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Australia reports 2024 largest year for lamb and sheep slaughter in decades

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The latest quarterly statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reveal that 2024 was a record year for lamb and sheep slaughter. Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) reports that 26.6 million lambs and 11.7 million sheep were slaughtered in 2024, marking the highest levels in decades.

Stephen Bignell, MLA's Market Information Manager, noted that these elevated rates are attributed to a large national sheep flock, a higher percentage of sheepmeat breeds, and drier conditions in South Australia and Victoria. Total lamb production reached 634,706 tonnes, up 6 per cent from 2023.

For the December 2024 quarter, mutton production was 90,847 tonnesâ??the highest since 1997. Adult cattle slaughter also rose to 2.13 million head, a 16 per cent increase from the previous year, with a total of 8.3 million cattle processed throughout 2024.

All states reported increases, especially Victoria (27 per cent) and South Australia (56 per cent). Dry conditions have prompted producers to destock by selling or processing excess cattle.

Despite the overall slaughter being 10 per cent below the previous record, beef production hit over 2.57 million tonnes, a 16 per cent rise from 2023, supporting record exports. The average adult carcass weight increased to 310.8 kg, although this was still below December 2023 levels.

A reduction in female slaughter led to lighter weights and an FSR of 51.8 per cent, indicating the cattle herd is in a destocking phase, as it remains above the 47 per cent benchmark.