

AgKI questions Kangaroo Island livestock freight increase on ferry service

By Liana Webster

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AgKI chair Peter Cooper is concerned about the future of Kangaroo Island's livestock transport. Picture supplied

A local agriculture group on Kangaroo Island has raised concern about the future of livestock movement coming off the Island.

With the pending arrival of two new ferries, AgKI is questioning a freight increase proposed by ferry operator SeaLink and the future capacity to transport increasing livestock numbers to the mainland.

The ferry service is a lifeline for the Kangaroo Island community and their farmers and AgKI is concerned it will not be able to accommodate expected growing sheep numbers on the Island.

More than 320,000 lambs are moved off KI each year, along with mutton and cattle.

Another 125,000 lambs are expected to travel to the mainland each year once former timber production company Kiland finish their vast forest to farmland conversion project.

AgKI chair Peter Cooper says livestock owners will have to pay a 1.5 multiplier on top of the ferries base freight rate once the new ferries are operational.

"SeaLink advised AgKI that the higher rates for livestock were to account for additional requirements for segregation and deck utilisation compared to general freight," he said.

"SeaLink admitted at the May meeting that is not the case and there is no segregation for livestock freight, nor any additional deck space required, so there is no justification for livestock being penalised and charged at a higher rate to general freight.

AgKI have also been in correspondence with (now former) Transport Minister Tom Koutsantonis about their concerns with the "unjustified increase for livestock freight and capacity" of the new ferries, but said responses have been dismissive.

This would increase costs per linear meter for both prime mover and stock crates from \$39.60 up to \$45.53 in just the first year, Mr Cooper said.

"Going forward, this price will be indexed each year, which could see livestock producers paying an additional 25 per cent on top of the new inflated rate," he said.

A SeaLink spokesperson said the new freight fare was set at \$22.73 per lane metre, indexed annually from July 2022.

"For freight over six metres in length, each linear metre carries a 1.2 multiplier to each lane metre," they said.

"For dangerous goods and livestock freight, a multiplier of 1.5 each lane metre is applied, reflecting the additional handling requirements involved in safely transporting these loads."



SeaLink argues that it has not increased general freight rates, including livestock, since 2012. Picture SeaLink

SeaLink also noted that since 2012 they have not increased general freight rates, including livestock, even as input costs have significantly risen.

AgKI have repeatedly requested that any port works for the new ferries not interrupt the busy livestock movement period from September to the end of November without meaningful consultation and notice.

"We still don't know when the new ferries will be in operation nor when SeaLink will be doing their harbour infrastructure works, which will see the ferry service shut down for four to five days," Mr Cooper said.

"Many farmers have booked in forward contracts to lock in good prices for their livestock, but don't know if they can get them there or what the price for transport will be.

"The stress is showing and AgKI is very disappointed that our concerns have not been addressed."

SeaLink advised they would be in contact with freighters and the community about the necessary shutdowns, when ferry suspension dates are confirmed.

A DIT spokesperson said the marine transport company are complying with their requirements in regard to the livestock freight, under their current contract which was awarded in 2021.

"Under the contract, with the introduction of the two new vessels, SeaLink will implement a new fare pricing structure, which includes new controlled freight pricing," they said.

"Controlled freight pricing sets out the maximum freight price that SeaLink can charge, this is indexed annually to assist with future changes to operational costs such as staff wages and fuel.

"SeaLink is free to negotiate with its customers, including organisations like Agriculture Kangaroo Island, on pricing arrangements under the maximum pricing."