

## Position paper B6

# Welfare of farm animals at saleyards

(adopted 27-11-2021)

The policies and positions of the RSPCA referred to in this document represent the guiding principles to which we aspire in fulfilling our various roles. We are committed to giving effect to these principles wherever possible and practical.

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## 1 Introduction

1.1 Farm animals may be sold in various ways, including:

- through direct consignment to an abattoir (called ‘over the hooks’)
- in the paddock (where farm animals are inspected and bought on farm and then directly transported to their destination)
- via an online auction system
- via a livestock market or saleyard.

1.2 Saleyards are public delivery and collection points to which animals are transported to be sold to the highest bidder and from where animals are then transported to their next destination. Because transport and handling are inherently stressful to the animals concerned, RSPCA Australia strongly encourages the direct consignment of farm animals to their point of destination and the shortest possible journey time from point of origin to another destination. However, saleyards - although declining in number - remain a common form of trading in farm animals.

1.3 This position paper focuses on the key aspects of saleyards (and other livestock markets) that influence animal welfare and provides guidance that will help reduce the risk to the welfare of animals consigned through these systems.

1.4 This position paper should be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policies and position papers:

- Mission, vision, objectives - [Good animal welfare](#)
- Policy B - [Farm animals](#)
- Policy F - [Transportation of animals](#)
- Policy G - [Humane killing](#)
- Position Paper B1 - [Welfare of bobby calves destined for slaughter](#)
- Position Paper B5 - [Managing farm animals during drought](#)

## 2 General principles

2.1 Wherever possible, farm animals must be consigned directly to their point of destination rather than going through saleyards.

2.2 The person in charge of the saleyard, or their nominated representative, must be responsible for ensuring the welfare of all animals at the premises. All animals are sentient and, regardless of their sale value, must be treated in a manner that does not compromise their welfare.

2.3 The saleyard must be designed, constructed and maintained to facilitate the natural flow of movement of animals and in a manner that does not cause injury and minimises distress.

2.4 The provision of water, feed, space, shade and shelter must adequately meet the physical and mental needs of the specific class of animal and the individual animal, in the local climatic conditions.

2.5 Only trained and competent persons must handle animals at the saleyard. The principles of low-stress animal handling must be applied, in which an understanding of animal behaviour and the animal’s flight zone are used to encourage rather than force an animal in the required direction.

2.6 Animals must be fit for sale and transport.

- 2.7 Arrangements must be in place for the appropriate care of sick or injured animals and other animals unsuitable for sale.

### **3 Responsibility**

- 3.1 The person in charge of the saleyard - be it a public or private saleyard - or their nominated representative (from here on referred to as the responsible person), has overall responsibility for ensuring the welfare of all animals from the moment they are unloaded at the facility up to the point of loading the animals onto a transport vehicle to leave the facility. This responsibility includes the provision of water, feed and veterinary treatment or euthanasia (as required) and shelter to animals as well as oversight to ensure all animals are handled by trained and competent persons and in compliance with animal welfare legislation. A copy of the relevant animal welfare legislation and associated extension material must be on site and available for viewing by all persons handling animals at the saleyard.
- 3.2 The saleyard must nominate an Animal Welfare Officer (AWO), who is trained and certified by a registered training organisation, and who has responsibility for overseeing animal welfare practices at the saleyard. The Animal Welfare Officer must be responsible for monitoring animal welfare, ensuring that good animal handling and management procedures are adhered to, and that animal welfare incidents are promptly and appropriately addressed, recorded and, where a breach of animal welfare legislation occurs, immediately reported to the relevant authority. Weekly internal audits must be included as part of the formal process for overseeing animal welfare at the saleyard. For this role to be carried out effectively, it is recommended that it be designated to an individual other than the person in charge of the saleyard who, particularly during the sale of animals, may often be focussed on other responsibilities.
- 3.3 The saleyard must nominate a registered veterinarian who is on site during the sale of animals and on-call when the saleyard is not selling animals (i.e. after business hours) to attend to animals requiring urgent care.
- 3.4 The driver of a transport vehicle arriving at or departing from the saleyard, is responsible for unloading the vehicle and notifying the recipient of the animals of their arrival and is also responsible for loading the animals onto a transport vehicle to leave the facility for further transport. The driver of the transport vehicle must advise the responsible person or AWO of animals who are unable to rise ('downers'), injured, distressed or in poor condition.
- 3.5 The responsible person or AWO must ensure that stockpersons (including agents and saleyard staff) appropriately care for and handle animals, including appropriate penning density, identifying animals not fit for sale and notifying, without delay, the person responsible for the treatment or euthanasia of animals not fit for sale. The responsible person and AWO must have the authority to ensure that animal welfare issues are addressed as a condition of sale.
- 3.6 Records of arrival and departure time of animals, including whether and when access to water (and feed as applicable) was provided, must be maintained and communicated to the next person in charge of the animals to ensure time off feed and water is known and monitored.
- 3.7 The responsible person or AWO must lodge a formal complaint to the relevant authority within 24 hours of becoming aware that animals received were unfit to load or if maximum legal time off water (and feed as applicable) limits were exceeded. If animals are unfit to load for further transport, the responsible person or AWO must advise the purchaser and take all reasonable steps to prevent loading.

- 3.8 Contact details of the responsible person and veterinarian must be clearly displayed and be available throughout the facility to be used in case of emergency.
- 3.9 Staff must immediately report a breach of animal welfare legislation to the responsible person, the AWO or directly to the relevant authority.
- 3.10 The responsible person has the responsibility to create a workplace culture that does not tolerate cruelty to animals and prioritises animal welfare. Measures should be taken to promote this culture, such as workplace training and practices that support and ensure a clear process for reporting breaches and timely responses to concerns about animal welfare.
- 3.11 Saleyards must display signage, especially in high use parts of the facility (e.g. unloading and loading ramps) to remind users of their responsibility to comply with relevant animal welfare legislation and the penalties for non-compliance. The signage also demonstrates the saleyard's commitment to meeting its animal welfare obligations.
- 3.12 Authorised animal welfare inspectors should attend saleyards regularly and without notice to ensure that the saleyard's responsibilities under state and territory animal welfare legislation are being met.

## **4 Facility design**

### **4.1 Unloading and loading ramps**

- 4.1.1 A platform, level with the floor of the transport vehicle, must be provided before the start of the unloading ramp. In order to avoid leg injuries to and baulking by animals, there must be no gap between the loading door of the transport vehicle and the floor of the platform.
- 4.1.2 The slope of unloading and loading ramps must not exceed 20 degrees and the ramp must be stepped rather than inclined and have non-slip flooring (e.g. with slats or grooves).
- 4.1.3 Ramps must be fitted with solid sides to minimise distractions that may cause animals to baulk. Ramp width must align with species requirements including body size as well as the preference of some animals to walk side by side.
- 4.1.4 The behaviour of animals and the different species and class of animal handled at the facility must be considered when siting and directing lights at the unloading and loading points. Lights must never shine directly into the eyes of animals as this will discourage forward movement. Casting of shadows should also be avoided.

### **4.2 Yards, laneways, pens and races**

- 4.2.1 Laneways and races must be designed to have smooth turns and curved corners that facilitate the natural flow of movement of animals. Laneways and races must be fit for the purpose of the animals moving through them.
- 4.2.2 Every effort must be made to avoid shadows, obstructions, excessive noise, moving objects and other distractions that may cause animals to baulk in laneways.
- 4.2.3 Fences and gates must be constructed so that there are no protrusions or sharp edges. Gates must be fitted with recessed closing devices or chains.
- 4.2.4 All floors, including laneways and races, must have a non-slip surface and be able to be adequately cleaned. Yards and pens must have dry, soft-standing floors.

- 4.2.5 Yards and pens must be adequately ventilated and provide animals with shade and with shelter from extremes of weather.
- 4.2.6 Yards, laneways, pens, races and ramps must be able to be adequately lit to permit the proper inspection of animals as well as to allow safe delivery and movement of animals at night or after business hours.

## **5 General provisions for animals**

- 5.1 Only animals who are fit for sale and transport must be presented for sale or transport at saleyards. Unfit animals include those who are: unable to bear weight on all legs; emaciated, dehydrated, injured or distressed; blind in both eyes; and animals with conditions likely to cause further pain or distress during the saleyard process and during transport.
- 5.2 More vulnerable animals, in addition to animals not fit for sale, must also not be presented for sale and transport, including:
- sick animals
  - animals in their third trimester of pregnancy
  - animals with young at foot
  - lactating animals
  - animals less than one month of age.
- 5.3 Where unfit and other vulnerable animals arrive or are identified at the facility, provisions must be in place to ensure prompt and appropriate care, treatment or, if required, euthanasia. This includes provisions for newborn animals. The responsible person or AWO must ensure that those who consign unfit and other vulnerable animals to saleyards in breach of animal welfare and/or transport legislation, are immediately reported to the relevant authority.
- 5.4 Good quality water must be available and easily accessible at all times to animals in all delivery yards, selling pens and other holding areas.
- 5.5 Feed (e.g. hay or other dry feed) must be provided to:
- animals 6 months of age or older who have been off feed for 24 hours or more
  - animals who are pregnant, lactating, or less than 6 months old who have been off feed for 12 hours or more
  - animals who are weak, sick or injured and being treated.
- 5.6 Yards and pens must have sufficient space (penning density) for all animals to move around freely and lie down and stand up unhindered, including pens holding an individual animal. Holding pens, e.g. for animals held overnight at the saleyard, must have sufficient space for all animals to lie down at the same time. This also applies where selling pens are used to hold animals overnight.
- 5.7 Gregarious animals of the same species must be penned together or near each other to avoid distress. The following animals must be penned separately and, as appropriate, in the company of or near conspecifics:
- entire males as required
  - aggressive animals
  - animals showing signs of oestrus
  - sick, weak, injured or other more vulnerable animals

- unfamiliar animals
  - horned animals as required
  - highly distressed animals.
- 5.8 Animals must be inspected regularly and, at the very minimum, before and after the sale, at penning, and before they are transported off the premises. A responsible person or AWO should monitor animals in high stress areas of the saleyard, including the unloading and loading ramps. The responsible person or AWO must identify animals not fit for sale (or transport) and other vulnerable animals arriving at the saleyard, including those animals who are considered to be of low financial value, and take action to ensure the welfare of those animals.
- 5.9 Written policies and procedures must be in place to deal with contingencies and risk to animal welfare, including in the event of fire or breakdown of equipment, natural disasters, extreme weather, emergency animal disease outbreak or unexpected closure of the saleyard.
- 5.10 Written procedures must be in place to ensure the safe delivery and welfare of animals after business hours. This includes provision of an appropriate holding area, sufficient light, access to water and, as required, access to feed. Clearly visible signage must be in place describing after-hours procedures. Animals must not be delivered to saleyards after business hours unless by prior arrangement with the responsible person and with the responsible person or AWO present at unloading.
- 5.11 Animals who are not transported off the premises on the day of the sale must be provided with a sheltered paddock or holding yard with a soft-standing floor (which does not become boggy) until they are collected for transport. There must be sufficient space in holding areas for all animals to lie down at the same time. Animals in holding areas must be provided with good quality water and dry feed.

## **6 Animal handling**

- 6.1 The responsible person must ensure that persons responsible for the handling of animals at the saleyard are appropriately trained and competent in their required specific tasks. An understanding of animal behaviour and the ability to recognise abnormal behaviour is particularly important. In addition, an understanding of animal welfare is essential, as is an awareness of the person's legal obligations under the relevant animal welfare legislation.
- 6.2 Unloading, loading and handling of animals must be undertaken using principles of low-stress handling and with an awareness of the animal's natural flight zone:
- electric prodders must not be used
  - dogs must not be used
  - appropriately used handling aids such as flappers, flags, paddles and boards can assist in moving animals in the desired direction.
- 6.3 Animals must be handled calmly and quietly in a manner that avoids pain, injury or distress, including that animals:
- not be lifted by the head, ears, horns, neck, wool, skin or by a single leg
  - not be thrown or dropped, including on or off a transport vehicle
  - not be hit or kicked
  - not be dragged
  - not have their legs tied
  - not be subjected to aggressive shouting or tone of voice.

- 6.5 Unnecessary delay in the unloading and loading of animals must be avoided.
- 6.6 Selling rings, where small groups of animals are herded from a holding pen into an exhibition pen often surrounded by seating for buyers, must be avoided - especially for an individual animal - as it causes unnecessary stress and potentially increases the risk of injury to the animal.

## **7 Treatment of sick or injured animals**

- 7.1 Sick or injured animals must be identified and receive appropriate veterinary treatment without delay. The condition of animals not fit for sale and their respective treatment must be recorded.
- 7.2 When necessary, sick or injured animals must be euthanased without delay by a trained and competent person and, preferably, out of sight of other animals and the public. Sick or injured animals who are unable to walk must be euthanased in situ.
- 7.3 A covered holding yard (e.g. 'hospital pens') must be provided to allow for the isolation and safe inspection of sick and injured animals. Where animals are not promptly euthanased and/or where animals are undergoing treatment, they must be inspected regularly, and prompt action taken when necessary to avoid further suffering.
- 7.4 Facilities must be available to permit adequate restraint of an animal who requires inspection or treatment because of sickness or injury.
- 7.5 A saleyard biosecurity plan must be in place to manage biosecurity risks inherent to the saleyard system where large numbers of animals from varying origins converge, mix and are then transported to their next destination. The biosecurity plan must include reporting procedures in the event of a notifiable endemic or exotic disease as well as procedures for managing the welfare of affected animals.

## **8 Transport**

- 8.1 Animals must be fit for transport<sup>1</sup> before leaving the saleyard.
- 8.2 Animals not fit for transport include those who are unable to bear weight on all legs; emaciated, dehydrated, injured or distressed; blind in both eyes; and animals with conditions likely to cause further pain or distress during transport.
- 8.3 Animals not fit for transport must only be transported under veterinary advice. Consideration must be given to the purpose for transporting these animals, their ability to withstand the entire journey and the specific conditions under which they are to be transported.
- 8.4 Animals who have been subjected to a painful husbandry procedure (e.g. disbudding, dehorning) must not be transported to a saleyard until the wound has healed. It is unacceptable to conduct a painful husbandry procedure on an animal at a saleyard and then subject them to transport. The responsible person or AWO must actively monitor stockpersons and animals to prevent painful procedures from being carried out at saleyards.

## **9 Legal considerations**

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance on whether animals are fit for transport is also provided in 'Is the animal fit to load? A national guide to the pre-transport selection and management of livestock', Meat & Livestock Australia, Sydney, NSW.

- 9.1 State and territory animal welfare legislation places certain responsibilities on those in charge of an animal's wellbeing. Legislation requires that a person:
- take steps to mitigate harm or suffering
  - provide an animal with proper and sufficient food, water and shelter
  - not commit an act of cruelty upon an animal
  - not abandon or neglect an animal.
- 9.2 The *Standards & Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals* and *Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals* provide basic recommendations for the care of farm animals on farm, during transport and at saleyards. At the very least, those with a responsibility for the care of farm animals must be aware of and comply with state/territory-based animal welfare legislation as well as the relevant animal welfare *Standards* or *Model Codes*.