



March
2023

Export Meat Operational Guideline

1.1 Animal welfare – from arrival to completion of slaughter



Purpose

This document outlines how the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) manages the animal welfare requirements of animal arrival, animal handling and slaughter at export-registered abattoirs, and of wild game carcasses at wild game processing establishments.

Scope

The species in scope of this guideline include those that are slaughtered/harvested for meat and meat products for export including:

- cloven hooved animals such as cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, pigs, deer, and camels
- solipeds such as horses and donkeys
- wild game animals such as kangaroos, boar, deer, and camels.

Legislative basis

Under the *Export Control Act 2020* ('the Act') and its subordinate legislation:

- export abattoirs are regulated by the Commonwealth government through the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department).

Under the *Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Rules 2021* (the Rules), export abattoirs are bound to comply with:

- their approved arrangement (including animal welfare standard operating procedures)
- the Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption (AS4696) (referred to here as 'the Australian Meat Standard').

Under the *Export Control (Wild Game Meat and Wild Game Meat Products) Rules 2021* (the Rules), wild game processing establishments are bound to comply with:

- their approved arrangement (including animal welfare standard operating procedures)
- the Australian Meat Standard
- the Australian standard hygienic production of game meat for human consumption (AS4464) (referred to here as 'the Wild Game Standard').

In this document

Principles	3
Fitness to load.....	3
Operational requirements for the receipt and handling of livestock in lairage	3
Department verification of the establishment's animal handling practices	4
Department systems audits of the establishment's animal handling practices	5
AUS-MEAT Australian Animal Welfare Certification System audits of establishment's animal handling practices	5
Review.....	6
Related material	6
Attachment 1: Roles and responsibilities.....	7
On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV)	7
The occupier.....	7
Field Operations Managers (FOM)	7
Area Technical Manager (ATM).....	7
Establishment ATM.....	7
EMSAP ATM	7
Attachment 2: Definitions	8

Principles

Procedures must be described in department-approved programs within the approved arrangement that detail how to receive, unload, yard, and move livestock throughout the lairage, lead up races and into the stunning box, to ensure that they are handled in a manner that minimises the risk of injury, pain and suffering and causes the least practicable disturbance to them.

All animal welfare-related programs must also describe quality assurance monitoring, verification, corrective actions, and record keeping for all such procedures.

For wild game processing establishments, appropriately trained and competent personnel must be in place to assess carcasses at the point of receipt for evidence of non-head shot wounds.

All staff that handle livestock, must be trained and competent in their work instructions. On EU-listed establishments, there must be an Animal Welfare Officer who oversees the receipt and unloading of livestock. Training and competency assessment processes must be described in, and the establishment must maintain, records of training in relation to animal welfare.

Goads to assist the movement of livestock, must be used in accordance with any species-specific requirements and they must not be applied to the face or genitals of livestock.

If working dogs are used to move livestock, then they must be muzzled whilst working, and then safely housed, away from livestock when not in use. If horses are used for moving livestock, then they must be safely housed away from livestock when not in use.

Fitness to load

To ensure the animals received were considered fit to load for transport to the establishment, the OPV/establishment must make a judgement on whether an incident had occurred prior to loading or during transport, where:

- the OPV/establishment assesses animals that appear to have been unfit to load or damaged during transport and determines whether an animal welfare incident has occurred (this is done by referencing the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines — Land Transport of Livestock)
- the OPV (where unloading occurs during OPV-working hours) may provide technical and physiological observation and clinical assessment of the animal(s) (OPVs are not always on-site at the time of unloading or available at the time of unloading where immediate action is required to relieve suffering)
- the OPV may provide professional opinion and assistance to establishment management in completion of an animal welfare incident report (refer to [Export Meat Operational Guideline: 1.2 Animal welfare incident reporting](#) for further information).

Operational requirements for the receipt and handling of livestock in lairage

Establishment management must ensure that:

- establishments have appropriately trained personnel, staff responsibilities, procedures, and reporting systems that covers animal welfare
- livestock are unloaded and assessed for their fitness to load as soon as practical (at first observation by establishment personnel) after arrival on plant (refer to [Export Meat Operational Guideline: 1.2 Animal welfare incident reporting](#) for further information)
- wild game carcasses are assessed for evidence of non-head shot wounds at the point of receipt into the processing plant (refer to [Export Meat Operational Guideline: 1.2 Animal welfare incident reporting](#) for further information)
- adequate space is provided in lairage pens for all animals to lie down

- adequate shelter from weather extremes is provided for vulnerable animals such as bobby calves
- there is unrestricted access to clean drinking water in all lairage pens
- where livestock are not scheduled for slaughter within 24 hours of arrival, appropriate feed and water is provided (maintenance ration):
 - liquid feed must be provided to bobby calves and sucker lambs such that they are not deprived for more than 24 hours of liquid feed
- goads are only used when necessary and they must not be used to inflict pain or suffering
- livestock are handled and moved calmly through lairage pens and lead up races/ramps
- all livestock handling structures, and equipment is maintained in sound working order and does not present risk of injury to livestock
- knocking boxes are designed to handle the species being slaughtered such that restraint is effective and humane
- stunning and sticking facilities and equipment are maintained in accordance with manufacturers recommendations
- back up stunning equipment is available for use in the lairage and also at the knocking box
- quality assurance monitoring is undertaken from the point of unloading through to the point of slaughter at the frequency described in the approved arrangement
- corrective actions are completed within the documented timeframe as described in the approved arrangement.

Department verification of the establishment's animal handling practices

The department will verify that each establishment meets the animal welfare requirements of the relevant standard and importing country requirements and has a system to raise and report any animal welfare issues they identify.

To ensure animals are handled appropriately from the point of unloading up to and including the point of slaughter at abattoirs, On-Plant Veterinarians (on behalf of the department) will conduct daily ante-mortem inspection/verification and monthly animal welfare process monitoring verification where:

- the OPV on-shift will observe animals during unloading, while in lairage pens, and at the point of stunning/sticking to identify instances where handling does not comply with aspects in section: [Operational requirements for the receipt and handling of livestock in lairage](#) or aspects in the relevant animal welfare standard
- the OPV will provide technical and physiological observation and clinical assessment of the animal(s)
- the OPV will provide professional opinion and assistance to establishment management
- the OPV will undertake monthly observations of processes from load-in to the knocking box with reference to the establishment's approved arrangement
- the OPV will record results in the monthly verification checklist
- any non-compliance during monthly process monitoring verification will be recorded in the Meat Establishment Verification Systems (MEVS).

To ensure wild game carcasses arriving at wild game establishments have been head shot, verification for non-head shot incidents will occur:

- the OPV will undertake monthly observations of processes for carcass load-in
- the OPV will record results in the monthly verification checklist
- the OPV will inspect carcasses suspected of a non-head shot
- the OPV will make a professional judgement determining whether a non-head shot is likely

- where a non-head shot has been determined, the OPV will inform the Quality Assurance Manager and generate an animal welfare incident report
- any non-compliance during monthly process monitoring verification will be recorded in the Meat Establishment Verification Systems (MEVS).

To ensure management of non-compliance, the department engages the establishment to undertake corrective action where:

- the OPV follows processes under the department's Meat Establishment Verification System (MEVs)
- the OPV relays non-compliance issues verbally or in writing to establishment management
- the OPV in discussion with the Establishment Area Technical Manager, issues corrective action requests (CARs) in the department's Audit Management System
- the OPV(s) raises non-compliance issues and open CARs with establishment management at the weekly meeting.

Department systems audits of the establishment's animal handling practices

The department undertakes systems audits of the establishment's animal handling practices as stipulated by the department's Export Meat System Audit Program (EMSAP) and Critical Incident Response guidelines, where:

- during six-monthly audits, the EMSAP Area Technical Manager (ATM) examines the establishment's improvement arrangement, policies, procedures, and records to ensure that these documents appropriately cover animal welfare and animal handling practices and that these practices have been adhered to
- ATM Auditors will advise the occupier of the establishment at the audit exit meeting of the findings of the audit, including any animal welfare-related issues that have been identified
- audits may be scheduled more frequently for establishments that have been deemed non-compliant
- audits may be scheduled yearly, where establishments have met criteria to enter an annual audit program (see [Export Meat Operational Guideline: 5.2 Export Meat System Audit Program \(EMSAP\)](#)).

The department manages animal welfare non-compliance through corrective action requests at audit.

- The ATM will relay non-compliance issues at the exit meeting.
- The ATM will issue CARs in the department's Audit Management System.
- The OPV and Establishment ATM are responsible for resolution of any outstanding EMSAP audit findings.

AUS-MEAT Australian Animal Welfare Certification System audits of establishment's animal handling practices

For establishments that are certified with the Australian Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System (AAWCS), the scope of a department audit will take into consideration the outcome of the most recent AUS-MEAT animal welfare audit.

The department recognises the AAWCS and modifies auditing responsibilities if an establishment is registered under AAWCS (see [Export Meat Operational Guideline: 1.3 Department recognised animal welfare system \(AAWCS\)](#)).

AUS-MEAT AAWCS audits of establishment's animal handling practices:

- must be undertaken by accredited AUS-MEAT animal welfare auditors
- must include an invitation to OPVs to attend the entry and/or exit meeting
- must permit audit reports to be made available to department auditors when requested.

Review

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

Related material

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

- Webpage: [Approved arrangement guidelines – Meat](#)
- Webpage: [Approved arrangement guidelines – Wild game meat](#)
- Webpage: [Export Meat Systems Audit Program \(EMSAP\)](#)
- Webpage: [Meat Export Regulatory Action and Sanctions Policy](#)
- Webpage: [Guideline – Critical incident response](#)
- Webpage: [Australian Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System \(AAWCS\) Conditions of Recognition](#)
- Webpage: [Quick Reference Card – Animal Welfare Regulatory Management](#)
- Webpage: Export Meat Operational Policy 1.0 Animal welfare (pending publication)
- Webpage: Export Meat Operational Guideline 1.2 Animal welfare incident reporting (pending publication)
- Webpage: Export Meat Operational Guideline 1.3 Department-recognised animal welfare system (pending publication)

The following related material is available on the internet:

- Webpage: [Export Control Act 2020](#)
- Webpage: [Export Control \(Meat and Meat Products\) Rules 2021](#)
- Webpage: [Export Control \(Wild Game Meat and Wild Game Meat Products\) Rules 2021](#)
- Webpage: [Industry Animal Welfare Standards – Third Edition](#)
- PDF: [Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption \(AS4696\)](#)
- PDF: [Australian standard for the hygienic production of wild game meat for human consumption \(AS4464\)](#)
- Webpage: [The Australian Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System \(AAWCS\)](#)
- Webpage: [Land Transport](#)
- Webpage: [Is the animal fit to load?](#)
- PDF: [Is it fit for the intended journey?](#)
- Webpage: [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)
- Webpage: [APS Values and Code of Conduct in practice](#)

Attachment 1: Roles and responsibilities

On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV)

- Verify compliance with the applicable animal welfare laws and standards as per the establishment's approved arrangement.
- Verify compliance of personnel and operations on establishment with all aspects of the establishment's animal welfare standard operating procedures.
- Monitor the condition of animals arriving for slaughter and assess the condition of wild game carcasses for non-head shots.
- Verify that the establishment management is appropriately managing animals arriving with unfit to load conditions.
- Ensure all staff are handling animals appropriately from the point of unloading through to the knocking box.
- Direct establishment management to take immediate corrective action, as necessary, to rectify animal welfare concerns and prevent further undue pain and suffering of animals on-plant (where the establishment has not identified animal welfare incidents and taken appropriate action).
- Verify that the establishment undertakes timely corrective action and is completing reports of animal welfare incidents.
- Review the establishment's animal welfare incident report.
- Submit animal welfare incident report to the relevant state/territory authority.
- Ensure carcasses condemned due to gunshot wound (GSW) are recorded in the Meat Export Data Collection System (MEDC) as a condemned 'non-headshot'.

The occupier

- Animal welfare at export-registered red meat abattoirs is the responsibility of the abattoir management.
- Export-registered red meat abattoirs are responsible for animal welfare from the unloading of animals off the truck at the abattoir to, and including, the point of slaughter.

Field Operations Managers (FOM)

- A senior departmental veterinarian who has regional responsibility for export establishments and the supervision of Area Technical Managers within their region.

Area Technical Manager (ATM)

- A Commonwealth authorised officer with veterinary qualifications who has responsibility for the supervision, technical performance, assessment and verification of technical standards and operations in a defined group of export meat establishments.

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.

EMSAP ATM

- ATM conducting the EMSAP audit at the establishment. This individual has not been the ATM with day-to-day on-plant responsibilities at the establishment being audited during the previous two years (i.e., held the Establishment ATM role).

The scope of department animal welfare verification audits of AAWCS Certified establishments by the EMSAP ATM are limited to sighting evidence of:

- a current AAWCS Certificate
- an acceptable audit outcome from the last AUS-MEAT verification audit.

Attachment 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.

Corrective action request (CAR)

A written direction from the department to an establishment to correct non-compliance.

Critical non-compliance

When used in relation to the audit of operations, means a failure (or a combination of the failures) to comply with any applicable requirement referred to in Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Rules 2021, 9-4(3).

Critical incident response audit (CIRA)

An audit scheduled by the department's Assistant Secretary Meat Exports Branch, in response to an identified critical incident triggered by non-compliance of export legislation, Australian standards, and/or importing country requirements.

Non-compliance

Failure to comply with export legislation and/or importing country requirements.

On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV)

A Commonwealth authorised officer (veterinarian) employed by the department to conduct ante-mortem inspection and to provide daily supervision of post-mortem inspection and verification of the establishment's approved arrangement.

Person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU)

As defined in the *WHS Act 2011*. A PCBU has a duty of care to ensure the health and safety of workers while they are at work in the business or undertaking and others who may be affected by the carrying out of work, such as visitors.