

Is the animal fit to load?



A national guide to the pre-transport selection and management of livestock

Revised edition 2019



Endorsed by:



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About this guide

This guide has been developed to help livestock operators meet the Australian Animal Welfare Standards & Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock (the ‘Standards’) and decide whether an animal is fit to be loaded for transport and for the entire journey by road¹ or rail to any destination within Australia. The guide does not constitute legal advice.

The Standards set out specific requirements to ensure the welfare of livestock during transport in Australia and apply to all persons (livestock operators) involved in the livestock transport process. Livestock operators may act as consignor, transporter or receiver of livestock and include producers, managers, saleyard managers/superintendents, feedlot operators, agents, livestock processing plants, drivers and transporters. For access to the Standards refer to page 27 (www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au).

The chain of responsibility for livestock welfare in the transport process is:

- the **consignor** for the assembling and preparation of livestock, including the assessment and selection as ‘fit for the intended journey’, feed and water provisions, and holding periods before loading.
- the **transporter** for the journey, which involves the loading, including final inspection as ‘fit for the intended journey’, the loading density, inspections and spelling periods during the journey, and unloading.
- the **receiver** after unloading.

¹ this includes transport by vehicle on board a vessel (e.g. movements from Australian islands to the mainland)

Causing unnecessary harm to an animal is an act of cruelty and any person committing such an act may be prosecuted.

Under the Standards, the 'person in charge' is considered responsible and has a duty of care to ensure the welfare of livestock under their control and compliance with the Standards. The Standards are enforceable under state/territory legislation.

What's new in this edition?

Compared with earlier versions, this 2019 edition provides the following additional information:

- clear roles and responsibilities for consignors and transporters
- clear checklists to assess whether an animal is fit to load
- managing effluent
- loading densities
- requirements for transporting bobby calves
- using firearms or captive bolt for euthanasia.

This guide is divided into three main sections:

1. Roles and responsibilities
2. Producers/consignors and transporter responsibilities: how to assess if the animal 'is fit to load?'
3. Examples of animals that are unfit to load.

1. Roles and responsibilities

The 'person in charge' of animals is responsible for the welfare of the animal(s) under their control and reducing the risk to their welfare.

The 'risk to welfare of livestock' is the potential for a factor(s) to affect the wellbeing of livestock in a way that causes pain, injury or distress. Poor welfare outcomes could include sunburn, hypothermia, heat stress, dehydration, exhaustion, abortion, injury, metabolic disease or death. Protection from pain, injury or distress is central to achieving positive welfare outcomes for animals.

If the 'person in charge' prepares to transport or transports an animal that is unfit, that person commits an act of cruelty upon that animal, and may be liable to prosecution under state or territory legislation. As such, it is also unacceptable for any party to coerce or intimidate the 'person in charge' into loading an animal that is not fit for the journey.

Who is the 'person in charge' of animals?

The 'person in charge' of animals changes at different points during the journey. For example, as per the Standards, while the consignor is responsible for the preparation, inspection and selection of animals as 'fit for the intended journey' prior to loading, the transporter is responsible for loading and final inspection during loading as 'fit for the intended journey'.

Tables 1 and 2 outline who is the 'person in charge' of animals at different stages of the journey and the scope of those responsibilities.

The 'person in charge' of an animal is responsible for the welfare of that animal.

The rail authority is responsible for livestock during the rail journey and the master of the marine vessel is responsible for livestock on roll-on/roll-off livestock transport vehicles during a sea journey.

Table 1: At what point is a ‘person in charge’ of animals

Person in charge of animals	When the person is responsible
Producer/consignor	Prior to loading
Transporter/driver	Loading, unloading and during the journey
Receiver* (e.g. processor, agent, saleyard manager/superintendent)	After unloading

*For more detail on receiver responsibilities refer to animalwelfarestandards.net.au/saleyards-and-depots

Table 2: Scope of responsibilities for the ‘person in charge’ of animals

The producer/consignor is responsible for:	The transporter/driver (except for rail) is responsible for:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mustering and assembling livestock • handling prior to loading • preparation, including inspection and selection as ‘fit for the intended journey’ and ensuring all animals are NLIS compliant • providing feed and water • holding periods prior to loading • providing appropriate loading facilities that are fit for purpose • providing advice to the transporter at the point of loading on the fitness of animals being transported • completing the necessary transport documentation (e.g. NVD or waybill). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing appropriate transport vehicles that are fit for purpose • loading, including final inspection (during loading) as ‘fit for the intended journey’ • loading density • additional inspections of livestock post loading • spelling periods during the journey (i.e. animals are unloaded and have access to feed and water) • unloading and alerting the receiver to any welfare concerns detected during transport.
See pages 7-20 for specific responsibilities	See pages 7-20 for specific responsibilities

Note: Variations exist between states/territories. Please check relevant state/territory legislation.

2 • Producer/consignor and transporter/ driver responsibilities: how to assess if the animal 'is fit to load'?

- The producer/consignor is responsible for the welfare of animals prior to loading.
- The transporter/driver is responsible for the welfare of animals at the point of loading, during the journey and at the point of unloading.

Good animal husbandry

Practising good animal husbandry ensures that the basic needs of animals are met and is essential for maintaining acceptable animal welfare standards.

Good animal husbandry must ensure:

- ✓ a level of nutrition adequate to sustain good health and welfare
- ✓ access to sufficient water of suitable quality and quantity to meet physiological needs
- ✓ social contact with other livestock of the same species
- ✓ sufficient space to stand, lie and stretch limbs, adequate opportunity to move freely and exhibit normal patterns of behaviour
- ✓ the facilities, equipment, husbandry and handling procedures used minimise the stress to livestock
- ✓ the risk of pain, injury or disease is minimised
- ✓ provision of appropriate treatment including euthanasia if necessary
- ✓ provision of reasonable precautions against extremes of weather or natural disasters.

Preparing animals for transport

Correctly preparing livestock for transport is a vital part of any journey. Well prepared animals travel better, are less stressed and animal welfare issues are less likely to occur. Remember, if in doubt, leave it out.

Effective practices for preparing for the transport of livestock include:

- ✓ resting recently mustered livestock prior to loading
- ✓ co-mingling of animals from different mobs well in advance of the journey
- ✓ recording and communicating the date and times livestock last had access to feed and water
- ✓ competent selection of livestock prior to loading
- ✓ performing husbandry practices (e.g. horn tipping) well in advance of the journey
- ✓ planning the journey with consideration given to the length of the journey and weather conditions
- ✓ utilisation of appropriate loading facilities that are fit for purpose according to the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Livestock at Saleyards and Depots (see page 27)
- ✓ knowing who to contact in case of an emergency.

'Is it fit to load' checklist

Before livestock are loaded, ensure you complete this checklist.

Remember, it's your responsibility to ensure animals are fit to load and fit for the intended journey before they are loaded.

The animal:

- can walk on its own by bearing weight on all four legs
- is free from visible signs of severe injury or distress or conditions likely to further compromise its welfare during transport
- is strong enough to make the journey (i.e. not dehydrated or emaciated)
- can see well enough to walk, load and travel without impairment or distress (e.g. it is not blind in both eyes)
- is not in late pregnancy or too young to travel (refer to the Standards to determine limits for late pregnancy)
- has had adequate access to water prior to loading to meet the maximum time off water standards (see page 15).

Note: If the animal was grazed on lush green pasture, ensure it was removed from the paddock well in advance of loading and provided with access to adequate roughage (where possible).

Prior to the journey commencing all required paperwork must have been completed for the movement (e.g. NVD, Waybill, Animal Health Declaration).

- If all boxes are ticked, the animal is fit to load
- If one or more boxes are unticked, the animal is not fit to load.

If the animal is not fit to load you must:

- ✓ treat the animal and reassess, then once recovered and fit to load the animal can be transported, or
- ✓ consult a veterinary surgeon and then transport only under veterinary advice, or
- ✓ euthanase the animal (see pages 18–20).

Consignors need to meet specific requirements for bobby calves.

Prior to loading a bobby calf less than five days old, consignors must ensure the calf:

- ✓ has been adequately fed milk or milk replacer on the farm within six hours prior to loading
- ✓ is provided with thick bedding and room to lie down
- ✓ is protected from cold and heat
- ✓ does not have a journey time greater than six hours
- ✓ is only being transported directly to a calf rearing facility (i.e. not through a saleyard).

Prior to loading a bobby calf between five and 30 days old, consignors and transporters must ensure the calf:

- ✓ is protected from cold and heat
- ✓ is in good health, alert and able to rise from a lying position
- ✓ has been adequately fed milk or milk replacer on the farm within six hours prior to loading.

- ✓ is provided with thick bedding and room to lie down
- ✓ is transported to ensure delivery in less than 18 hours from last feed and has a journey time (including loading and unloading) of no more than 12 hours
- ✓ has as an accessible record that shows that the calf was last fed within six hours of loading unless the journey is between rearing properties and is less than six hours duration.

A person must not:

- ✗ consign a bobby calf across Bass Strait
- ✗ use a dog or an electric prod to move a bobby calf during the transport process
- ✗ throw, drop, hit or drag a calf at any time
- ✗ lift an animal off the ground by the head, ears, neck, tail, hair or single leg.

Calves must be handled gently and with patience at all times. Calves should be unloaded with care as they fatigue easily and may not follow other animals. Ramps used for bobby calves should not have a slope greater than 12 degrees.

A person consigning a premature calf (including induced calf) must ensure the calf is as fit for the journey as a normal, full-term calf.

Note: For more information on transporting bobby calves please refer to the Dairy Australia Website: www.dairyaustralia.com.au

Feed and water requirements

Maximum time off water

The Standards determine the maximum period of time that each species can be held off water during transport. See Table 3 on page 15 for more information. This period includes mustering and any time off water in yards, as well as the journey itself.

Note: these are maximum limits. Some animals may need additional access to water depending on their status (e.g. pregnant or young), environmental conditions (e.g. hot weather), stock condition, stocking density and journey length.

Journey log

Transporters, drivers and agents should always seek information about how long animals have been off feed and water before loading. If it's likely that the complete journey will take more than 24 hours, the 'person in charge' must record the date and time that animals last had access to water and feed and when they were last inspected. Written information about who to contact in an emergency must also be provided.

Feed and water prior to loading

While food and/or water is on offer, make sure that there is enough space for every animal to access it, as shy feeders/drinkers become an issue when space is limited. Consider giving electrolytes to animals during the preparation period as it may help prevent physical stress during a long journey.

Table 3: Maximum time off water and rest time

Species	Class of animal	Max. time off water	†Minimum spelling period
Cattle	Cattle over 6 months old	48 hours	36 hours
	Calves 30 days to 6 months old	24 hours	12 hours
	Lactating cows with calves at foot	24 hours	12 hours
	Cows known to be more than 6 months pregnant, excluding the last 4 weeks	24 hours	12 hours
	Calves 5 to 30 days old travelling without mothers (12 hours max. journey)	18 hours	
Sheep	Sheep over 4 months old	48 hours	36 hours
	Lambs under 4 months	28 hours	12 hours
	Ewes known to be more than 14 weeks pregnant, excluding the last 2 weeks	24 hours	12 hours
Goats	Goats over 6 months old	48 hours	36 hours
	Kids under 6 months old	28 hours	12 hours
	Goats known to be more than 14 weeks pregnant, excluding the last 2 weeks	24 hours	12 hours

† The minimum period that stock must be spelled (rested and given access to food, water and space to lie down) before starting another journey.

Source: Australian Animal Welfare Standards for the Land Transport of Livestock.

Managing effluent

Managing water and feed intake prior to consignment is an important part of pre-transport livestock preparation.

Appropriate management of feed and water intake prior to transport differs depending on the commercial requirements of the supply chain, seasonal conditions, feeding regimes and journey plans. Producers/consignors should check these requirements with the receiver and transporter to manage effluent. Consideration should be given to limiting feed intake (particularly lush green pasture) prior to transport and providing access to adequate roughage.

The Heavy Vehicle National Law classifies effluent loss as a load restraint breach that is subject to chain of responsibility provisions. All parties in the supply chain with influence or control over livestock effluent production in transit can be held liable.

Loading densities

The transporter must ensure that the loading of animals into livestock crates adheres to appropriate penning density recommendations in order to minimise welfare risks.

Loading densities are primarily determined according to body weight (see Table 4) but should also consider the following: species and class, wool or hair length, weather conditions, expected transport time, size and body condition, horn status and design and capacity of the pen/crate.

Table 4: Loading densities

	Mean live weight (kg)	Minimum floor area (m ² /head) standing	Number of head per 12.5m x 2.4m deck
Cattle	100	0.31	94
	150	0.42	70
	200	0.53	55
	250	0.77	38
	300	0.86	34
	350	0.98	30
	400	1.05	28
	450	1.13	26
	500	1.23	24
	550	1.34	22
Sheep	600	1.47	20
	650	1.63	18
	20	0.17	176
	30	0.19	157
	40	0.22	136
	50	0.25	120
Goats	60	0.29	103
	20	0.15	200
	30	0.17	176
	40	0.22	136
	50	0.25	120
	60	0.28	107

Source: Australian Animal Welfare Standards for the Land Transport of Livestock

Note: Additional space will be required for sheep with heavy wool, cattle, goats and sheep with long horns and females with young at foot.

Used properly, firearms provide one of the quickest and most effective methods for instantly euthanasing livestock.

For adult cattle, a firearm should deliver at least the muzzle energy of a standard 0.22 magnum calibre cartridge. For larger animals (e.g. bulls), 0.30 calibre high-power cartridges are recommended. For calves, sheep and goats, a firearm should deliver at least the muzzle energy of a standard 0.22-calibre long rifle cartridge.

To ensure maximum impact and the least possibility of misdirection, projectiles should be fired at the shortest range possible, but not with the barrel in contact with the animal's head.

Figures 1 and 2 indicate where the firearm or penetrating captive bolt should be directed to euthanase cattle, sheep and goats.

When using a penetrating captive bolt, the animal should be handled carefully and be appropriately restrained to avoid unnecessary distress.

Note: People undertaking the euthanasia of livestock must be appropriately trained. People using firearms must also be licensed in their use.

Figure 1: Euthanasia of cattle using a firearm or penetrating captive bolt.

(A) indicates the frontal method

(B) indicates the poll method which may be used in an emergency if the frontal position is unavailable.

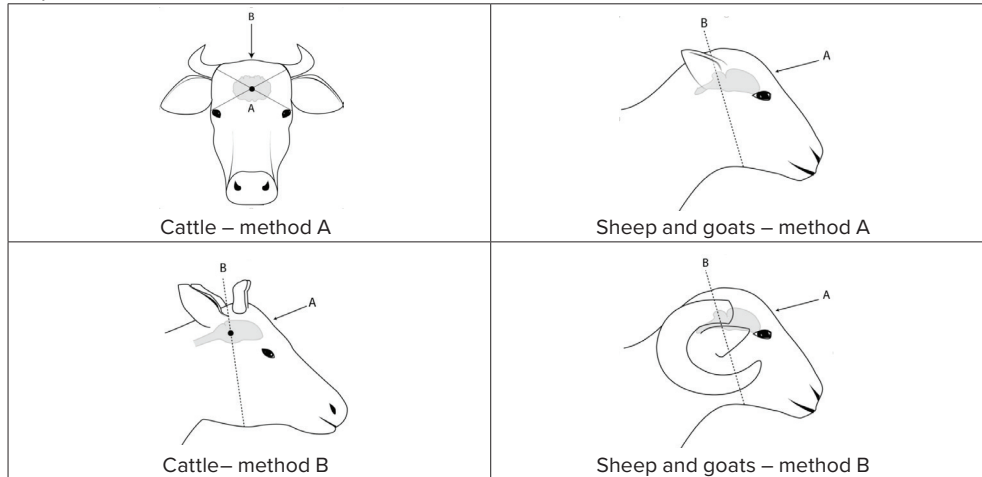


Figure 2: Euthanasia of sheep/goats using a firearm or penetrating captive bolt.

(A) indicates the frontal method

(B) indicates the poll method which is the preferred method for goats or sheep with horns.

After using a firearm or penetrating captive bolt livestock should be monitored for at least five minutes to ensure that death has occurred. The signs listed below should be used to confirm death of the animal:

- loss of consciousness and deliberate movement
- absence of corneal 'blink' reflex when the eyeball is touched
- maximum dilation of the pupil
- absence of rhythmic respiratory movements for at least five minutes.

Note, that after a lapse of up to a minute, the animal may start to twitch. This can occur in an animal that has been shot correctly.

The earliest sign of an ineffective shot is a return to normal rhythmic breathing. If in doubt, re-shoot.

3. Examples of animals that are unfit to load

The 'person in charge' of an animal is responsible for its welfare and ensuring the animal is not exposed to or treated in any way that causes pain, injury or distress.

Note: Many of these examples demonstrate extreme and severe cases. Conditions that are less severe but that are likely to result in pain or distress during transport will render the animal unfit to load. If in doubt, leave it out.

Lameness

Lameness in animals can be easy or difficult to detect depending on causal factors and the site of the injury or condition. Animals that cannot walk or stand normally are unfit to load. Signs of lameness include:

- bunny hopping or head bobbing
- carrying one leg when standing or walking
- knuckling over
- reluctance/refusal to stand or walk.

Leg deformity



Foot abscess



Recent injury



Old fracture



Old injury



Knuckling over



Note: Long claws may cause lameness and an arched back may indicate the animal is in pain.

Visible signs of injury or conditions that may compromise welfare

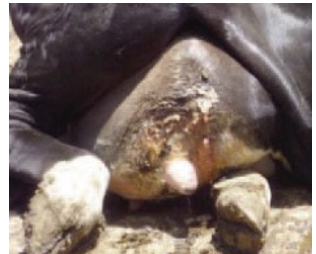
Ingrown horn



Hernia



Udder infection



Scabby Mouth



Cancer: Vulva



Enlarged testicles



Note: Sheep that have severe scabby mouth disease should not be loaded or transported.

Visible signs of injury or conditions that may compromise welfare

Swollen pizzle



Lumpy jaw*



Refusal to stand or walk



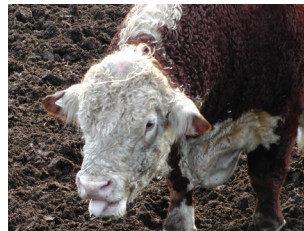
Full udder



Fly strike



Panting or heat stress



Note: Panting may indicate the animal is in pain. Animals in heavy lactation with full udders should not be transported. *Photo courtesy of Agriculture Victoria.

Blindness or eye disease

Eye cancer*



Blind in both eyes



Eye disease



Eye cancer



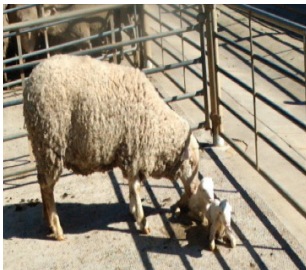
Skin cancer



Eye disease



* In some cases, it may be acceptable to transport animals with small eye cancers (less than 2cm), provided the lesion is free of discharge and not infested with fly larvae. If in doubt, consult a veterinarian.



*Note: Industry best practice recommends that animals within the last 2–4 weeks of gestation should only be transported under veterinary advice. Refer to the Standards to determine limits for late pregnancy.

Emaciated, dehydrated or weak



Note: Animals that are severely emaciated should not be transported. For more information on the implications of body condition of cattle fitness to load, refer to *A National Guide to describing and managing cattle in low body condition* (see page 27).

For more information

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock: www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/files/2015/12/Land-transport-of-livestock-Standards-and-Guidelines-Version-1-1-21-September-2012.pdf

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Livestock at Saleyards and Depots: www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/files/2016/03/AAW-SG_Livestock-at-Saleyards-and-Depots_2018.pdf

The Australian Standard for the Export of Livestock: www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/australian-standards-livestock

A National Guide to describing and managing cattle in low body condition: www.alpa.net.au/UserFiles/File/Documents/MLA%20Low%20Score%20cattle%20Sept%202013.pdf

If there's doubt whether an animal is fit to load, contact a veterinarian or the primary industry department in your state/territory.

ACT: Parks, Conservation and Lands	13 22 81
NSW: Department of Primary Industries	1800 808 095
NT: Department of Primary Industry and Resources.	1300 720 386
QLD: Queensland Government	13 25 23
SA: Primary Industries and Regions South Australia	1800 255 556
TAS: Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment	1300 368 550

VIC: Agriculture Victoria **13 61 86**
WA: Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development . . . **08 9368 3333**

Emergency contacts

LivestockASSIST – a 24-hour national hotline to coordinate emergency responses to incidents involving heavy vehicles carrying livestock.

The national number is **1800 4 ALRTA** (or **1800 425 782**).

Note: The hotline is free for all livestock transporters or anyone else at the scene of an incident.

Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline: **1800 675 888**

National Emergency Disease Protocols including National Livestock Standstill (*AUSVETPLAN Manuals and Documents*): animalhealthaustralia.com.au/our-publications/ausvetplan-manuals-and-documents



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