

GOVERNMENT REPORT ON STRENGTHENING ANIMAL WELFARE IN LIVESTOCK PROCESSING

May 2024

Background

In November 2023, distressing footage from five Tasmanian abattoirs was publicly released. Biosecurity Tasmania acted immediately to commence an investigation under the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* in response to the footage.

The Government acted immediately to establish the Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce to ensure an enduring animal welfare culture at the State's livestock processing facilities and meet the expectations of industry, the community and government.

The Taskforce, which is chaired by Ms Richards, includes representatives from:

- TasFarmers;
- Dairy Tasmania;
- Sprout Tasmania;
- Livestock Transport Industry;
- RSPCA Tasmania;
- Australian Meat Industry Council;
- Department of State Growth; and
- Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (Biosecurity Tasmania)

The Taskforce is developing standards, guidelines and a strategy. It will also look at workplace culture in our livestock processing facilities, including how we can better train and support those working in the sector, what is needed to ensure that the highest standards are upheld by every employee, and what has worked in other jurisdictions.

The full Taskforce Terms of Reference are publicly available on the NRE Tas website at: <https://nre.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/tasmanian-livestock-processing-taskforce>.

Progress to-date:

Since 14 December 2023, there has been significant progress to support improved animal welfare:

- The Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce has met regularly and has established a Reference Group (consisting of abattoir operators) to support its work.
- All operators of Tasmania's abattoirs, slaughterhouses and knackerries were invited to form the Reference Group to ensure proposals by the Taskforce are considered for practical implementation.
- Biosecurity Tasmania completed a round of unannounced visits to all abattoirs and knackerries not subject to investigation between December 2023 and early March 2024. The five abattoirs that are the subject of investigation were inspected as part of the investigation process. In addition, food safety audits under the *Primary Produce Safety Act 2011* (which includes animal welfare considerations) of all operating processing facilities were undertaken by an external consultant throughout February and March 2024.
- The outcome of the inspections will form the basis of an ongoing monitoring and education plan and strategy for the remainder of 2024.

- The investigation into the five processing facilities has been progressing, but further details cannot be provided at this stage in the investigation so as to not prejudice the investigation.
- In March 2024, the *Guidelines for Mandatory Video Monitoring in Tasmanian Abattoirs & Knackeries* and a *Video Monitoring in Processing Operations Legal Requirements Checklist* were issued to all processing facilities, including knackeries. These documents were developed by the Taskforce and Reference Group, using the draft national guidelines for animal welfare for livestock processing and the Australian Meat Industry Council's guidelines for these facilities as the basis for discussion and development. The Guidelines cover video monitoring design, operation and technical specifications, retention of video footage, and review and inspection requirements. The Guidelines have been published on the NRE Tas website.
- Further, the Chief Veterinary Officer and the Chief Inspector Primary Produce Safety issued directions and revised accreditation to all abattoirs and knackeries in the State in late March 2024, making it a lawful requirement for video surveillance to be in place within three months (before the end of June 2024). This delivers on mandatory video surveillance.
- The appointment of two animal welfare officers was announced on 14 December 2023. The Tasmanian Government's 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's future includes an additional \$1.2 million for Biosecurity Tasmania over three years.

Next Steps

An enduring animal welfare culture is, however, much more than video monitoring. The Taskforce has a work program to develop a complete draft set of guidelines for livestock processing facilities covering:

- Processing staff competency (draft guidelines now being reviewed).
- Design, operation and maintenance of facilities and equipment.
- Responsibilities and management procedures.
- Pre-slaughter care and handling.
- Slaughter and emergency killing.
- Specific requirements for cattle, bobby calves, pigs and sheep were assessed during a collaborative workshop on 24 April 2024, which comprised both Taskforce and Reference Group members.

The Taskforce is aiming to provide the draft guidelines to Government by mid-2024. The draft guidelines will be the subject of consultation. A Regulatory Impact Statement is likely to be required before these guidelines can be enshrined in Animal Welfare Regulations and supporting Guidelines under the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*.

The Government anticipates that the Taskforce will also provide advice on what action is needed to implement the new standards and guidelines, particularly with respect to education for the industry, as well as compliance monitoring and enforcement activities.