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Export Meat Operational Guideline

1.3 Department-recognised animal welfare system



Purpose

This guideline outlines:

- the conditions under which the department formally recognises the voluntary Australian Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System (AAWCS)
- the role of AUS-MEAT in auditing AAWCS-certified export-registered establishments
- how the department will verify and audit animal welfare requirements at establishments that are certified against the voluntary industry program
- how the department will verify and audit animal welfare requirements at establishments that choose not to participate or have been withdrawn or suspended from AAWCS, either voluntarily or by AUS-MEAT, upon advice from the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee (AMILSC).

Scope

This document applies to Tier 2 slaughter establishments where:

- importing country authorities require that export registration and oversight of establishments be administered by the Australian government
- establishments are regulated by the department under the Tier 2 scheme.

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Principles

(AAWCS) is a voluntary program owned by the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC). It was launched in September 2013 to demonstrate industry's commitment to animal welfare and compliance with the Industry Animal Welfare Standards.

The rules for AAWCS are contained in AAWCS Program Rules and the AAWCS Notification Protocol.

The AAWCS program is recognised by the department as providing an appropriate level of assurance of animal welfare outcomes at export meat processing establishments, consistent with requirements under export legislation. The recognition of AAWCS however does not limit the department's regulatory responsibilities or powers under export legislation, including the power to undertake audit, inspection or impose regulatory sanctions for non-compliances with export legislation.

Where establishments are certified to the AAWCS program, and recognition is captured in the establishment's approved arrangement, the department will reduce the audit scope for the animal welfare component during the initial audit (new Tier 2 establishments) or during six-monthly or annual audit systems audits (existing Tier 2 establishments).

The department will audit non-certified establishments against both:

- the Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption's (AS4696) requirements for animal welfare
- relevant importing country requirements for animal welfare.

Conditions of recognition of the AAWCS

The conditions of recognition of AAWCS include:

- department continues to verify animal welfare
- On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV) at the certified establishment receives an invite to all AACWS exit meetings
- AUS-MEAT notifies the department through the Export Meat Industry Advisory Committee (EMIAC) Animal Welfare Subcommittee (AWSC) secretariat and the National Veterinary Technical Manager (NVTM) of all AAWCS critical non-compliances
- participation in overseas audits by AUS-MEAT.

Department verification of animal welfare

Regardless of whether an establishment is AAWCS-certified or not, the department verifies animal welfare on all export-registered abattoirs under its Meat Establishment Verification System (MEVS). MEVS is used to underpin the department's health certification system for export-eligible meat and meat products.

There are two verification activities that are conducted monthly that are prescribed for animal welfare including check-the-checker process monitoring verification of animal handling (load-in to the knocking box) and check-the-checker process monitoring verification of slaughter floor (or skinning room) operations. The latter check covers animal welfare elements that relate to stunning and sticking.

These formal verification activities are rated acceptable, marginal or unacceptable. Marginal outcomes incur a non-compliance issue (NCI) while unacceptable outcomes result in a corrective action request (CAR) being issued by the OPV.

For findings outside of the formal verification checks, the OPV immediately notifies the appropriate establishment representative (either in establishment management or control, or designated animal welfare personnel). Such issues are noted in the department's records, and they may be tabled at the department weekly meeting with establishment management. The exception to this rule is findings that are assessed as unacceptable, in which case the OPV will issue a CAR.

The department will notify AUS-MEAT in a timely manner of any significant on-plant animal welfare circumstances that are identified at AAWCS-certified establishments.

Reporting of audit outcomes on AAWCS-certified establishments

AUS-MEAT will provide, on request, information to the department which includes but is not limited to the following:

- total number of AAWCS-certified establishments
- total number of establishments that have been suspended, either voluntarily or through audit, from the AAWCS program
- total number of new AAWCS applications and dates of certification
- dates of all initial and annual verification audits
- for each establishment, all critical and major non-compliances and outcomes of any investigations.

Note: AUS-MEAT will also advise OPVs at AAWCS-certified establishments of any critical or major compliance.

The scope of animal welfare auditing by the department during its Area Technical Manager (ATM) audits, will be limited to verification of the currency of the establishment's AAWCS certification and the outcome of its last AUS-MEAT verification audit. Where there is evidence of potential systemic non-compliances with animal welfare, then the ATM may also review department on-plant animal welfare verification records, CARs and animal welfare incident reports (AWIRs), and weekly reports for the period since the last AUS-MEAT AAWCS verification audit.

If an establishment has been suspended from AAWCS since the last department audit, the scope for animal welfare auditing will be determined by the ATM auditor in accordance with the department's audit checklist. As part of their audit preparation process, the ATM may enquire about any AMILSC-applied sanctions (e.g. follow up audits by AUS-MEAT) and the status of recertification (if the establishment has taken this step).

The requirements for recertification are described in the AAWCS Program Rules:

- An AUS-MEAT representative will sit on the EMIAC Animal Welfare Subcommittee (AWSC).
- A department representative will sit on the AMILSC.

Notification of AAWCS critical non-compliances

In the event of an AAWCS critical non-compliance, the following notifications are required immediately:

- Establishment management must advise the OPV when an establishment is issued a critical non-compliance by an AUS-MEAT approved auditor. This will be achieved by mandated attendance of OPVs at the audit exit meeting; or by a timely written notification to the OPV if circumstances, on a rare occasion, prevent attendance. The OPV will subsequently advise the Establishment ATM as soon as possible.
- The OPV must notify the relevant state authority for animal welfare and the department (the Food Safety Unit) by submitting the Animal Welfare Incident Report on behalf of the Establishment.
- AUS-MEAT must immediately notify the department of all critical non-compliances simultaneous to notifying the Animal Welfare Certification Subcommittee (AWCSC). The AWCSC will assess the certification of non-compliance against the AMIC Animal Welfare Standard and the AAWCS Program Rules (following the submission of critical incident reports) and will advise AUS-MEAT of the best course corrective action. If the AWCSC upholds the critical incident non-compliance, this will trigger the department to raise a critical incident response and conduct an independent audit of the incident.

Facilitation of overseas audit by AUS-MEAT

Whenever an AAWCS-certified establishment is included in an overseas audit, the department may request that AUS-MEAT participates. AUS-MEAT will provide a representative(s) that is suitably across the AAWCS Program Rules, notification process and has working knowledge of the respective establishment's animal welfare programs.

For any non-compliances against an AAWCS-certified establishment's animal welfare program that is found during an overseas audit, the department will oversee any corrective action required by the establishment. The department will keep AUS-MEAT informed of progress and the outcome of all non-compliances found during overseas audits.

Auditing of AAWCS non-certified establishments

Export-registered abattoirs that either choose not to participate in the AAWCS program or have been suspended from the AAWCS program at the time of department audit, will be subject to the full scope of the department's audit program for animal welfare as detailed in the Export Meat System Audit Program (EMSAP) guideline. ATMs will use the current version of the systems audit checklist that is available on the department's website.

Review

This document is to be reviewed on at least a biennial basis, commencing 12 months from the initial rollout date for the systems audit.

Related Material

The following related material is available on the department's website:

- Webpage: [Export Meat Systems Audit Program \(EMSAP\) policy](#)
- Webpage: [Guideline - Critical incident response](#)
- Webpage: Export Meat Operational Policy 1.0 Animal welfare (pending publication)
- Webpage: Export Meat Operational Guideline 1.1 Animal welfare - from arrival to completion of slaughter (pending publication)
- Webpage: Export Meat Operational Guideline 1.2 Animal welfare incident reporting (pending publication)

The following related material is available on the internet:

- Webpage: [Export Control Act 2020](#)
- Webpage: [The Standards](#)
- PDF: [Industry Animal Welfare Standard for Livestock Processing Establishments Preparing Meat for Human Consumption](#)
- Webpage: [Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption \(AS4696:2007\)](#)
- Webpage: [Australian Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System](#)
- Webpage: [Land Transport](#)
- Webpage: [Is the animal fit to load?](#)
- PDF: [Is it fit for the intended journey?](#)
- PDF: [Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines - Land Transport Standard of Livestock](#)
- Webpage: [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)
- Webpage: [APS Values and Code of Conduct in practice](#)
- Webpage: [The Rules](#)
- PDF: [AAWCS Notification Protocol](#)

- PDF: [Australian Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System \(AAWCS\) Program Rules](#)

Appendix 1: Roles and responsibilities

Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC)

- Maintains ownership of the voluntary Industry Animal Welfare Standards.
- Manages the content of the voluntary Industry Animal Welfare Standards.
- Nominates suitable representatives for the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee (AMILSC) - Animal Welfare Certification Sub-Committee
- Convenes the AMIC/Australian Meat Processing Council (AMPC) Technical Animal Welfare Review Committee
- Where changes to the Standard are made, seeks departmental agreement to continued acceptance of the certification program, as providing equivalent or greater animal welfare outcomes than legislative requirements (including importing country requirements).

Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee (AMILSC), via the Animal Welfare Certification Sub-Committee

- Acts as custodians of the AAWCS program on behalf of AMIC.
- Establishes and reviews the AAWCS Program Rules and Notification Protocol that are used by AUS-MEAT to verify compliance with the voluntary Industry Animal Welfare Standards.
- Manages all identified AAWCS critical non-compliances.
- Directs AUS-MEAT to provide the department with information that is considered appropriate in connection with an export-registered abattoir's approved arrangement and any alleged or suspected breaches of Commonwealth laws.
- Provides direction to AUS-MEAT in relation to the AAWCS Program Rules, Industry Animal Welfare Standards and ongoing certification.

Area Technical Manager (ATM)

Establishment ATM

- ATM with day-to-day on-plant responsibilities, on-plant staff technical review responsibilities and an establishment Critical Incident Response Audit (CIRA) audit role.
- Approves the establishment's approved arrangement and/or any amendments made to it.
- Receives notifications from OPVs and supervises departmental requirements for AACWS critical non-compliances identified on the certified establishment.

EMSAP ATM

- ATM that conducts the EMSAP audit at the establishment. This is an ATM that has not had day-to-day on-plant responsibilities at the establishment being audited during the previous two years (i.e. held the establishment ATM role).
- Confirms the status of AAWCS certification during audit.

AUS-MEAT

- Maintains arrangements with AMIC for the auditing and certification of the AAWCS program.
- Acts as the program administrator of the AAWCS program, including management of audit arrangements and close out of CARs.
- Maintains and publishes a register of participating establishments that are certified.
- Provides a copy of the AAWCS Register to the department on request.
- Provides an annual report on the AAWCS program to the department.
- Immediately notifies the department of any critical non-conformances.
- Develops and maintains the AAWCS Program Rules and the AAWCS Notification Protocol.
- Ensures the AAWCS program (including verification audits) is managed in accordance with the AAWCS Program Rules.

- Notifies AAWCS-certified establishments, including those in voluntary suspension, of any AAWCS Program Rule amendments.
- Provides approved auditors for the AAWCS program.
- Participates in overseas audits as requested by the department.

Establishment Management

- Amends the approved arrangement to cover the elements of the AAWCS Program Rules and Notification Protocols.
- Seeks advice from the Establishment ATM regarding variation level for any amendments to AAWCS within the approved arrangement (significant or nonsignificant).
- Provides animal welfare verification records, including department-issued CARs and AWIRs, at the request of the AUS-MEAT approved auditor.
- Where an AAWCS critical non-compliance has been identified during an AUS-MEAT verification audit, completes an AWIR in alignment with responsibilities under state/territory and Commonwealth legislation.
- Provides the AWIR to the OPV for a professional statement (as appropriate)
- Notifies the OPV of AAWCS scheduled verification audits at the weekly meeting.
- Invites OPVs to all audit exit meetings.
- Provides timely written notification to the OPV of all critical non-compliances if the OPV is unable to attend the audit exit meeting (if circumstances, on the rare occasion, prevent attendance).
- In all cases of animal welfare non-compliances, immediately takes corrective actions to alleviate an animal's pain and suffering. For example, emergency or priority slaughter.

Export Meat Program

- Obtains an annual copy of the AUS-MEAT AAWCS Register online via the AUS-MEAT website.
- Obtains a copy from AUS-MEAT of the AAWCS annual report to the department.

Field Operations Manager (FOM)

- Conducts Critical Incident Response Audits (CIRAs), when required.

National Veterinary Technical Manager

- Represents the department on the AMILSC (and the AWSC).
- Advises the Export Meat Program senior management of outcomes of AMILSC critical non-compliance reviews.
- Assesses changes to the AAWCS program and determines the impact of the changes on the ability of the department to continue to recognise the AAWCS program as an appropriate level of assurance of animal welfare outcomes at export meat processing establishments, consistent with legislative requirements.

On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV)

- Reviews AAWCS program section in the establishment's approved arrangement prior to ATM approval.
- Attends all verification audit exit meetings (unless circumstances, on the rare occasion, prevent attendance).
- Monitors AAWCS verification audit notifications and audit outcomes, including major and critical non-compliances as well as AAWCS suspensions, during the weekly meeting with establishment management and notifies the ATM in the weekly report.
- Conducts monthly verification of animal welfare in accordance with the MEVS guideline and relevant work instructions.

- Submits all AWIRs on behalf of the establishment to the relevant state authority and the department Food Safety Unit.
- Raises an AWIR and submits to the relevant state authority and the department Food Safety Unit when the establishment fails to identify an animal with an unfit to load condition as identified in the Land Transport Standards or when an act of animal cruelty, neglect or abuse occurs on-plant (outside an AAWCS verification audit) for certified establishments or non-certified establishments.
- Provides a professional statement in AWIRs, as appropriate.

Appendix 2: Definitions

Approved arrangement (AA)

An approved arrangement under Chapter 5 of the *Export Control Act 2020*.

An arrangement for a kind of export operations in relation to a kind of prescribed goods approved by the secretary.

An approved arrangement:

- documents the controls and processes to be followed when undertaking export operations in relation to prescribed goods for export
- enables the secretary to have oversight of specific export operations.

Animal welfare incident report

A report generated by either establishment management or a department OPV (when the establishment fails to do so) to notify the relevant state/territory animal welfare regulatory agency in the event of either:

- livestock being identified as unfit for an intended journey as per the Land Transport Standards
- improper handling of livestock by establishment staff.

Australian Animal Welfare Certification System (AAWCS)

A voluntary program designed to demonstrate industry compliance to animal welfare and compliance with the voluntary Industry Animal Welfare Standards - Livestock Processing Establishments Preparing Meat for Human Consumption (Industry Animal Welfare Standards).

AAWCS Program Rules

The program rules for AAWCS which are administered by the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee (AMILSC) through AUS-MEAT Limited (AUS-MEAT).

AAWCS-certified establishment

Under the AAWCS a certified establishment complies with the voluntary Industry Animal Welfare Standards.

AAWCS critical non-compliance

In the context of the AAWCS, a critical non-compliance includes acts of animal cruelty, neglect or abuse which breaches applicable animal welfare legislation. Critical non-compliances are documented by an AUS-MEAT Critical Incident Report.

AAWCS major non-compliance

In the context of the AAWCS program, a major non-compliance that either:

- has the potential to compromise animal welfare or impinge on the integrity of the Australian meat and livestock industry or AUS-MEAT

- if not addressed has the potential for the non-compliance to further compromise the AAWCS Program Rules or the voluntary Industry Animal Welfare Standard
- has enough non-compliance in an element to warrant a systematic major non-compliance
- has reoccurring non-compliances that have not been addressed by corrective action.

A major non-compliance is documented in an AUS-MEAT Corrective Action Request (CAR).

AAWCS minor non-compliance

In the context of the AAWCS program, a minor non-compliance:

- Reflects a variance from the AAWCS Program Rules or the Industry Animal Welfare Standards that is not likely to directly impinge on animal welfare or the integrity of the Australian meat and livestock industry or AUS-MEAT.

A minor non-compliance is documented in an AUS-MEAT Corrective Action Request (CAR).

AAWCS non-certified establishment

An establishment that is not certified for animal welfare by AUS-MEAT under the AAWCS program.

AAWCS Notification Protocol

A document to maintain AUS-MEAT's obligations relating to the AUS-MEAT Animal Welfare Certification Program Rules for Livestock Processing Establishments. It includes the responsibility of notifying the department (or other relevant state/territory government agencies) of changes to a livestock processing establishment's animal welfare certification status and/or serious cases of animal welfare non-compliance.

Industry Animal Welfare Standard

Refers to the [Industry Animal Welfare Standard for Livestock Processing Establishments Preparing Meat for Human Consumption](#) (3rd Edition).

Tier 2 establishments

Where importing country authorities require that export registration and oversight of establishments be administered by the Australian government, establishments are regulated by the department under the Tier 2 scheme.

Withdrawn from AAWCS certification

AAWCS has been withdrawn either voluntarily or by AUS-MEAT on the advice of the AMILSC.