



Animal Welfare for Livestock Producers

The purpose of this brochure is to give you a basic understanding of animal welfare, what it is, what are the implications of poor welfare and how animal welfare is regulated in Victoria.

Throughout this document the term "Livestock Producer" will refer to all livestock owners, transporters, stockpeople and abattoir workers; the term "Stockpeople" will refer to all those that work directly with livestock on a day-to-day basis.

What is animal welfare?

Animal welfare or animal well-being refers to the physical *and* mental health of animals.

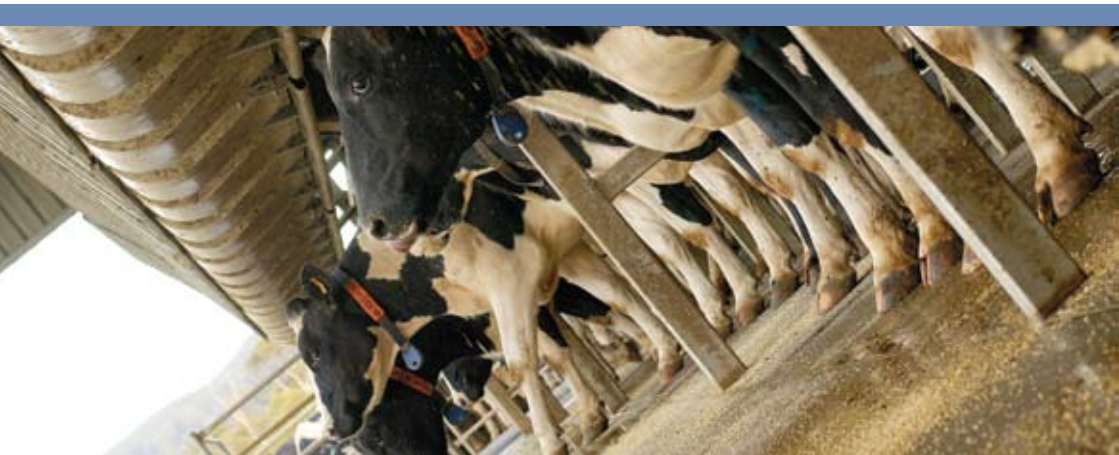
When we talk about animal welfare we are usually referring to how well an animal is adapted to/coping with the environment in which it lives, both physically and emotionally (mentally).



Why worry about animal welfare?

As all livestock producers understand, there are several reasons to be concerned about animal welfare:

- Poor animal welfare impacts on animal production and reproduction
- Poor animal welfare can result in loss of market access
- Legislation requires livestock owners to care for the welfare of their animals
- Livestock are capable of feeling pain and having a desire for a pleasurable life (they are sentient or have feelings)



Poor animal welfare results in production losses:

Most stockpeople easily recognise when the welfare of their animals is compromised, often initially noticing that an animal's behaviour is different or production and/or reproductive performance have declined.

Research throughout the livestock industries has shown that animals showing poor physical and/or mental health can have lower reproduction, growth and production rates.

When an animal is placed in an environment (housing, food, water, social contact, climate or handling) that fails to fully provide for all its' needs, the animal's body must act to compensate. The bodily and behavioural mechanisms used to 'cope', divert energy away from non-essential functions, such as growth, reproduction and production, towards maintaining the animal's internal environment.

Therefore, as most stockpeople are aware, poor welfare can result in losses in growth, production and reproduction.

Often, however, while livestock producers understand, and can readily identify, the effects of poor environments on the welfare of their animals, they are unaware of the impact that they, as animal handlers, can have.

Research has shown that poor animal handling can result in livestock that are highly fearful of humans.

Fear of humans can decrease welfare, production, reproduction and growth as a result of higher stress levels in animals that are handled poorly.

Results of high fear levels in pigs.

Studies	Fear animals	
	Depression in growth	Depression in reproduction
Australian	6%	7%
USA	7%	4%

Understanding the natural behaviour of livestock is important in determining the best method of handling.

For more information on the impacts of inadequate environments and poor handling on livestock production please contact your local DPI Animal Health Staff (ph: 136 186) or the Animal Welfare Science Centre (awsc-info@unimelb.edu.au/ ph: 03 8344 8933).

Poor animal welfare results in loss of market access:

In the last two decades, consumers have become more aware and concerned about the welfare of animals. Animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA, and animal rights organisations such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), and Animals Australia have raised the profile of animal welfare in livestock production systems.

An increased awareness of animal welfare is increasingly encouraging consumers to seek animal welfare assurances for the animal products they buy. This in turn has encouraged retailers (such as Woolworths/Safeway, and Coles) and fast food outlets (such as McDonald and KFC) to regulate and label how the meat and eggs that they purchase are produced.



You will notice when you enter a supermarket that eggs are now labelled as either cage, barn laid or free range on the carton. Labelled products, indicating free-range production, are also available for pork and poultry meat.

A failure to recognise the importance of animal welfare to consumers may result in the loss of market access or market share.

It is important that all livestock producers investigate and implement animal welfare strategies on their farms to ensure market access and the sustainability of livestock production in Australia.

For further information about animal welfare and market access or help with developing a plan to improve the welfare of your livestock please contact your local DPI Animal Health Staff (ph: 136 186).

Victorian Government legislates that the welfare of livestock must be ensured:

There are two pieces of government legislation which outline our responsibilities towards livestock. The first is the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (POCTA) 1986 and the second is the Livestock Disease Control Act (LCDA) 1984.

The purpose of POCTA is to:

- (a) prevent cruelty to animals
- (b) encourage the considerate treatment of animals
- (c) improve the level of community awareness about the welfare of animals

Section 9 of the act sets out Cruelty offences:

These include a person who....

- does or omits to do an act with the result that unreasonable pain or suffering is caused, or is likely to be caused, to an animal; or
- drives, conveys, carries or packs an animal in a manner or position or in circumstances which subjects, or is likely to subject, it to unnecessary pain or suffering; or
- is the owner or the person in charge of an animal which is confined or otherwise unable to provide for itself and fails to provide the animal with proper and sufficient food, drink or shelter;

commits an act of cruelty upon that animal and is guilty of an offence.

POCTA is supported by a series of Codes of Practice in the state of Victoria, providing minimum guidelines for ensuring the physical and mental comfort and health of livestock both on-farm, during transport, and at saleyards and slaughter.

The Codes of Practice provide best practice guidelines, emphasise individuals' responsibilities and place a high priority on minimising stress in animals.

Codes of Practice can be accessed in full from www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare (then click on link 'Acts, Regulations & Codes of Practice'), or contact your local DPI Animal Health Staff (ph: 136 186).

The LDCA outlines the identification, treatment and management of disease in livestock.

As a general rule, should you suspect that your animals are unwell, you should call your local veterinarian or DPI Animal Health Staff for advice.



Heifer suffering from Actinobacillosis

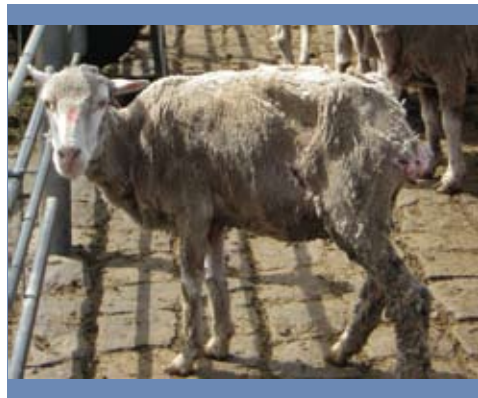
Everyone has a duty of care for animals in their charge, and responsibility as members of the community for the welfare of animals

Livestock are sentient:

Research over the past 30 years has enabled scientists to determine that all livestock species (and fish) have the necessary brain structures and nervous system to allow them to feel pain and suffer.

Pain and suffering are forms of stress on the animal and stressed animals can show compromised growth, production and reproduction.

In addition, research has indicated that all livestock species are capable of comprehending and desiring pleasurable experiences.



Minimising pain and providing a comfortable environment will safe-guard and, perhaps, enhance the production capabilities of your stock.

Failure to recognise sentience in livestock species could result in production losses, market access loss and breaches of POCTA.

General signs of pain in livestock:

The following table displays, scientifically observed, common signs of pain in different livestock species.

	<i>Vocalisation</i>	<i>Grinding Teeth</i>	<i>Reluctance to Move</i>	<i>Rapid/ Shallow Breathing</i>	<i>Isolation from Group Mates/ Unresponsive to Social Contact</i>	<i>Foot Stamping</i>	<i>Abnormal Posture or Frequent Postural Changes</i>	<i>Head Tucked/ Eyes Closed</i>	<i>Decreased Production</i>
<i>Cattle</i>	X	X	X				X		X
<i>Pigs</i>	X	X	X		X		X		X
<i>Sheep</i>	X	X			X		X		
<i>Goats</i>	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
<i>Poultry</i>	X						X	X	

X indicates that this species commonly displays this type of behaviour when in pain.

This is not an exhaustive list and it should be noted that some animals could display all of these symptoms.

For more information about animal sentience please contact your local DPI Animal Health Staff (ph: 136 186) or the Animal Welfare Science Centre (awsc-info@unimelb.edu.au/ ph: 03 8344 8933)

How to ensure livestock have good welfare:

Some basic guidelines:

Regular Surveillance of Stock:

Check your stock regularly - all stock should be inspected on a regular basis.

For intensively housed livestock it is recommended that you inspect your animals at least 1-2 times per day. For extensively housed livestock it is recommended that you inspect your stock at least once every 1-2 days.

As most stockpeople are aware, regular surveillance enables rapid identification of changes in stock welfare. You become familiar with your stock and their behavioural patterns, making it easier to identify changes.

Behavioural change is often the first sign that the welfare of an individual animal or a group of animals is being compromised.

If you notice that your animal(s) behaviour has changed, then it is time to do some further investigation by approaching and catching/yarding the animal(s) affected.

In addition, regular stock surveillance will also help familiarise your stock to you. This is important in reducing animal's fear of humans, and may go a long way to improving the ease with which your stock may be handled, particularly with extensively grazed animals. Research has shown that most livestock species are able to distinguish between familiar and unfamiliar handlers.

Enabling your stock to become familiar with you in a neutral setting may also reduce the impact of negative procedures that are necessary as part of normal livestock husbandry.



Regular surveillance should also help indicate to you if you have a predator problem, as you will be more likely to notice a carcass and/or a general unease in the stock.

Check feed, water and shelter access regularly.

Many industries now provide producers with auditing guidelines to help with monitoring the well-being of stock and ensure the best quality product. See **Animal Welfare Audits** (page 11).

Housing and Husbandry

Ensure your housing and husbandry practices meet, at least, the *minimum requirements* set out in the Code of Practice.

Codes of practice are available for all livestock industries and peripheral industries, such as Saleyards, Transporting Livestock, and Dogs.

While the Codes of Practice are currently not enforceable by law, livestock owners failing to meet the minimum requirements can be subject to prosecution under POCTA (see page 3) for “do[ing] or omit[ing] to do an act with the result that unreasonable pain or suffering is caused, or is likely to be caused, to an animal”.

Therefore, it is important to obtain a copy of the code of practice for your livestock species and ensure your housing and husbandry is, at the very least, of *minimum standard*.

- *It is important to note, that minimum standards do not always ensure good welfare.*
- *They are just the bare minimum required under POCTA Act.*
- *Therefore, you should consult with your industry and or local Animal Health Officer for managing your housing and husbandry procedures to improve and maintain good animal welfare.*

Handy Hints for reducing the impact of negative husbandry procedures

- Follow the code of practice – the Codes of practice provide guidelines for the appropriate age and minimum requirements for ensuring the comfort of animals undergoing negative or invasive husbandry procedures
- Recognise the general signs of pain and distress in your stock (see Page 7)

- Enabling your animals to become used to (habituated) separation from the group and handling by humans reduces fear associated with isolation, close inspection and palpation.

While it can be time consuming, spending time moving quietly amongst your animals on a daily/weekly basis will help habituate them to your presence.

Finding the time to bring stock into yards and run them through races and crushes without performing a procedure (particularly avoiding negative or painful procedures) can help familiarise your stock with you and other stockpeople; helping to improve the ease and speed with which husbandry procedures can be carried out. This is particularly important for young or new stock.

- Provision of a preferred feed or positive handling around the time of a husbandry procedure may help to reduce the negativity of the procedure and may also help to also reduce any association between pain/discomfort of the procedure and the stockperson.
- Performing an aversive treatment at a specific location by either an unfamiliar or familiar operator wearing distinctive clothing can also help to prevent animals from associating the negative aspects of husbandry procedures and handling with their regular animal carer.

Research has shown that animals can distinguish between handlers, particularly handlers wearing distinctive clothing.

If you cannot get a contractor or a veterinarian to carry out a painful husbandry procedure, changing into clothing very distinct from what you normally wear may prevent stock from recognising you.

- Allowing animals the opportunity to interact with humans may be rewarding for animals in environments that lack complexity – particularly intensively housed pigs.



Animal Welfare Audits

Auditing materials and Standards have been developed between industry bodies and animal welfare research scientists.

The advantage of using auditing materials to monitor the welfare of your stock is that the auditing material provides you with step by step guidelines for monitoring, identifying and developing strategies to improve animal welfare. The goal of these programs is to maintain or improve productivity, reproduction and product quality.

Many industries have developed or are developing animal welfare auditing materials for farms, transporters and abattoirs. Speak to your industry body about access to these materials.

Seek out Animal Welfare Auditing materials and Standards from your industry bodies.

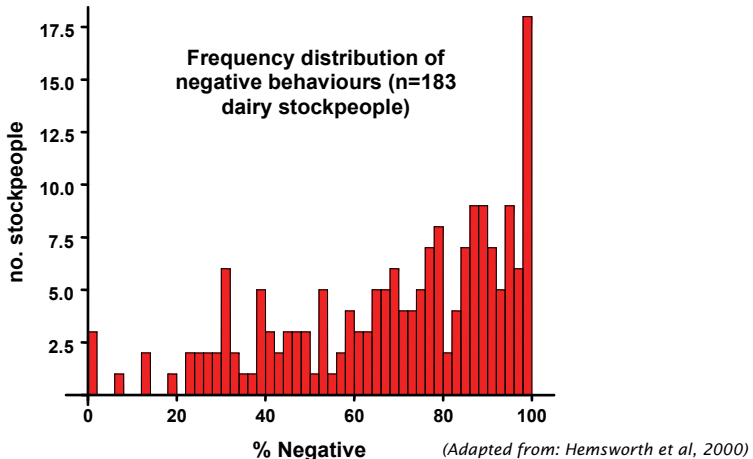
Example from Broiler Welfare Auditing Documentation:

Shed		Auditor		
Date		Date of Audit for Previous Batch of Birds		
Question SHADED QUESTIONS REFER TO CRITICAL ACTIONS AND MUST BE COMPLIED WITH. Questions in bold reflect good practice actions; those with a † must be complied with (if applicable). <i>Questions in italics reflect difficult to verify good practice questions.</i> † Question complies with code of practice	Answer (tick) (evidence available and viewed) Shading indicates the anticipated compliance response if the question applies.			Tick if there is an item or problem that needs fixing For further info. see Rationale question number:
	Yes	No	n/a	
SET-UP PRIOR TO BIRDS' ARRIVAL				
Were drinkers at the correct height? - Level with the birds' back for bell/cup drinkers? - Within reach for nipple drinkers?				1
Was water pressure gauge/height gauge checked since the last batch? WAS WATER AVAILABLE AT ALL NIPPLES/CUPS/BELLS?				1
If using surface water was it sanitised prior to reaching the birds? <i>Was water supply potable i.e. is it fit to drink? †</i>				1
If using bore water was it tested for pH and salts annually?†*				1
Was water supply tested for microbial contamination at least annually?†*				1
Was feed available on the ground on paper or in trays?				2
Were feeders on the floor and were all feeder points accessible?				2
Were feeder adjustment devices checked?				2
WAS ALL RESIDUAL FEED REMOVED AT THE END OF THE PREVIOUS BATCH?†				2
Was the shed cleaned and sanitised according to company recommendations?†				3

Understanding Animal Behaviour and Low Stress Stock Handling

Research has shown that inappropriate handling can result in up to a 20% variation in productivity, reproduction and product quality in livestock.

Inappropriate handling can lead to fear of humans and, in turn, depending on the regularity of contact and handling, chronic stress responses.



This graph shows the percentage of negative behaviours used by 183 different stockpeople within the Australian Dairy Industry when handling cows during routine milking. More than half of the stockpeople used between 70-100% negative behaviours including: slapping, hitting, kicking, shouting and fast speed of movement.

Understanding the behaviour of your stock and how they perceive (understand) humans is a key factor in ensuring you behave in ways that will not initiate a fear response.

While fear is a normal and adaptive response, designed to prevent injury, chronic fear can cause long term stress responses decreasing the productivity and welfare of animals and make handling them very difficult.

Low Stress Stock Handling courses are available around the State (please ask your local DPI Animal Health Staff).

In addition, the Animal Welfare Science Centre is continuing to develop a series of professional stockperson handling packages for the livestock industries, transporters and abattoirs. Currently, ProHand courses are available for the pig and dairy industries (for more information about these packages please contact *the Animal Welfare Science Centre* on awsc-info@unimelb.edu.au or ph: 03 8344 8933).

Animal Welfare Plan

Work with your farm consultant/veterinarian or local DPI Animal Health Staff to assess the welfare of your livestock and to develop a plan to improve areas where welfare issues are identified.

Your plan may need to include:

- changes to housing arrangements,
- increasing the regularity of stock surveillance,
- familiarising your stock with you,
- training in animal behaviour and low stress stock handling, and
- the implementation of an animal welfare auditing system on your farm.



IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT GOOD ANIMAL WELFARE IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION.

If you would like further information on any of the topics contained in this brochure or have other enquiries please contact your local DPI Animal Health Staff on

ph:136 186 or

email customer@dpi.vic.gov.au or

visit www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare.

Industry Contacts

Red Meat

Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)
www.mla.com.au

Beef CRC
<http://svc192.bne150v.server-web.com/default.asp>
Email: beefcrc@une.edu.au

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI)
www.awi.com.au

Pork

Australian Pork Limited (APL)
www.apl.com.au

Free Range Pork Farmers Association
www.freerangepork.com.au

Laying Hens

Australian Egg Corporation Limited (AECL)
www.aecl.org

Free range farmers association
www.freerangefarmers.com.au

Meat Birds

Australian Chicken Meat Federation (Inc)
www.chicken.org.au

Dairy Industry

Dairy Australia (DA)
www.dairyaustralia.com.au

National Centre for Dairy Education (NCDE)
www.ncdea.edu.au

Animal Health and Welfare

Animal Health Australia
www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au

Animal Welfare Science Centre
www.animalwelfare.net.au

Bureau of Animal Welfare
www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare
Ph: 136 186

Department of Primary Industries
www.dpi.vic.gov.au/farming
Ph: 136 186

RSPCA



www.rspca.org.au

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