

# Animal Welfare Task Group (AWTG) - Annual Report 2024



## Renewal of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy

**Lead jurisdiction:** Joint leadership with Commonwealth, state and territory governments

**Timeframe:** Ongoing; the renewed strategy will include progressive development of 6 animal group chapters, with publication of full strategy expected by mid-2027

### Highlights:

- Commonwealth, state and territory agriculture ministers confirmed their commitment to jointly lead the renewal of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS), and to develop a National Statement on Animal Welfare during 2024.
- A first tranche of public consultation was completed in mid-2024 and is available here: [Get involved - DAFF](#). This engagement identified a range of challenges in Australia's system, but also opportunities, and feedback informed next steps in the strategy's renewal.
- A second tranche of stakeholder consultation focused on the development of a National Statement on Animal Welfare. The National Statement on Animal Welfare was developed in 2024 and endorsed by all Agriculture Ministers in December.
- Governance was established, including a Strategy Advisory Group and cross-portfolio Sponsor Group with the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, in recognition that the responsibility for animal welfare lies across various agencies.

### Project Information:

- The Australian Government has allocated \$5 million over four years to renew the AAWS, aiming to establish a comprehensive national framework for animal welfare in Australia.

- The AAWS project is led by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) with cross-jurisdictional leadership facilitated through the AWTG.
- The next phase of the strategy's renewal will focus on individual animal group 'chapter' development.



## Implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry

### Highlights:

- A subgroup of the AWTG was formalised in August 2024 to discuss issues around implementation of the poultry standards into state and territory legislation.
- The subgroup is chaired by Vic. and met 5 times in 2024 to discuss implementation of the standards, with the aim of national harmonisation.
- NSW and WA have undertaken public consultation on proposed regulations to implement some aspects of the poultry standards including standards relating to requirements for cage housing for laying hens.
- WA completed the first of a two-stage process implementing the poultry standards by way of regulation. The *WA Animal Welfare (Poultry) Regulations 2024* implement the standards relating to the phase out of conventional layer hen cages, the standards providing breeding ducks access to water and a range of standards with commencement date of 1 July 2025 in the poultry standards.

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Updating the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Land Transport of Livestock* to improve the welfare of horses

**Lead jurisdiction:** Queensland

**Timeframe:** planned for finalisation in 2025

## Highlights:

- Agriculture ministers are working towards national endorsement of amendments to the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock* to improve the welfare of horses.
- The National Horse Traceability Implementation Taskforce were consulted in 2024 to better align record keeping requirements of the standards with the National Horse Traceability System. This work was led by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (formerly the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries) and the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

## Project Information:

- At the February 2020 Agriculture Ministers' Meeting, ministers agreed that Queensland, on behalf of AWTG, would lead a review the suitability of the existing *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock* for horses.
- Extensive public consultation with equine industry stakeholders, livestock transporters and other interested stakeholders in 2021 and 2022 informed amendments to the standards and guidelines that relate to the welfare of horses.
- The Decision Regulation Impact Statement was assessed as compliant with requirements by the Office of Impact Analysis in late 2023.



Development of new *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Livestock at Processing Facilities and Establishments*

**Lead jurisdiction:** Queensland

**Timeframe:** planned for finalisation in 2025

## Highlights:

- Members of AWTG and the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), as well as targeted stakeholders provided substantial feedback on drafts of the standards throughout 2024.
- A revised draft is being developed for wider public consultation, which is planned for 2025.

## Project Information:

- At the February 2020 Agricultural Ministers' Meeting, ministers agreed that Queensland, on behalf of ATWG, would lead the development of new *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Livestock at Processing Facilities and Establishments*.
- The standards and guidelines will replace the previous Model Code of Practice for Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments which was finalised in 2001.
- This work is being informed by an independent scientific literature review published in 2022, feedback from meetings of the SAG held throughout 2022 and visits to livestock processors in 2023. The SAG includes industry bodies, animal welfare groups, animal welfare scientists and consumer groups.

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Examination of animal welfare issues related to virtual fencing technology to support a harmonised approach for its use

**Lead jurisdiction:** Commonwealth

**Timeframe:** planned for finalisation in 2025

## Highlights:

- In 2024, AWTG agreed to develop an *Australian Animal Welfare Guide for Virtual Fencing* as the preferred approach for harmonisation.
- The subgroup working on this project established a Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG), which consisted of agricultural and animal welfare scientists and representatives from agricultural industry groups, animal welfare organisations and the veterinary industry.
- The SRG met 6 times in 2024 and meetings were chaired by an independent facilitator.
- Drafting of the guide is underway.

## Project Information:

- In August 2021, the Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee (AGSOC) referred a national examination of issues associated with virtual fencing technology, with a view to harmonising regulation across jurisdictions, to the AWTG for progression.
- An AWTG subgroup, chaired by the Commonwealth, comprising representatives from NSW, WA, Qld, SA and Vic, conducted this work.
- An independent scientific literature review on animal welfare considerations for virtual fencing and an addendum were published in 2023 and underpin the development of the guide. The addendum captures new, and more detailed information on virtual fencing technology since the finalisation of the literature review.



Improvements to the process for developing and reviewing Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines

**Lead jurisdiction:** Commonwealth

**Timeframe:** currently in progress, finalisation timeline to be determined

## Highlights:

- Targeted stakeholder consultation occurred in early 2024 to seek feedback on the staged approach to improvements to the standards and guidelines development process.
- The AWTG is working towards finalisation of the standards development framework and jurisdictional lead process map.
- Substantial updates are planned for the AWTG webpage in 2025 to provide greater transparency to stakeholders regarding the standards development process.
- Further work to improve the process for developing national animal welfare standards and guidelines will continue in 2025.

## Project Information:

- At the December 2022 Agriculture Ministers' Meeting, ministers requested that AGSOC consider options to improve the process for developing nationally consistent animal welfare arrangements, to ensure clarity, harmonisation and timeliness.
- A subgroup of the AWTG was convened, consisting of representatives from NSW, WA, Qld, Vic. and the Commonwealth as secretariat, to explore options to be provided to agriculture senior officials.
- Ministers discussed options progressed by agriculture senior officials and noted a staged approach for improvement. They have tasked agriculture senior officials with continuing work, focusing on practical elements. This work is being progressed by the AWTG.