reality of an all-renewables approach. It is going to cost the Australian taxpayer in excess of $1.33 trillion to go to 90 per cent plus renewables. There is no country of the industrial scale of the size of Australia that has gone an all-renewables approach. In fact, there's two. They've had a crack, Spain and Portugal.

They got to 77 per cent, they lost their grid for a year and a half. You need baseload power. And unfortunately, renewables cannot do that. And what you are seeing, there is a human toll for the people of Gladstone that they're going to bear that burden because they will not have jobs, because you cannot run smelters on renewable energy. You don't have the generation capacity nor the battery technology available at the moment to be able to even keep them going long enough to be able to sustain those industries.

This is a commercial decision predicated on the fact that they cannot compete because energy is too expensive. That is a stark reality that Australia needs to face into.

Anthony Albanese ran around during the campaign with a scare campaign about a $600 billion nuclear plan that we took as a Coalition, which was a blatant lie. It was in fact, the reality was we had independent modelling that our entire grid would cost 331 billion, which would have 38 per cent of our grid nuclear, about 54 per cent would be renewables and the balance would be gas and coal and they now have a plan that's going to cost you over $1.33 trillion dollars.

In fact, if you add in the Capacity Investment Scheme, if you add in the subsidies for household batteries, it will be closer to one and a half trillion dollars.

So where is Anthony Albanese and Chris Bowen now? Be honest with the Australian people about the cost of their energy grid. They do not have the courage look the Australian people in the eye and tell them the truth. We went to an election. We went in front of the Australian people. We had independent economic modelling from Frontier Economics who both Labor and the Coalition used and they refused to come out and tell the Australian people.

But go and tell the people of Gladstone. Go and look the people of Gladstone in the eye that have just lost their job. Look them in the eye and say this is why you are losing your job. Albanese doesn't have the courage to do it. He's gutless and he knows he's taking this country down a path that he's going to see more, more job losses, particularly as he goes that goes down this all renewables path.

JOURNALIST

So would you like to see the power station run longer or should both levels of government and industry prepare for the closure and help local workers transition?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

You've got to fix the fundamentals. You can't run away from fixing the fundamentals and the fundamentals is baseload power. And this is, unless they're going to face into this, you can subsidise till the cows come home but ultimately Australian taxpayers' money will run out and you have to fix it by putting in baseload power. That's why you're going to have to keep coal going longer.

The Queensland Government has already announced that they're going to keep their coal-fired power assets going longer. And in fact, there's probably scope to include existing coal-fired power assets in the Capacity Investment Scheme to underwrite prices to ensure that they do remain until there's a transition from those coal-fired power assets that bring down prices as they're doing with renewable energy, which is meant to be the cheapest form of energy.

So there needs to be an understanding of the mechanisms there rather than subsidising, but we need to get baseload and keep baseload power to keep these industries going. As we continue down this all renewables path, there are industries that are going to continue to fold.

JOURNALIST

Just lastly, what would you like to see happen to make these transitions away from small regional towns easier then?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well there shouldn't be a transition. We should not be giving up. This is the problem with the culture in this country. We've become a country of finding reasons why not to do things and giving up. Instead, we should back ourselves to do it better than anyone else in the world.

We have sovereignty of all our resources, we should use them and have the courage to do it. That means that we should have coal and gas with carbon capture storage. We should have nuclear energy. We should have renewables. But we've got to have it in the right mix to make us competitive on the international stage.

Instead, we've got a government driven by ideology rather than the practical reality of what people are feeling in their energy bills, but what the good people at Gladstone are feeling in them losing their jobs. What would that look like, the balance then? We went to the last election with a balanced grid, 38 per cent nuclear energy, about 54 per cent renewables. The balance would be gas and coal. With carbon capture storage that had a total cost of $331 billion, not $600 billion that Anthony Albanese ran around during the campaign as a scare campaign.

And now we see that his actual grid is going to cost nearly $1.5 trillion. That's why you're seeing it every quarter. Every time you open up your energy bill, you should see Anthony Albanese's face on it. And every time you see that, you are going to continue to see it go up because someone has to pay that $1.5 trillion. You're going to pay that.

Everybody's going to pay that. But there are they're going to pay it with their jobs.

JOURNALIST

Jumping back to live export for a moment, would you call on the Albanese government to increase the transition package and if so, what do you believe that figure should be?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well they undertook a consultation process, why wouldn't they go back to the drawing board and listen to what was advised to them? But you know this is the problem, the Albanese government isn't even prepared to come and look producers in the eye, look industry in the eye, they're impacted by this.

They've run for cover. I mean if you're going to destroy the livelihoods of Australians and you believe so passionately in the decision you've made, wouldn't you think you'd have the courage or your conviction to come and look these people in the eye and say this is why I'm doing it, but this is what we'll have a conversation about what you'll need to make sure that we support you because this is not a decision that is fair on you, you're undertaking a lawful industry, we're taking it away, why wouldn't you look them in the eye and do that?

So this has all been a sham, this has all been a political farce all at the expense of hard-working Australians who have done the right thing by this country They've done the right thing by their community. And for them to have that torn away, that's not the Australian way.

Australians don't cut and run. They don't hurt their fellow Australians. We back ourselves. This is the human toll that you're looking at right here today.

And for a Prime Minister to not even care to come and talk to them and understand what it might look like speaks volumes about him rather than anybody else.

JOURNALIST

So we're hearing on the ground that there is no chance the package will be increased. What would you say to that?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Well, one, it doesn't surprise me. That's the contempt that this government has shown Western Australians.

The Western Australians that handed him the keys to the Lodge are expendable as far as Anthony Albanese is concerned. And I just say to people in Perth, these are your fellow Western Australians. This is a time for you to stand up, to understand exactly what you're doing. Just don't come here and hug a lamb, come and hug one of these people. They're the ones that need more comfort than what that lamb does.

I'll give you six to four on that. We're talking about these people's livelihoods, their futures. And they've had a government that that has ripped that away for no reason that they're prepared to explain. Now, I just think that it's time for this government and this Minister, who I think has been absent in every sense, of coming over and talking to these industries and saying to them honestly, what is it that you need? Instead, I suspect you're just going to see a ticking box exercise and you're on your own - Good luck and goodbye.

JOURNALIST

Last question, if that's alright. WA farmers are preparing to harvest their third biggest crop on record. We've had four out of five years have been records, well sorry above 20 million tonnes I should say. WA's grain supply chain is really battling to keep up with the amount of grain that is required to be moved, particularly by rail.

Do you know what is happening with the agricultural supply chain improvement programme and would you say there needs to be more money spent on grain on rail in Western Australia?

DAVID LITTLEPROUD

Definitely, in fact I mean I've had numerous meetings with CBH and they've been raising concerns for the last couple of years about what's coming their way and this is important.

It's important that you have a government that understands that not all the infrastructure spend needs to go into capital cities. In fact, the Albanese government's first budget ripped $27 billion away from regional infrastructure. That's roads and rail. That's about getting our product to Australians plates or on a boat.

They're the ones that are paying the bills. And so this is where there's not an understanding, not only in terms of live sheep, but in terms of the infrastructure that's required to make sure that our nation can be fed and clothed and pay the export dollars that we need to be able to keep our country going. And there is no investment, all the programmes have stopped.

And so sadly, I think all I can say to the people of Western Australia and the CBH and the grain growers, I think you're on your own. I think you've got a government that's not prepared to cut a cheque in any way, sense or form.

So that's the tragic news that you're going to see. It's all being funnelled into the capital cities and I suspect as a Queenslander there'll be a few dollars funnelled into the Olympics, but as someone who lives in Western Queensland, I've got roads that are falling apart as well because this all seems to be about the city rather than understanding how important it is to make sure that those arterials, whether they be road or rail, are kept up otherwise there is a cost living crisis.

Your food is going to cost more. It's going to take more to get your food to your plate and that's what this Albanese government doesn't understand, doesn't care about.

Thank you.