

The Hon Jane Howlett MP
Minister for Primary Industries and Water

Dear Minister

Final report of the Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce

On 12 December 2023 the Tasmanian Parliament carried a motion ([Attachment A](#)) put by the Hon John Tucker MP in response to alleged animal welfare issues brought to light by footage obtained from Tasmanian livestock processing facilities. The then Minister for Primary Industries, Jo Palmer MLC, charged the Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce (the Taskforce), with assisting in addressing clause (3) of that Motion:

- (3) *Calls on the minister to take immediate action to address any regulatory failures and to report to the House in the first sitting week of 2024 on –*
- a) *an urgent audit of animal welfare standards in all licensed slaughterhouses together with a clear strategy for ongoing regular auditing, including unannounced monitoring audits together with industry education.*
 - b) *evidence of the installation by the 2024 resumption of parliament of 24-hour video surveillance of stun and slaughter rooms in all licensed abattoir premises and a commitment to any required legislative changes as early as possible in 2024 to make this compulsory.*
 - c) *any other action which the minister considers necessary to ensure Tasmania's animal welfare standards meet or exceed the highest standards applying across Australia.*

The Taskforce was composed of members from across industry, with representatives from Dairy Tasmania, TasFarmers, Sprout, the Australian Meat Industry Council, the RSPCA, a livestock transporter, and a veterinarian. It included Government representation from Biosecurity Tasmania and State Growth. I was appointed Chair due to my legal and regulatory background and extensive experience as a committee chair, coupled with my knowledge of the agricultural sector as a Tasmanian beef farmer.

The Taskforce Terms of Reference (at [Attachment B](#)) detail the purpose, composition, and operation of the Taskforce. It states that the Taskforce's roles and responsibilities were to:

- *identify high risk operational and regulatory issues including gaps, weaknesses, ambiguities and emerging stressors or issues that are impacting animal welfare in the State's livestock processing facilities (abattoirs and knackeries) across the livestock processing industry*
- *collaborate with industry to recommend meaningful, immediate and medium-term actions, with a first priority to determine how to mandate video surveillance of stun and slaughter rooms in all licensed livestock processing facilities*
- *develop a Standard and/or Guidelines for Tasmania that resolves the issues that can be mandated in particular addressing video surveillance; licensees' responsibilities; and other identified issues across the livestock processing industry*

- *prepare an outcomes-based Strategic Implementation Plan*
- *provide advice on the compliance and assurance framework, including benchmarks for Government food safety audits and animal welfare inspections, and industry education*
- *regularly report on progress through the Secretary NRE Tas to the Minister*
- *submit recommendations for consideration by the Minister and in particular, provide an interim report to the Minister to inform an update to the House of Parliament in the first sitting week of 2024.*

Processing wildlife, such as wallabies, and processing animals on farm is out of scope of the Terms of Reference. Further, the Taskforce examined only the processing of the main livestock classes identified in the footage, being cattle (including calves), sheep and pigs.

The Taskforce endeavoured to meet fortnightly and met a total of 11 times since its first meeting on 19 December 2023. The Taskforce developed a program of work to ensure it delivered against the Terms of Reference in the most efficient manner possible. Following each meeting I sent a communique to the Minister for Primary Industries and Water, and the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. During caretaker period, the communiqués were sent to the Secretary only.

The Taskforce determined to use the Australian Meat Industry Council's voluntary Industry Animal Welfare Standard and Guide and the Draft Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines (Livestock at Processing Establishments) as the bases from which to develop Guidelines for the Tasmanian livestock processing sector. The areas covered by those documents are:

- Monitoring of livestock welfare (video monitoring surveillance)
- Staff competencies
- Design, operation and maintenance of facilities and equipment
- Pre-slaughter care and handling
- Slaughter and emergency killing
- Species-specific requirements
- Management responsibilities and procedures.

The Taskforce prioritised these areas with reference to the Motion, and the level of impact on animal welfare. Each meeting was dedicated to examining one of the listed areas and making recommendations with respect to the corresponding guidelines to be developed.

A Reference Group, to which all licensed processors in the State were personally invited via email and phone, met to provide feedback to the Taskforce before any recommendations were finalised and given to Biosecurity Tasmania's Stephen Hall, (Principal Advisor, Legal Services) to commence drafting.

The Reference Group met five times, and their engagement was hugely beneficial to the process, particularly as they gave feedback regarding the likely impact of proposed Guidelines in the context of their existing operations, which ranged from a single-person business to a multinational corporation.

The first issue addressed by the Taskforce was the introduction of video monitoring in livestock processing facilities. The *Guidelines for Mandatory Video Monitoring in Tasmanian Abattoirs and Knackeries 2024* (at [Attachment C](#)) 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. They had the flexibility to implement a system appropriate to the scale of their business, provided it captured the footage prescribed by the Taskforce.

The Taskforce subsequently examined and made recommendations to inform the drafting of guidelines with respect to staff competencies, design, operation and maintenance of facilities and equipment, pre-slaughter care and handling, slaughter and emergency killing, species-specific requirements and management responsibilities.

Draft recommendations from the Taskforce on animal handling, slaughter and species-specific requirements were presented at a workshop of Reference Group and Taskforce members on 24 April 2024. This was a day-long workshop in Campbell Town, where the attendees discussed in detail the proposed recommendations and their likely impact on animal welfare and operations of livestock processing facilities. That discussion was invaluable as it informed the drafting of the guidelines pertaining to those topics.

Once the Guidelines were drafted in their entirety, upon recommendation of the Taskforce, Biosecurity Tasmania engaged Dr Leisha Hewitt, a world expert in ensuring animal welfare in livestock processing, to undertake an independent review. The purpose of the review was to ensure the Guidelines reflected the latest best practice in animal welfare in livestock processing facilities. Dr Hewitt was asked to:

1. Advise if the animal welfare measures in the Guidelines were consistent with scientific best practice, and if not, explain why, and propose alternative measures that might be implemented to achieve the same or similar outcomes
2. Advise whether the terminology pertaining to animal welfare in the glossary to the Guidelines was accurately defined, and if not, suggest more accurate definitions
3. Highlight any ambiguity in the Guidelines that may make it difficult for those implementing the Guidelines to understand what compliance would look like
4. Highlight any omission in the Guidelines that would lead to poor animal welfare outcomes in livestock processing establishments.

Furthermore, Biosecurity Tasmania's Chief Veterinary Officer, and a departmental vet with extensive experience in livestock processing facilities, also provided feedback on the completed draft. All feedback was used to further refine the Guidelines.

Simultaneously, the Taskforce developed a draft Strategic Implementation Plan, as required under the Terms of Reference. The Strategic Implementation Plan set out recommendations relating to:

1. Awareness raising (ensuring the sector is aware of the new Guidelines)
2. Education (both for processors and for the supply chain, ensuring they understand what the Guidelines require, and what good animal welfare looks like)
3. Collaboration (amongst all stakeholders to develop systems that optimise animal welfare)
4. Compliance (ranging from a program of regular audits through to public recognition of good practice)

5. Additional species (development of further Guidelines to address other species processed in the State).

Finally, the draft Guidelines and draft Strategic Implementation Plan were presented to a second workshop of Reference Group and Taskforce members on 10 July 2024. At this workshop the attendees examined the Guidelines in full and provided final comments. They also discussed the draft Strategic Implementation Plan and gave feedback on the proposed measures to support adoption of the Guidelines and improvements to animal welfare across the Tasmania livestock industry.

Once this final feedback was incorporated into the Guidelines and Strategic Implementation Plan, both documents were provided to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. The *Animal Welfare Act 1993* (the Act) requires the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to consider any Guidelines before they can be implemented under Section 44B of the Act.

The Committee discussed the *Animal Welfare Guidelines: Handling of Animals at Tasmanian Livestock Processing Premises 2024* (the Guidelines) ([Attachment D](#)) and the Strategic Implementation Plan ([Attachment E](#)) at their meeting on 2 August 2024. Their feedback will be supplied directly to you.

As set out in the Strategic Implementation Plan, the Taskforce recommends the Guidelines are immediately implemented under Section 44B of the Act. As Guidelines, they will not be directly enforceable but can be considered when determining whether a processor has committed a 'method of management offence' under section 7 of the Act or has complied with their animal welfare duty under section 6.

To make these Guidelines directly enforceable will require them to be adopted as Regulations under the Act, which is likely to require a regulatory impact statement. By implementing the Guidelines under section 44B in the first instance, the Guidelines can be rolled out to industry in a far shorter timeframe and 'tested' prior to being drafted into Regulations.

Thank you for the opportunity to Chair the Taskforce and undertake this important work. I am deeply grateful to the members of the Taskforce and the Reference Group who have made this challenging task a collaborative and rewarding process. I would also like to thank the staff of Biosecurity Tasmania, particularly General Manager Rae Burrows, Executive Officer Louise Brooke, and Principal Advisor Stephen Hall. They have tirelessly supported the Taskforce and provided it with the resources and information it needed to conduct its work efficiently and effectively.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information on the work of the Taskforce.

Yours sincerely



Felicity Richards

Chair, Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce

Attachments

- A. Motion of Tuesday 12 December 2023: Tasmanian Quality Meats (TQM) Abattoir
- B. Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce Terms of Reference
- C. Guidelines for Mandatory Video Monitoring in Tasmanian Abattoirs and Knackeries 2024
- D. Animal Welfare Guidelines: Handling of Animals at Tasmanian Livestock Processing Premises 2024
- E. Strategic implementation plan