

FINAL REPORT

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Animal welfare is a key priority for the red meat processing industry. The red meat processing industry wants and that it continues to respond to consumer demands by striving for best practice.

In the 2017-18 call for proposals, AMPC indicated that stockperson awareness, capability and training was priority area to maintain and improve the welfare of animal consigned for processing. This project aimed to contribute this priority, by developing “Is it fit to process?” guides for small to medium enterprises (SME) processing for the domestic market, as well as Tier 1 export abattoirs.

The project has been successful in achieving this aim.

Three *Is the Animal Fit to Process?* guides were developed, based on the highly successful *Is it fit to load?* guide published by MLA, one guide for cattle, one for goats/sheep and one for calves.

The *Is the Animal Fit to Process?* guides have undergone broad industry and government consultation between October 2018 and January 2019. Comments on the draft guides have been received from the Australian Meat Industry Council, Animal Health Australia, Department of Agriculture and Water Resources Animal Health Policy Branch, Agriculture Victoria, New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, the Tasmanian and NSW Departments of Agriculture, RSPC Australia and Animal Angels (which provided several photographs for the guides).

Sections of the guides were substantially improved by the consultation process, including the stronger links to the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport Standard of Livestock*, the addition of a section describing how to prepare an animal welfare incident report and the inclusion of a table summarising emergency animal disease signs.

This project has revealed strong stakeholder interest in animal welfare at Australian red meat processing plants. It has also revealed how difficult it can be to achieve agreement across broad stakeholder groups on such a topical issue. Within this environment, the project has achieved its aim of developing “Is it fit to process?” guides for small to medium enterprises (SME) processing for the domestic market, as well as Tier 1 export abattoirs. The guides will provide a benchmark as the processing industry continually improves animal welfare at Australian abattoirs.

The project has uncovered that an animal welfare incident report template that domestic plants can use to report the arrival on animals with unfit to load conditions does not exist. The animal welfare incident report template developed by DAWR as part of Meat Notice 16-07 is considered too onerous for domestic plants by some stakeholders. We recommend that a simple animal welfare incident report template for domestic plants be developed.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In the 2017-18 call for proposals, AMPC indicated that the ‘Welfare of animal with our care’ is a key priority for the red meat processing industry and that it is imperative industry seeks continuous improvements in animal welfare. The red meat processing industry wants to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are maintained and that it continues to respond to consumer demands by striving for best practice. AMPC has identified stockperson awareness, capability and training as priority area to maintain and improve the welfare of animal consigned for processing.

All animals consigned for slaughter must undergo ante mortem inspection to ensure they are fit for processing. In Tier 2 export abattoirs that have a full-time On-Plant Veterinarian in attendance, the ante mortem inspection is conducted by On-Plant Veterinarians. In domestic and Tier 1 export abattoirs, the ante mortem inspection is done by Meat Safety Inspectors or stockpersons. It is this group that the project is seeking to support, by providing information to help Meat Safety Inspectors and stockpersons decide if an animal is fit to kill, can be processed as a suspect, should undergo emergency kill or must be euthanized and condemned.

In 2015 the World Organisation for Animal Health, the influential global body that sets health standards for international trade in animals and animal products, evaluated Australia’s animal health and biosecurity system. Although 38 of the 47 criteria measured were given the highest competency level, at level five, areas of deficiency were identified. Of direct relevance to the red meat processing sector, the World Organisation for Animal Health was concerned about the arrangements for ante-mortem inspection at domestic abattoirs and at Tier 1 export abattoirs where an On-Plant veterinarian is not present full time. The World Organisation for Animal Health was concerned that this arrangement may compromise Australia’s program of general animal disease surveillance.

The highly successful *Is it fit to load?* guide was first published by MLA in 2003 and has undergone numerous re-prints since first publication. The *Is it fit to load?* guide was last re-published in 2012 and re-printed in 2016, includes the Australian Welfare Standards for the Land Transport of Animals and was endorsed by key industry and welfare organisations and government. The *Is it fit to load?* guide is designed to be carried in a pocket or glove box, is short (i.e. 14 pages), and includes feed and water curfews and pictures of animals that are unfit to load.

The Industry Animal Welfare Standards for Livestock Processing Establishments Preparing Meats for Human Consumption include Standards for stockperson competency, including the requirement that stockpersons can identify animals that are weak, ill, injured or suffering from other ailments that affect their welfare.

The aim of this project was to develop “Is it fit to process?” guides for small to medium enterprises (SME) processing for the domestic market, as well as Tier 1 export abattoirs. The Guides were to be based on the highly successful *Is it fit to load?* guide published by MLA. One Guide was to be developed for cattle and one for sheep/goats.

The Guides will provide SME enterprises in the red meat processing industry with short pictorial guides to help underpin decision making about whether an animal is fit to process. In addition, the Guides will include the steps to be taken if an Emergency Animal Disease is suspected.

3.0 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Develop “*Is it fit to process?*” guides for the red meat processing industry, based on the highly successful “*Is it fit to load?*” guide published by MLA. One Guide will be developed for cattle and one for sheep/goats.
- Obtain endorsement of the new Guides by key industry organisations and government.
- Promote the new Guides through MINTRAC networks and related training activities and displays. The Guides will also be referenced in training and assessment materials so there is ongoing awareness of their availability.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The project was undertaken in five key steps.

Step 1: Establishment of the Project Steering Committee.

Step 2: Development of draft content of the Guides. Our approach was to develop short pictorial guides that will help small to medium enterprises decide whether an animal is fit to process. The Guides also include the steps to be taken if an Emergency Animal Disease is suspected.

A project start-up meeting was held on 13 March 2018 and was attended by representatives of Joan Lloyd Consulting and MINTRAC. During the meeting, the project team decided it would be appropriate to develop three guides, one guide for cattle, one for calves, one for sheep/goats.

An interim draft of the Guides was provided to AMPC in for comment and critique.

Step 3: Meeting of the Project Steering Committee. The aim of the meeting was to obtain agreement on the content of the Guides, as the first step in achieving endorsement.

Step 4: Graphic design.

Step 5: Consultation and endorsement of the Guides by key industry organisations and government.

5.0 PROJECT OUTCOMES

Project Briefing Note

The project Briefing Note that describes the project was prepared and approved by AMPC. The Briefing Note was included in the folders at AMPCP/MINTRAC Network meetings and at the Meat Inspection & Quality Assurance conference. to build awareness of the new guides.

Project Steering Committee

The Project Steering Committee was established. Members included:

- John Langbridge (Teys)
- Tony Lofthouse (Cowra)
- Matthew Campbell (NSW DPI)

The Animal Health Policy Unit in the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources agreed to review drafts of the guides, particularly as these relate to Emergency Animal Disease detection, but not to be part of the Project Steering Committee.

The Committee met by phone on 24 September 2018. The initial layouts of the guides were reviewed during the meeting.

Is it Fit to Process Guides

The draft content/layout of the guides was developed and submitted to AMPC for comment in August 2018. The initial plan for the guides was to have:

- Page 1 as a summary of the Industry Animal Welfare Standards for Livestock Processing Establishments.
- Page 2 as an introduction to the guide.
- Pages 3 and 4 as an overview of ante mortem inspection.
- Pages 5 describe the four categories of animals not passed for slaughter, with image examples.
- Page 6 to discuss the handling of sick, weak or injured animals.
- Page 7 show examples of injuries.
- Page 8 show examples of emaciation.
- Page 9 show examples of soiling.
- Page 10 show examples of cancers.
- Page 11 show examples of pregnancy.
- Page 12 describe what to do if an emergency animal disease is suspected.
- Page 13 include contact numbers of more information, as well as endorsing organisation logos.

Key messages were to be featured throughout the guides, including the tag line Assess, Don't Guess and What to Do and Important to Remember boxes.

In consultation with AMPC we decided to develop three guides, one for cattle, one for goats/sheep and one for calves.

Consultation

The draft guides were circulated for consultation/comment twice.

The first round of consultation was conducted during October 2018 and included:

- AMPC
- AMIC
- Animal Health Policy Unit, DAWR
- Animal Angels (who had provided numerous photos for use in the guides)
- Animal Health Australia

- MLA
- RSPCA
- State Departments of Agriculture

Comments were received from AMPC, AMIC, DAWR, Animal Angels, RSPCA and the Tasmanian and NSW Departments of Agriculture. Animal Health Australia provided their logo for inclusion in the Guides.

The Guides were then revised and circulated to the organisations that had provided comments, as well as MLA and Agriculture Victoria, with a request for comments and endorsements. Key changes at the stage included the addition of a section on what to do when animals with unfit to load conditions arrive at a plant, removal of the page on pregnancy and greater prominence for the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline number.

Comments were received from AMIC, Animal Angels, Animal Health Australia, Agriculture Victoria, RSPCA and NSW DPI.

Animal Health Australia was happy with the changes made and for its logo to remain on the guides.

Representatives of NSW DPI indicated that it would endorse the guides; however, a logo was not provided.

RSPCA indicated that it could not endorse the guides because its policy on electric prodders and because it had concerns with the category of Emergency Slaughter. However, RSPCA will distribute final versions of the guides to all its inspectors.

Helpful suggestions were received from Agriculture Victoria, including the importance of abattoirs collecting video as well as photographs when reporting possible animal welfare issues.

AMIC indicated that it could not endorse the guides without further changes. The pages that included cancers were removed from the cattle and sheep/goat guide. The ante mortem inspection section of the calf guide was substantially revised. Two options of each of the guides, one with and one without example condition photos (injuries, emaciation and soiling), were then circulated to AMPC and AMIC in late December 2018.

A request for further changes was received from AMIC in January 2019, including a change to the name of the guides (Is it Fit to Slaughter), re-wording some sections and deleting and/or cropping some of the example photographs. Appendix 2 indicates how the AMIC comments were addressed.

During February 2019, signed copyright forms were obtained for the photographs included in the final drafts of the guides (apart from the photographs provided by the author). Copyright permission forms are provided in Appendix 3.

The final drafts of the three guides are provided in Appendix 4.

6.0 DISCUSSION

This project has revealed strong stakeholder interest in animal welfare at Australian red meat processing plants, with state and commonwealth governments, industry and welfare groups participating in the consultation phases of the project. Useful comments were received from all organisations that participated in the consultation.

Sections of the guides were substantially improved by the consultation process, including the stronger links to the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport Standard of Livestock*, the addition of a section describing how to prepare an animal welfare incident report and the inclusion of a table summarising emergency animal disease signs.

However, the consultation process also led to the sections of the cattle and goats/sheep guides showing examples of cancers and pregnancy being removed from the guides. This was a disappointing outcome. Industry may be more willing to include these sections in future editions of the guides.

The project also revealed how difficult it can be to achieve agreement across broad stakeholder groups. While we not able to achieve open endorsement of the guides by all stakeholder, we were able to obtain this from Animal Health Australia and MINTRAC. MINTRAC is now actively promoting the guides at training and network meetings. We recommend that AMPC send printed and electronic copies of the guides to the Manager Animal Welfare at Animal Health Australia to distribute through its networks.

Although RSPCA Australia would not openly endorse the guides, it has indicated that it will distribute final versions of the guides to all its inspectors. This is a positive outcome.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This project has revealed strong stakeholder interest in animal welfare at Australian red meat processing plants. It has also revealed how difficult it can be to achieve agreement across broad stakeholder groups on such a topical issue. Within this environment, the project has achieved its aim of developing “Is it fit to process?” guides for small to medium enterprises (SME) processing for the domestic market, as well as Tier 1 export abattoirs. The guides will provide a benchmark as the processing industry continually improves animal welfare at Australian abattoirs.

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8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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9.0 APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix 1: Project Briefing Note

9.2 Appendix 2: Response to AMIC comments on the draft *Is the Animal Fit to Process Guides*

9.3 Appendix 3: Copyright Permission Forms

9.4 Appendix 4: Final drafts of the *Is the Animal Fit to Process Guides*