



RSPCA Australia

Better beef cattle welfare: Our vision

September 2013

RSPCA 
for all creatures **great & small**

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NOTE: This document, originally released as the *RSPCA Australia Animal Welfare Guidelines – Beef Cattle* in November 2012, has been renamed to reflect its purpose and intent which is to outline the RSPCA's vision for better welfare across the beef cattle industry.



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INTRODUCTION

RSPCA Australia's *Better beef cattle welfare: Our vision* outlines principles and practices designed to assist the beef cattle industry to continually improve and demonstrate high animal welfare for beef cattle on farm, during transport and at slaughter. This document provides the RSPCA's vision for higher welfare practices in the beef cattle industry in the short to medium term.

The principles underpinning this vision are based on the 'Five Freedoms'.

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst: by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
2. Freedom from discomfort: by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease: by prevention, rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour: by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. Freedom from fear and distress: by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

RSPCA Australia considers that these 'freedoms' will be better provided for if those responsible for the care of beef cattle provide:

- caring and responsible planning and management
- skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious approach to husbandry
- appropriate environmental design
- caring and considerate handling and transport
- humane slaughter.

Our vision has been developed knowing that most producers work hard to meet the needs of their customers. By committing to good animal welfare:

- your animals will benefit
- your business will be part of a progressive movement where food is sourced from animals raised to higher welfare standards
- your business will be giving consumers what they want
- your business will be a leader.

RSPCA Australia supports the development of industry and retail quality assurance or certification schemes that include the practices outlined in this document and provide producers with the means to demonstrate good animal welfare practice to an increasingly discerning consumer. The RSPCA encourages producers and brand owners to provide comprehensive information to consumers about on-farm production practices. This includes independent auditing of the scheme as well as transparency about specific production practices.

NOTE: RSPCA Australia does not assess producers or others in the supply chain who claim to meet the practices outlined in this document and the RSPCA therefore cannot provide any formal endorsements.

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ON FARM

RSPCA Australia believes that, throughout every stage of the production process, people in charge of the care and management of farm animals should be aware of their responsibilities, should engage in caring and responsible planning and management, and practice considerate handling and transport to ensure the welfare of the animal concerned.

It is recognised that good stockmanship, i.e. the knowledge, skill, attitude and behaviour necessary to handle animals in a manner that does not compromise their welfare, is essential for the well-being of farm animals.

RSPCA Australia believes that farm animal husbandry and management practices should provide for the behavioural, social and physiological needs of the individual animal and not cause unnecessary injury, suffering or distress.

RSPCA Australia's *Better beef cattle welfare: Our vision* aims to build on and go beyond the minimum requirements of state/territory legislation and Model Codes of Practice or Standards for animal welfare, where they exist, to present a vision for better animal welfare on farm.

1. Responsibilities

Aim: People working with animals are aware of and practice their duty of care.

- 1.1 Staff are aware of and understand relevant animal welfare legislation.
- 1.2 Staff use low-stress stock-handling techniques that incorporate an understanding of animal behaviour and the attitude required to promote good animal handling.
- 1.3 Staff are able to recognise signs of pain, injury, disease or distress in cattle and are able to take suitable action.

2. Feed and water

Aim: Animals are kept in good condition at all times.

- 2.1 Cattle have access to good quality water at all times.
- 2.2 Cattle have access to good quality roughage at all times to allow them to ruminate.
- 2.3 Cattle are kept in good condition with backbones and short ribs that feel smooth and rounded with firm pressure being required to feel under and between the ribs.

3. Risk management of extreme weather, natural disasters, disease, injury and predation

Aim: Strategies are in place to safeguard the welfare of all animals at all times.

- 3.1 Cattle have access to shelter or shade – either natural or artificial – at all times.
- 3.2 A documented risk management strategy is in place to ensure preparedness for drought, fire, and flood.
- 3.3 Predator control programs use the most humane and effective techniques available, including non-lethal methods.
- 3.4 A preventative disease management strategy is in place.

4. Facilities and equipment

Aim: Animals are handled in a calm and quiet manner without unnecessary distress or risk of injury.

- 4.1 Cattle handling systems are fit for purpose and designed to facilitate low-stress stock handling.

5. Handling and management

Aim: Animals are handled in a calm and quiet manner and are not subjected to painful procedures or situations that cause unnecessary distress.

- 5.1 Staff use low-stress stock-handling techniques that incorporate an understanding of cattle behaviour and the attitude required to promote good stock handling.
- 5.2 Electric prodders are not used or carried.
- 5.3 Dogs that bite cattle are muzzled while working.
- 5.4 Dogs are not used in yards.
- 5.5 Electro-immobilisation is not carried out.
- 5.6 Hot-iron branding is not carried out (unless required by law).
- 5.7 Ear notching is not carried out.
- 5.8 Cattle identification methods include ear tags and/or RFID.
- 5.9 Calves are weaned into yards, where they have access to water and highly palatable feed, while their mothers are moved to an adjoining paddock with good quality pasture.
- 5.10 Unnecessary individual housing, separation or mixing of cattle is avoided.

6. Castration, dehorning and spaying

Aim: Animals are not subjected to painful husbandry procedures or situations that cause unnecessary distress.

- 6.1 Operators must be competent in the procedure being performed. Where operator accreditation exists for a particular procedure, the operator must also be accredited and their competency regularly assessed.
- 6.2 Calves destined for slaughter prior to sexual maturity are not castrated.
- 6.3 Where castration is carried out, it is done with pre- and post-procedure pain relief, and only on cattle under 3 months old.
- 6.4 Polled cattle are sourced instead of horned cattle.
- 6.5 Where polled cattle cannot be sourced, horn trimming or tipping is used instead of dehorning.
- 6.6 Dehorning (when the horn is attached to the skull) is not carried out.
- 6.7 Where calves are disbudded (i.e. before the horn bud attaches to the skull) it is done using pre- and post-operative pain relief.
- 6.8 Disbudding using caustic chemicals is not carried out.
- 6.9 Spaying of female cattle is not performed unless carried out by a veterinarian for therapeutic reasons and with pre- and post-procedure pain relief.

7. Breeding management

Aim: Breeding management does not subject animals to painful procedures or situations that cause unnecessary distress.

- 7.1 Operators must be competent in the procedure being performed. Where operator accreditation exists for a particular procedure, the operator must also be accredited and their competency regularly assessed.
- 7.2 Genetic selection includes traits that improve animal welfare, e.g. temperament, calving ease, polled.
- 7.3 Bulls are managed to avoid injury and aggression.
- 7.4 The method of testing the serving capacity of bulls using restrained heifers or cows is not carried out.
- 7.5 Semen collection using electro-ejaculation is not carried out.
- 7.6 Heifers and cows are managed to avoid difficulties associated with calving.
- 7.7 Calving heifers/cows are inspected daily unless distance/location demand less frequent intervals.
- 7.8 Calving aids, if required, are manual (e.g. a calf puller) not mechanical.

8. Calf rearing systems

Aim: Animals are kept in social groups.

- 8.1 Dairy beef calves are kept in groups with access to a sheltered, dry, well-ventilated environment with deep litter flooring and with sufficient space to allow all calves to lie down in lateral recumbency at the same time.

9. Cattle feedlots

Aim: Animals in feedlots are able to express their behavioural needs.

- 9.1 Cattle are lotfed in NFAS-accredited¹ (or equivalent) facilities.
- 9.2 Cattle entering a feedlot are not pregnant.
- 9.3 Cattle are provided with shelter or shade.
- 9.4 Cattle have access to good quality roughage in their ration at all times to allow them to ruminate.
- 9.5 Cattle are regularly exercised outside of their home pen.
- 9.6 Cattle are managed to avoid the occurrence of clinical or subclinical nutritional and infectious diseases, including ruminal acidosis and bovine respiratory disease.
- 9.7 Cattle not coping with the feedlot environment are provided with access to pasture.

10. Humane killing

Aim: Animals do not suffer unnecessarily.

- 10.1 Operators must be competent in the procedure being performed. Where operator accreditation exists for a particular procedure, the operator must also be accredited and their competency regularly assessed.
- 10.2 Cattle which have to be killed due to premature birth, weakness, injury, or disease are humanely and competently euthanased on site without delay, using captive bolt or firearm in the frontal position.

¹ The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme is the feedlot industry's quality assurance scheme that includes compliance with animal welfare, environment, biosecurity, food safety and product integrity legislation (www.feedlots.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66&Itemid=96).

DURING TRANSPORT

Transport is stressful for farm animals and can cause suffering and deaths. Aspects of transport that can affect animal welfare include separation of the animals from their familiar environments and social groups, forced interaction with unfamiliar animals, unfamiliar handling by unfamiliar people, overcrowding, water and food deprivation, exposure to extremes of temperature and humidity, and novel experiences and situations.

RSPCA Australia believes that animals should be transported in a way that avoids injury and minimises suffering or distress. Journey times should be as short as possible, and slaughter of animals should occur at processing facilities as near to the farm as possible.

RSPCA Australia's *Better beef cattle welfare: Our vision* follows the framework of the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock*² and they aim to build on and go beyond the minimum requirements in those Standards to present a vision for better animal welfare during the transport process.

1. Responsibilities and planning

Aim: Animals do not endure unnecessarily long journey times.

- 1.1 Cattle are not consigned through saleyards.
- 1.2 Cattle destined for slaughter are transported to the nearest available abattoir.
- 1.3 The date and time that cattle last had access to water is recorded at the start of each journey.

2. Stock-handling competency

Aim: Animals are handled in a calm and quiet manner without unnecessary distress.

- 2.1 Cattle are transported using truckCare-accredited³ (or equivalent) operators.
- 2.2 Transport staff are trained in low-stress stock-handling techniques.

² All standards required by law in this 'Transport' section of the RSPCA Guidelines can be viewed in the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock*, Edition One, Version 1.1, 21 Sept 2011, Animal Health Australia, Canberra (www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/land-transport/).

³ truckCare is the Australian livestock transport industry's quality assurance program (www.alrta.org.au/truckcare/).

3. Transport vehicles and facilities for livestock

Aim: Animals are handled in a calm and quiet manner throughout the transport process without unnecessary distress or risk of injury.

- 3.1 Cattle handling and transport systems are designed and used according to low-stress stock handling principles.

4. Pre-transport selection of livestock

Aim: Animals selected for transport are in good health and fit for the intended journey.

- 4.1 Cattle must be provided with sufficient food, water and rest before, during and after the journey, according to their biological needs.

5. Loading, transporting and unloading livestock

Aim: Animals are not subjected to painful practices or situations that cause unnecessary distress.

- 5.1 Electric prodders are not used or carried.
- 5.2 Dogs that bite cattle are muzzled while working.
- 5.3 Low-stress stock-handling techniques are used.
- 5.4 Unnecessary separation or mixing of cattle is avoided.
- 5.5 Cattle have access to water at least four hours up to the time of loading.
- 5.6 A record indicating the date and time cattle last had access to water accompanies them to their final destination.
- 5.7 Cattle which have to be killed due to weakness, injury, or disease are humanely and competently euthanased on site without delay.

6. Humane destruction

Aim: Animals do not suffer unnecessarily.

- 6.1 Operators must be competent in the procedure being performed. Where operator accreditation exists for a particular procedure, the operator must also be accredited and their competency regularly assessed.
- 6.2 Cattle which have to be killed due to weakness, injury, or disease are humanely euthanased on site without delay, using captive bolt or firearm in the frontal position.

7. Live export

Aim: Animals are not exported live for slaughter.

- 7.1 Cattle are not exported live for slaughter.

8. Specific requirements for the land transport of cattle

Aim: Animals are transported at an age and in a manner that does not cause suffering.

- 8.1 Calves are not presented for sale, transport or slaughter unless at least 10 days old.
- 8.2 Time off water and feed for calves between 10 and 30 days old does not exceed 12 hours.
- 8.3 Calves between 10 and 30 days old are fed within 4 hours of loading for transport.
- 8.4 Calves between 10 and 30 days old are provided with thick bedding on transport vehicles.
- 8.5 Time off water for cattle over 30 days old does not exceed 24 hours.
- 8.6 Cattle over 30 days old have access to good quality hay up to 4 hours prior to loading for transport.

AT SLAUGHTER

Slaughter is the final step in a series of events that are stressful to animals, namely mustering, loading, transport, unloading, and mixing with unfamiliar animals in unfamiliar environments. It is therefore crucial that the moments immediately prior to slaughter do not cause additional and unnecessary suffering or distress.

RSPCA Australia defines humane slaughter as when an animal is either killed instantly or instantaneously rendered insensible to pain until death supervenes. A high level of operator skill is essential for the humane killing of animals.

RSPCA Australia is of the view that state/territory regulators must expand their current food safety audits to include a full assessment of animal welfare at all slaughtering establishments. Animal welfare auditing should apply not only to abattoirs that slaughter animals for human consumption, but also those establishments that slaughter animals for pet meat and other purposes.

RSPCA Australia's *Better beef cattle welfare: Our vision* follows the framework of the *Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption*⁴ and they aim to build on and go beyond the minimum requirements in those Standards to present a vision for better animal welfare during the slaughter process.

1. Handling of animals

Aim: Animals are handled in a calm and quiet manner without unnecessary distress.

- 1.1 Cattle are slaughtered only at abattoirs that operate according to the *National Animal Welfare Standards for Livestock Processing Establishments*⁵.
- 1.2 Abattoir staff are trained in and use low-stress stock-handling techniques.
- 1.3 Yards, lairage area, raceways and other facilities are designed to facilitate low-stress stock handling.
- 1.4 Electric prodders are not used or carried.
- 1.5 Dogs are not used.
- 1.6 Unnecessary separation or mixing of cattle is avoided.

⁴ All standards required by law in this 'Slaughter' section of the RSPCA Guidelines can be viewed in the *Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption*, FRSC Technical Report No. 3, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra (www.publish.csiro.au/pid/5553.htm).

⁵ The *National Animal Welfare Standards for Livestock Processing Establishments* integrate the national Codes of Practice, relevant State and Commonwealth legislation and other commercial requirements and promote the humane treatment of livestock at processing establishments (www.amic.org.au/content_common/pg-amics-animal-welfare-standards-for-processing-establishments.seo).

2. Young, injured, sick or stress susceptible animals

Aim: Animals are slaughtered without delay.

- 2.1 Young, injured, sick or stress susceptible cattle are given priority at slaughter.

3. Slaughter

Aim: Abattoirs are monitored to ensure animals are handled, stunned and slaughtered humanely.

- 3.1 Cattle are stunned prior to sticking.
- 3.2 Slaughtering establishment audits include a full assessment of animal welfare, encompassing animal handling, stunning and slaughter practice.



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