

Welfare of farm animals at saleyards

(Adopted 29-07-2011)

1 Introduction

1.1 This position paper must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policies:

- [Policy B - Farm animals](#)
- [Policy F - Transportation of animals](#)
- [Policy G - Humane killing](#)

1.2 Farm animals can be sold in a number of 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; or
- via a livestock market or saleyard.

1.3 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 final destination. Because transport is inherently stressful to the animals concerned, RSPCA Australia strongly encourages the direct consignment of farm animals to their point of destination. However, saleyards – although declining in number – remain a common form of trading in farm animals.

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

1.5 Where reference is made to the transport of animals, the following position papers apply:

- [Position Paper F3 Transportation of drought-affected livestock](#)
- [Position Paper F4 Road transport of livestock](#)

2 General principles

2.1 The person in charge of the saleyard is responsible for ensuring the welfare of all animals at the premises.

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

2.3 The provision of water, feed, shade and shelter should take into consideration the physiological needs of the specific class of animal, the individual animal, and the local climatic conditions.

2.4 The principles of low-stress animal handling should be applied in which an understanding of animal behaviour and the animal’s flight zone, in

particular, are used to encourage rather than force an animal in the required direction.

- 2.5 Arrangements should be in place for the care of sick or injured animals and other animals unsuitable for sale.
- 2.6 Animals should be fit for transport before being sold.

3 Responsibility

- 3.1 The person in charge of the saleyard – be it a public or private saleyard – or their nominated representatives, are responsible for ensuring the welfare of all animals from the moment they are unloaded at the facility up to the point of loading off the facility. This responsibility may include the provision of water, feed and shelter as required.
- 3.2 Records of arrival and departure time of farm animals should be maintained and communicated to the next person in charge to ensure time off feed and water is known.
- 3.3 The responsible person should lodge a formal complaint to the relevant authority if animals received were unfit to load or if time off water limits were exceeded. If animals are unfit to load for further transport, the responsible person should advise the purchaser and take all reasonable steps to prevent loading.
- 3.4 Emergency contact details of a responsible person and/or veterinarian should be clearly displayed on the premises.

4 Facility design

4.1 Unloading and loading ramps

- 4.1.1 A platform level with the floor of the transport vehicle should be provided before the (un)loading ramp begins.
- 4.1.2 The floor of the platform should be level with the floor of the transport vehicle.
- 4.1.3 In order to avoid leg injuries to animals there should be no gap between the loading door of the transport vehicle and the floor of the platform.
- 4.1.4 The slope of unloading and loading ramps should not exceed 20 degrees.
- 4.1.5 The ramp should be stepped rather than inclined and have non-slip flooring.
- 4.1.6 Ramps should be fitted with solid sides to minimise distractions that may cause animals to baulk.
- 4.1.7 Ramps should be of an appropriate width and take into consideration the species as well as the preference of some animals to walk side by side.
- 4.1.8 The behaviour of animals should be considered when siting and directing lights at the unloading/loading points at saleyards.

4.2 Yards, laneways and pens

- 4.2.1 Laneways should be designed to have smooth turns and corners that facilitate the natural flow of movement of animals.
- 4.2.2 Shadows, obstructions, and other distractions that may cause animals to balk in laneways should be avoided.
- 4.2.3 Fences and gates should be constructed so that there are no protrusions or sharp edges. Gates should be fitted with recessed closing devices or chains.
- 4.2.4 All floors, including laneways, should have a non-slip surface.
- 4.2.5 Yards and pens should provide a dry floor area capable of being cleaned.
- 4.2.6 Yards and pens should be adequately ventilated and provide animals with shade and, as required, with shelter from extremes of weather.
- 4.2.7 Yards, laneways, pens and ramps should 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 hours.

4.3 Lairages

- 4.3.1 Animals that are not transported off the premises on the day of the sale should be provided with a sheltered paddock or holding yard with a soft-standing floor until they are collected for transport. There should be sufficient space in holding areas for all animals to lie down. Animals in lairage should be provided with water and good quality feed.

5 General provisions for animals

- 5.1 Water should be available to livestock in all holding and delivery yards, pens and lairage areas.
- 5.2 Feed should be provided to
 - animals over 6 months old that have been off feed for more than 24 hours;
 - animals that are pregnant, lactating, or less than 6 months old that have been off feed for more than 12 hours;
 - animals that are weak, sick or injured and requiring treatment.

These animals should be weighed upon arrival (i.e. not subjected to curfews) and then provided with feed.
- 5.3 Animals less than one month of age should not be presented for sale.
- 5.4 Yards and pens should have sufficient space for all animals to move around freely and lie down.
- 5.5 Different classes of animals should be penned separately.

- Sufficient pens should be available to allow the individual penning of bulls should that be required.
 - Aggressive animals and animals showing signs of oestrus or with young at foot should be penned separately.
 - Mixing of unfamiliar animals should be avoided.
- 5.6 Animals should be inspected regularly and, at the very minimum, before and after the sale and before they are transported off the premises.
- 5.7 Contingencies should be in place in the event of fire or breakdown of equipment. Contingency planning should also include natural disasters, e.g. fires or floods.
- 5.8 Procedures should be in place to ensure the safe delivery and welfare of animals after business hours. This includes provision of an appropriate holding area, access to water and, as required, access to feed.

[See also – PP B1 Welfare of bobby calves at pick up points and scales](#)

6 Animal handling

- 6.1 All persons handling animals at the saleyard should be trained and competent in the specific task(s) required of them. An understanding of animal behaviour and the ability to recognise abnormal behaviour is particularly important.
- 6.2 Unloading and loading should be undertaken using principles of low-stress handling and with an awareness of the animal's natural flight zone.
- Electric prodders should not be permitted.
 - Handling aids such as flappers, flags and paddles can be used to move animals in the desired direction.
 - Dogs should only be used where they are effectively controlled and will not injure or unnecessarily distress animals.

[See also – Policy B4.10 Use of electric prodders and other handling aids](#)

- 6.3 Animals should be handled in a manner that avoids pain, injury or distress.
- Animals should not be lifted by the head, ears, horns, neck, wool, skin or by a single leg.
 - Animals should not be thrown on or off a transport vehicle.
 - Animals should not be hit or kicked.
 - Animals should not be dragged.
- 6.4 Tying the legs of animals to be transported should not occur.
- 6.5 Unnecessary delay in the unloading and loading of farm animals should be avoided.
- 6.6 Selling rings should be avoided – especially where an individual animal is concerned – as it causes unnecessary stress and potentially increases the risk of injury to that animal.

7 Treatment of sick or injured animals

- 7.1 Animals that are sick or injured should not be presented for sale.
- 7.2 Sick or injured animals should receive appropriate veterinary treatment without delay. This includes sick or injured animals arriving on a transport vehicle.
- 7.3 A covered holding yard should be provided to allow for the isolation and safe inspection of sick and injured animals.
- 7.4 Facilities should be available to permit adequate restraint of an animal that requires inspection or treatment because of sickness or injury.
- 7.5 When necessary, sick or injured animals should be humanely killed without delay by a competent person and out of sight of other animals and the public. Sick or injured animals that are unable to walk should be humanely killed in situ.

8 Transport

- 8.1 Animals should be fit for transport before leaving the saleyard.
- 8.2 Animals not fit for transport include those that are not able to walk, weak from hunger or thirst, blind, heavily pregnant, injured, diseased or otherwise distressed.
- 8.3 Animals not fit for transport should only be transported under veterinary advice.

[See also - PP F5 Transportation of bobby calves](#)

9 Legal considerations

- 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
 - not commit an act of cruelty upon an animal;
 - provides an animal with proper and sufficient food, water and shelter; and
 - not abandon an animal.
- 9.2 The Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals and Standards & Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals provide basic recommendations for the care of farm animals. In general, compliance with the relevant Model Code (or animal welfare Standard) will ensure compliance with animal welfare legislation.
- 9.3 The responsible person should report instances of cruelty or other breach of relevant legislation to the relevant authority.