

Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce Strategic Implementation Plan

As required by the Terms of Reference for the Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce (the Taskforce), this strategic implementation plan provides advice and recommendations on:

1. Implementation of the *Animal Welfare Guidelines: Handling of Animals at Tasmanian Livestock Processing Premises 2024* (the Guidelines); and
2. Meaningful immediate and medium-term actions, including industry education, to ensure Tasmania's animal welfare standards meet or exceed the highest applying across Australia.

The following advice of the Taskforce is informed by the broad experience of Taskforce members, together with input from Biosecurity Tasmania (including its veterinary officers), the advice of Dr Leisha Hewitt, an independent, world-renown expert in animal welfare research, and collaboration with a Reference Group of Tasmanian livestock processors.

Implementation of the Guidelines

The Taskforce recommends that the Guidelines be implemented under section 44B of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*. Section 44B(1) states that '*The Minister, after consultation with the [Animal Welfare] Advisory Committee, may approve guidelines on animal welfare*'. Once approved, the Guidelines can be published by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, on its [website](#), together with existing animal welfare guidelines and codes of practice.

The Guidelines have been subjected to ongoing consultation with a Reference Group during their development. All Tasmanian abattoir and knackery operators processing sheep, cattle and pigs were invited to the Reference Group, both via email and phone. As a result of this ongoing consultation, and the fact the Guidelines are advisory in nature, rather than mandatory, the Taskforce is of the view that immediate implementation is appropriate.

The Guidelines will not be enforceable in their own right; however, they may be referred to by the regulator in response to a suspected method of management offence.

The Taskforce notes the *Guidelines for Mandatory Video Monitoring in Tasmanian Abattoirs and Knackeries 2024* were brought into force by means of an instruction from the Chief Veterinary Officer under section 14 of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* and a variation to the Conditions on Accreditation from the Chief Inspector of Primary Produce Safety under the *Primary Produce Safety Act 2011* on 20 March 2024. Processors were given three months to implement a video monitoring system at their facilities.

Incorporating additional species

The Taskforce recommends further Guidelines applicable to other species processed in Tasmania be developed to ensure consistency. The Guidelines at the time of writing are limited to the species identified in the footage released in late 2023, namely cattle, sheep and pigs.

Development of Standards

The Taskforce recommends that the Minister review the Guidelines within the next two years, and convert them, together with the *Guidelines for Mandatory Video Monitoring in Tasmanian Abattoirs and Knackeries 2024*, into Standards under section 44A of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*. Such Standards will be enforceable.

The Taskforce understands it is likely that the development of Standards would require a Regulatory Impact Statement, which will involve a comprehensive public consultation process. The industry, having had the opportunity to implement the Guidelines, will be well-placed to provide feedback to inform the development of the Standards. Furthermore, the authorised officers who have conducted inspections and audits using the Guidelines will have valuable insights to offer to the process.

Education and compliance

The Taskforce recommends Biosecurity Tasmania be provided with additional resources to support implementation of the Guidelines, specifically:

1. An animal welfare advisor for livestock processors
2. An educational campaign
3. Written and video materials that provide comprehensive, simple information about the Guidelines and best practice in animal welfare across a range of facility types
4. Checklists and template standard operating procedures to support the documentation required by the Guidelines
5. Sufficient staff to support regular, comprehensive audits against the Guidelines.

Animal Welfare Advisor

In the course of its work, it became clear to the Taskforce that Tasmania's smaller processors have limited resources to support them in implementing the Guidelines. Many spoke highly of former Senior Biosecurity Officer and Food Safety Auditor, Neville Price, who, after retirement, provided advice and support to smaller operators needing guidance on technical matters such as appropriate stunning methods.

The Taskforce formed the view that an Animal Welfare Advisor, supporting the implementation of the Guidelines and encouraging and guiding processors towards best practice, would significantly strengthen Tasmania's animal welfare. It would also provide the community with confidence that all facilities, no matter what size, have the expertise to implement the Guidelines in their entirety. The Taskforce is acutely aware of the critical role small facilities play in our local food system. An Animal Welfare Advisor would mitigate against the burden on these important facilities.

Campaign

A campaign to alert the industry and the community to the (new) Guidelines will be important. A campaign will need to contextualise the Guidelines, referencing for example the Australian Meat Industry Council's Standards and Guidelines, and the (current draft) Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry).

The Taskforce notes that good animal welfare across the supply chain (including producers, livestock agents, transporters and others involved in handling livestock) all contributes to good animal welfare at processing facilities. For this reason, the Taskforce is of the view that clear, sustained communications need to be issued to the entire supply chain reinforcing the need for strong animal welfare practices. The communications should include, but not be limited to, the following areas highlighted during the development of the Guidelines:

- The importance of producers and transporters meeting 'fit to load' requirements, particularly for vulnerable animals such as bobby calves
- Livestock delivered to processors must meet the processor's specifications, to ensure the animal can be humanely handled at the processor's facility
- Livestock must be curfewed appropriately prior to transport

- Infrastructure, particularly yards, loading ramps and trucks, used in delivering livestock to the processor, must be of an appropriate standard.

Written and video materials

In response to concerns about literacy levels in the industry, the Taskforce considers it very important that supporting materials, which break down the requirements of the Guidelines are communicated in simple, practical steps and are made available to processors and their staff. These materials would need to address the wide range of facilities in which the Guidelines will be implemented, noting the different infrastructure that may be used, the different species processed, and the range of roles involved in the process.

The Taskforce notes that the research and development corporation, Australian Meat Processor Corporation (AMPC) has educational resources that may be able to be used, or to supplement, materials developed by Government.

Checklists and templates

The Guidelines require processors to document evidence of their animal welfare practices. The Taskforce considers it would be of assistance to both the processors and the authorised officers auditing or inspecting their facilities, to have consistent checklists and templates that align with the obligations set out in the Guidelines. It will also assist processors to incorporate animal welfare documentation into their existing food safety documentation where appropriate, further minimising administrative burden on all parties.

Audits

A program of regular, comprehensive audits against the Guidelines, and both announced and unannounced inspections, support the implementation of the Guidelines and sends a strong message to industry and the community that the Government takes animal welfare very seriously.

The Taskforce notes that all processors are currently visited at least once per year, however, with the introduction of the Guidelines, it recommends additional staff are engaged to enable Biosecurity Tasmania to increase its monitoring activity. Audits and inspections are not only a compliance measure; they are also useful to processors to identify areas for improvement.

Existing audit processes, such as AusMEAT's audit for export facilities, should be recognised for equivalence wherever possible, to minimise the administrative burden on processors and authorised officers.

Further measures

To support strong, Tasmania-wide animal welfare practices the Taskforce recommends the following measures be researched by the industry (Government, processors, producers, transporters, industry organisations and other stakeholders)

1. Increased transparency
2. Recognition of best practice and innovation
3. Collaboration between processors, and the wider industry, to identify and address animal welfare challenges
4. Availability of registered training organisations delivering the latest meat processing qualifications.

Increased transparency

The Taskforce and Reference Group touched upon the benefits and challenges of increased transparency in the processing sector. In particular, it was noted that farmers seeking service kills (that is, where the processor slaughters the animal for the farmer, but the farmer retains ownership and takes possession of the carcass) report finding it difficult to locate local processors who undertake service kills and establish whether they have a reputation for high standards of animal welfare. Better information about processing facilities including the species they process and their animal welfare standards, would be helpful to producers. It would also encourage best practice animal welfare amongst processors seeking to establish themselves as a preferred service kill provider.

Recognition

Reference Group members suggested those processors who adopt and adhere to the Guidelines be recognised and promoted as best practice operators. This would serve to encourage best practice across the entire industry and highlight to the community at large the industry's commitment to animal welfare.

Innovations in the industry which improve animal welfare outcomes should be championed. Best practice in animal handling will undoubtedly continue to change in years to come, and the industry should be encouraged and celebrated when it makes improvements which embrace emerging best practices.

Collaboration

The Taskforce found feedback from the Reference Group essential to developing guidelines which would underpin meaningful, practical animal welfare measures. Collaboration between processors and other stakeholders, including Government, is needed to address existing and future challenges to the sector. For example, the Taskforce noted a project to address the length of time between last feed and slaughter for bobby calves is needed. Further, ritual slaughter practices are a challenge to animal welfare that needs further consideration.

Availability of training

The absence of registered training organisations delivering the latest meat processing qualifications in Tasmania emerged as a significant concern to processors and the sector. The Taskforce understands from informal advice from TasTAFE that it does not intend to put the latest meat processing qualifications on scope. Support for initiatives which make the latest training readily available in the State is essential to the industry and animal welfare.