



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture**

Mr Terry Martin  
Inquiry Chair  
Queensland Racing Integrity Commission  
City East, QLD 4002

Dear Mr Martin

Thank you for your letter of 5 November 2019 to Dr Baden Pearse, Field Operations Manager, advising that the Queensland government has established an independent inquiry into horse welfare in Queensland and inviting the Australian Government Department of Agriculture to make a submission. Dr Pearse has referred your letter to me for response.

Please find attached the Department of Agriculture's submission to this inquiry. The department welcomes the opportunity to make a submission as animal welfare at slaughtering establishments continues to be an area of focus and attention by all stakeholders including the Australian Government, state governments, industry, animal welfare groups and consumers.

Please do not hesitate to contact me [REDACTED] if you require any additional information.

Yours sincerely

Fran Freeman  
First Assistant Secretary  
Exports Division

19 November 2019



## The Department of Agriculture submission into the Queensland Government independent inquiry into horse welfare in Queensland

Submission 1

### Animal welfare in Australia

State and territory governments are responsible for animal production and welfare laws and their enforcement. The states and territories set and enforce animal welfare standards through administration of legislation for animal welfare and the prevention of animal cruelty. The Australian government has specific powers in relation to external trade that encompasses some animal welfare issues.

All export abattoirs are regulated by the Australian government through the Department of Agriculture for export operations. The department has regulatory safeguards to ensure that animal welfare legislative requirements are maintained in accordance with the relevant state or territory animal welfare regulatory authorities.

### Agencies involved

There are three agencies involved with the compliance of animal welfare at export abattoirs that process horses meat for human consumption in Queensland; Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Safefood Production Queensland, and the department.

The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries holds responsibility for animal welfare of farm animals including horses and Safefood Production Queensland regulates the production of primary produce which includes abattoirs.

Under Commonwealth legislation (*Export Control Act 1982*<sup>1</sup> (the Act), *Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Orders 2005*<sup>2</sup> (the Orders)), export abattoirs are bound to comply with *Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption*<sup>3</sup> (the Australian Meat Standard) and importing country requirements.

One way the department verifies compliance with these requirements on export establishments is through on-plant veterinarians (OPVs). OPVs are appointed as authorised officers under the Act and are also Australian Public Service Employees. OPVs conduct daily ante-mortem inspection whereby animals are physically examined for suitability for slaughter and verify the welfare of the animals. They monitor compliance with the Australian Meat Standard which includes that animals are slaughtered in a way that prevents unnecessary injury, pain and suffering to them and causes the least practicable disturbance.

### Animal welfare at abattoirs

Export abattoirs are responsible for animal welfare from the unloading of animals off the transport truck to the completion of slaughter. For animal welfare incidents that are identified at the export abattoir but have occurred prior to arrival (i.e. the animals were unfit to load), the export abattoir or the departmental on-plant veterinarian (OPV), depending on who identifies the incident, will raise an animal welfare incident report which will notify the relevant state/territory authority so that they can take appropriate legislative action.

The Australian Meat Standard includes that animals are slaughtered in a way that prevents unnecessary injury, pain and suffering to them and causes the least practicable disturbance.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C01063>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2019C00536>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/5553/>



Where an animal welfare issue is found on an export abattoir by an OPV and the abattoir has not taken appropriate action in a timely manner, the OPV will immediately alleviate the animal's pain and/or suffering and report the incident to the relevant state or territory authority.

### **Animal welfare requirements when preparing animals for slaughter**

Section 7 of the Australian Meat Standard provides the basis for the welfare of animals at slaughtering establishments (both domestic and export). Exporters are required to comply with the Australian Meat Standard, including this section, under the Orders.

The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) developed the 'Industry Animal Welfare Standards – Livestock processing establishments preparing meat for human consumption'<sup>4</sup>. This is a voluntary standard that covers the welfare of animals from receipt to slaughter. It provides a more detailed approach and assists industry to continually improve and demonstrate compliant animal welfare outcomes. The European Union recognises these standards as meeting their animal welfare requirements.

### **Animal welfare incident reporting**

A breach in animal welfare requirements at export abattoirs will trigger an *Animal Welfare Incident Report* to be completed and notified to the relevant state or territory authority. The purpose of this report is to provide information to that regulatory authority who may prosecute under their legislation. The department provides any information available to assist with investigations, however the final outcome is not often reported back.

### **Corrective Action**

It is the department's practice that where an OPV identifies non-compliance with an animal welfare requirements a corrective action request (CAR) is issued to the export abattoir. A CAR identifies action to be taken by the export abattoir to address non-compliance, amongst other things. The department will assess the effectiveness of the action taken through inspection, audit and verification.

Where necessary, the department may take further regulatory action in accordance with the Act and Orders to address non-compliance with animal welfare requirements. Regulatory action may include requiring variation of the approved arrangement and/or revoking or suspending the occupier's approved arrangement or registration of their establishment. The department may also pursue criminal proceedings where the occupier of an establishment has failed to comply with the Australian Meat Standard.

### **Horse welfare standards and guidelines**

Whilst there is no national animal welfare standard specific to horses as a livestock species, the Australian government supports state and territory governments in developing a nationally consistent Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines that includes horses.

The drafting of national standards and guidelines for horse welfare commenced in 2008. This initial work was coordinated by the then Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on behalf of state and territory governments. In April 2009, Animal Health Australia was tasked with working with industry to finalise the drafting of the standards and guidelines for horse welfare, including completing public consultations. In 2011, Animal Health Australia reported there was no agreement from horse industry members to provide the necessary funding to progress the draft standards and guidelines<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://aawcs.com.au/standards/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/horses/>





### **Departmental reviews and submissions**

At the Agriculture Ministers' Forum on 25 October 2019<sup>6</sup>, Agriculture Ministers agreed to advise Racing Ministers on animal welfare. Ministers further agreed to the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee reviewing the implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock in respect of horses.

The department is working with all jurisdictions on this review. The department is gathering information on implementation and enforcement of the standards by each jurisdiction and any industry codes in use. This review will identify gaps and inconsistencies and provide jurisdictions with information for harmonising, and where necessary improving, their regulation.

It is the department's understanding that a Senate Inquiry into the feasibility of a National Horse Traceability Register for all horses is due to report to the Australian government parliament by 5 December 2019. Any recommendations made that are relevant to the department's regulatory arrangements of horse processing for export meat and meat products will be considered by the department when the report is released.

It has also been noted the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries is convening a state and territory working group to consider national horse identification and registration processes to potentially support management of emergency disease, natural disaster preparedness and rider safety and to reduce stock theft. The department will consider the group's findings when presented to the department's Animal Health Committee.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/about/media-centre/communiques/ag-ministers-forum-october-2019>