



ANIMAL WELFARE GROUP | AUSTRALIA COUNTRY PROFILE



KEY METRICS

(All figures are approximate)



POPULATION



27,403,000



2,308,000



3,570,000



70,912,000



9,896,168

Cattle slaughtered in 2014



5,000,000

Pigs slaughtered in 2016



32,206,844

Sheep slaughtered in 2014

2016 BEEF
CONSUMPTION



29.5
kgs/capita
(65 lbs/capita)



The objective of the country profiles is to provide an overview of the animal welfare landscape and the differences between regions. The information provided is general in nature and a summary of facts, it does not represent the opinion of Leather Working Group. The country profiles are living documents, that are reviewed and updated from time to time. While Leather Working Group has taken due care to ensure the information is accurate as of the date of publication, the information is provided on an "as is" basis and we make no representation or warranty as to its accuracy. Please note that examples of high-quality and low-quality animal welfare can be identified in every region. Leather Working Group is not liable to any person for any loss suffered or incurred as a result of reliance on the information.

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SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

Transport

- There is a significant amount of legislation regarding the transportation of livestock, including species-specific regulations.
- The regular provision of water throughout transportation is significant due to the Australian climate.
- As much of the transport is from large scale farming operations, organisations can easily be held accountable for animal welfare violations.

Traceability

- Microchipping bovine animals has been implemented nationally and allows for traceability from birth to slaughter. This system is regarded as one of the most developed globally.
- Sheep and goats use ear tags and pigs are usually temporarily tattooed before transfer. Whilst less thorough than microchips, there is good traceability of all animals.

Slaughter

- Animals in Australia must be rendered unconscious prior to slaughter. The preferred methods of slaughter are firearms and captive bolts, as these are considered quick and humane.
- CCTV must be operational in all areas of the slaughterhouse in which live animals are handled, ensuring that animals are treated appropriately and that individuals are held accountable for any violations.

Legislation

- States and territories are responsible for the legislation regarding animal welfare. Despite some differences, all states and territories use the 'five freedoms' as a basis for their legislation.

Governance

- There is evidence of only a low level of corruption in Australia.
- Each state and territory, excluding South Australia, has a regulatory body to enforce animal welfare regulations.

NGO Activity

- There are two major NGOs operating in Australia that focus on animal welfare, both target a reduction of live exports as the treatment of animals once they have been exported cannot be guaranteed.
- NGOs have also suggested several areas where the treatment of animals on farms can be improved.

FARMING

Australia is a major agricultural producer and exporter. As of 2015 the bovine herd population was 27.4 million. The state with the highest concentration of animals is Queensland with 11.3 million head of cattle, followed by New South Wales and Victoria with 5.6 million and 4.1 million respectively. The total bovine herd number has remained fairly constant since the early 1990s¹.

The sheep and lamb population is roughly two and a half times that of bovine animals² and is concentrated to the south of Australia³. In 2015, the sheep and lamb herd stood at 70.9 million with the highest concentration of numbers in New South Wales at 26.6 million, followed by Victoria at 14.5 million and Western Australia at 14 million. The sheep and lamb herd has reduced by a total of 55%⁴ since the early 1990s, when it was considerably higher at a total of 170 million¹. The decline in population has been attributed to changing production systems and climatic challenges⁵. Not only has the sheep herd decreased, but the nature of the population has changed, with purebred Merino lamb numbers decreasing whilst meat producing and dual-purpose breeds are increasing⁶. This shows the transition in the use of sheep for wool production to meat production within Australia. Although there has been a transition toward meat production, Australia still produces over 25% of the world's wool⁷.

The pig population is considerably smaller than the sheep and cattle populations at 2.3 million head of livestock⁸. The pig population is 10% of the cattle population, with Queensland holding 28% of the national pig herd⁹.

Cattle farms in the south typically hold smaller herds in operations that are more intense, however some major cattle production companies are located there¹⁰. Nearly 40% of red meat is processed in Queensland due to the supply of cattle¹⁰ and Australia is third to Brazil and India for total world beef exports, accounting for 14.67% of exports¹¹.

Australia's cattle industry covers 200 million hectares of land¹⁰. The majority of farms occupy less than 500 hectares of land, but around 100 farms occupy more than 500,000 hectares⁹, meaning Australia has some of the largest individual cattle farms in the world. The use of feedlots has increased considerably in the past three decades, allowing over 1 million cattle to be fed in a singular animal feeding operation at any one time¹⁰. The number and size of feedlots is expected to increase, following the trend in North America¹⁰. Nippon Meat Packers, the largest feedlot in Australia, can house up to 75,000 animals. Of the 4,000 cattle businesses in Western Australia, the largest 500 producers own more than 75% of the state's herd¹².



TRANSPORT

Due to the size of Australia and the distances between some of the larger farms, long distance transport of livestock is an inevitability and therefore a key animal welfare issue for the country. In 2012, the Australian Government published the Land Transport of Livestock Standards and Guidelines concerning animal welfare during the transportation of livestock under the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS)¹³. The standards are wide reaching covering transport by road, rail and shipping, and it applies to all major commercial livestock industries in Australia. The standards identify that responsibility for livestock welfare starts with the owner or agent, and extends to the final receiver of the livestock¹³.

The content of the Land Transport of Livestock standards is comprehensive; the document extends to 124 pages and covers general standards and guidelines to be applied to all livestock, and species-specific standards covering 12 of the major livestock species farmed in the country¹³.

Certain principles govern the general guidelines that can be applied to all livestock transportation, including a recognition that preparation and selection of appropriate livestock ready for transport should be the first step to ensuring the livestock's welfare is maintained throughout any transportation. Livestock should be handled correctly using purpose designed facilities and vehicles by competent handlers to reduce stress in the animals. The journey should be planned to ensure prompt delivery of livestock and undertaken to ensure that appropriate timing of rest periods are met. Throughout any transportation, consideration must be given to feed and water requirements, provision of adequate shelter, and protection from injury and disease for all livestock¹³.

Provision of water is a key requirement for livestock welfare. This particular consideration is important as the climatic conditions of Australia mean that livestock are prone to overheating during transport. The guidelines classify all activities from the time that livestock are first deprived of water before loading, until the time that livestock have access to water at the end of their journey, as included in the transport process and hence the guidelines are applicable throughout³.

The transport guidance is well established and fully integrated within state and territory legislation. The majority of livestock transport in Australia is the result of large scale commercial farming, therefore organisations can be held to account if they do not invest appropriately to meet the standards of livestock transport required by the state or territory within which they operate.

TRACEABILITY

Australia's National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) was first introduced in the late 1990s, enabling beef and dairy livestock to be accurately identified and tracked from birth to slaughter, and has been implemented nationally. The highly accurate device contains a microchip that is encoded with a unique number that cannot be altered, allowing tagged animals to be identified electronically. Animals must always be tagged before moving to a slaughterhouse or other farm, and it is an offence to auction or transport cattle without the correct NLIS identification. The traceability of cattle livestock in Australia is therefore regarded as world-leading^{10,14}.

Sheep and goats must also be identified with an NLIS-approved ear tag prior to moving an animal and the tags must be visually readable¹⁵.

Value Chain Management International (VCM International) state that "99.5% of movement transactions are received electronically within 24 hours of the movement", which emphasises how effective and valuable the tool has become¹⁶. The implementation varies between states, but all states are compliant. Victoria has been actively engaged with the scheme from the start, and has made it mandatory for all cattle born from 2002 to be identified using NLIS electronic tags¹⁶.

The temporary tagging of pigs should be carried out in the form of tattooing. Temporary tagging is compulsory in preparation for the movement of pigs to another facility, detailing the unique code of the property it is leaving. Any pigs below 25kg in weight should be ear tagged only¹⁷. Permanent tagging of pigs may be carried out in the form of: ear tattooing, tagging, notching or punching, body tattooing, or micro-chip. Notching of the ear should be avoided where possible, and should not be carried out after 7 days of age¹⁸. NLIS can be used for pigs, but there is currently no evidence to suggest that this is mandatory.



SLAUGHTERING

All livestock must be slaughtered in a quick and humane manner, preferably via firearms or captive bolt. Blunt trauma is acceptable only for livestock under 24 hours old and piglets less than 15kg, and only if other humane methods are unavailable for use¹³. Workers must be vigilant that animals are not regaining consciousness, and must take immediate action should this happen^{13,19}.

Slaughter should not be carried out in the presence of other animals, and dead animals should not be in sight of live animals awaiting slaughter¹⁹. When religious slaughter is carried out, pre-stunning in the form of electrical stunning or effective 'mushroom' percussion stunning should be encouraged¹⁹. Pigs may be rendered unconscious by using carbon dioxide and mechanical stunning may be used, but only in special circumstances such as emergency slaughter¹⁹.

CCTV must be installed and operational in all slaughter facilities. It must provide a clear view of live animal handling areas, including the stunning and killing area, and the footage must be available for all auditors and authorised inspectors upon request²⁰.

Australia exports large quantities of livestock, much of this is live export to East Asia. There is an animal welfare risk that once livestock leaves the regulatory controlled area of Australia, slaughter methods may not meet the same standards.



HIDES, SKIN & LEATHER

Australia has a large cattle and sheep population, with approximately 30 million head of cattle and 70 million head of sheep. A significant proportion of the animals are live exported, with a significant quantity of sheep being exported to countries such as Kuwait, Jordan and Oman, and cattle to Indonesia, Turkey and Israel²¹.

Each year approximately 9 million cattle are slaughtered and 30 million sheep. A significant proportion of the raw hides available are exported in a salted or brined state to China, equating to approximately 377 million USD worth or about 4.5-5 million hides²².

Approximately 3.5-4 million hides are processed in Australia to the wet blue state. A significant proportion of this material is exported to Italy, Vietnam, India and China.

The majority of sheepskin is exported to China as salted, wool on skins. A significant proportion of this will be processed into woolskins in China.

A small quantity of Australian material is processed into finished leather locally, the majority of which is used in the automotive industry. Generally, very little of the domestically available material is processed into finished leather in Australia.





LEGISLATION & REGULATION

The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS), first developed in 2005, is an Australian Government initiative that guides the development of new, nationally consistent policies to enhance animal welfare arrangements in all Australian states and territories¹³. The standards form a basis for development and implementation of consistent legislation across the states and territories, who have responsibility for developing and enforcing animal welfare legislation. The AAWS also provides guidance for people responsible for the care of livestock.

The AAWS was first developed by the Australian Government in conjunction with the states and territories, with the AAWS now managed independently by the states and territories. Australia has three tiers of government, each of which have animal welfare responsibilities although these vary between jurisdictions. Under the Federal Constitution, states and territories have the primary jurisdiction for animal welfare within Australia²³.

Despite the fact that the AAWS was developed nationally, there is no national legislation regarding the welfare of animals, as each state or territory is required to create their own legislation²⁴. All states and territories regulate their own legislation, with all legislation focusing on the 'five freedoms' as indicators of good animal welfare²⁴.

The state and territory governments have published animal welfare legislation based on the principles of the AAWS²⁵. This legislation is administered by relevant departments within those state and territory governments, usually Primary Industry and Environment departments.

The Australian Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals was endorsed by the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand as a national code in 2000²⁶. The codes of practice outline various aspects of animal welfare, including slaughtering, holding conditions and the requirements for unloading livestock²⁶.



GOVERNANCE

Information on governance is subjective; therefore to help quantify implementation of law, we use the independently published Global Corruption Index to assess the level of governance in each country. Australia is ranked joint 13th of 176 countries, alongside the United Kingdom and Iceland. This ranking suggests there is a low level of corruption in Australia²⁷.

The Australian Government handed the management for the delivery of the AAWS to the state and territory governments. In 2013²⁸, the Australian Animal Advisory Committee was disbanded. The decision was driven by budget considerations at a national level²⁹.

The Australian Government retains responsibility for trade and international agreements. This legislation covers the welfare of animals involved in the live animal export trade and animals processed at export-registered slaughterhouses²⁸.

The Australian states and territories have responsibility for developing primary jurisdiction for animal welfare. Their responsibilities include preparing and enforcing animal welfare standards, providing suitable legislative frameworks and programs, and promoting these to the public. Despite the individual responsibility to develop and enforce standards, states and territories also have a responsibility to work towards consistency of approach in legislation²⁸.

Each state and territory, excluding South Australia, have set up either an Animal Welfare Authority, Advisory Council or Advisory Committee comprised of relevant industry and government stakeholders, with responsibilities to develop animal welfare standards. New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria go further by employing officers to monitor compliance to animal welfare standards and inspect suspected breaches³⁰.

The allocation of responsibility to relevant government bodies is recorded in legislation. Enforcement of governance and regulatory responsibilities of the relevant departments are therefore subject to public sector accountability mechanisms³⁰.

NGO ACTIVITY

Regarding the treatment of livestock animals, there are two predominant NGO's working for animal welfare in Australia; RSPCA Australia who are running multiple campaigns including the reduction of live export, un-stunned slaughter, intensive pig farming, alongside improvements in dairy cow farming practice³¹. The other key NGO relating to the livestock industry is Animals Australia; their goal is to "significantly and permanently improve the welfare of all animals in Australia"³². The key campaigns of Animals Australia are focused on the removal of live export and humane slaughter³³.

Live export of livestock is the most significant animal welfare issue in Australia and a primary focus of NGO activity. 7% of cattle and 6% of sheep are exported live from Australia, predominantly to East Asia³⁴. RSPCA Australia and Animals Australia are campaigning to reduce live export as humane slaughter cannot be guaranteed once an animal has been exported. A key driver of the campaign is that packaged meat is argued to be a more valuable commodity than live export livestock providing an economic incentive towards reduced live export³⁵.

RSPCA Australia defines humane killing as when an animal is either killed instantly or instantaneously rendered insensible to pain until it dies³⁶. Both RSPCA Australia and Animals Australia campaign for pre-slaughter stunning³⁶. Pre-slaughter stunning is standard practice in most Australian abattoirs producing halal-certified meat, however some halal and all kosher slaughter is carried out without prior stunning. It is the state and territory food authorities that provides abattoirs with special permission to conduct religious slaughter without prior stunning, and these exemptions can apply to sheep, goats, cattle or poultry³⁶.

The RSPCA Australia campaign against the use of indoor intensive systems for housing pigs focuses on the lack of freedom and barrenness of the surroundings, which can lead to stress, injury and abnormal behaviours³⁷. RSPCA Australia is especially concerned about the welfare issues associated with use of sow stalls and farrowing crates³⁸.

The key area of focus for RSPCA Australia regarding dairy farming is the treatment of bobby calves, that are hand fed and transported to slaughter at 5 days old. The dairy supply chain allows calves to be off feed for 30 hours and transported for up to 12 hours. RSPCA Australia's position is that if bobby calves cannot be euthanized on farm, they should be at least 10 days old before being transported off farm and then slaughtered within 12 hours of last feed³⁹.

Mulesing is a common practice in Australia and considered controversial as there are health benefits for the sheep as well as animal welfare issues in its practice. Mulesing is the removal of strips of wool-bearing skin from around the breech (buttocks) of a sheep to prevent blowfly strike. Blowfly strike itself has serious animal welfare implications. The scar tissue that grows over the wound does not grow wool and is less likely to attract the flies that cause blowfly strike. The procedure can be carried out by untrained persons and without the use of anaesthetic⁴⁰. The Australian Veterinary Association's position on mulesing is that alternative methods should be developed but until these are in widespread use, approved analgesics should be used following the procedure to minimise any animal suffering⁴¹. The animal welfare organisation PETA's position is that mulesing should not be used to prevent blowfly strike and other animal husbandry methods must be developed in its place⁴².

Each year Australia undergoes a cull of wild kangaroos to control the population, a proportion of the animal hides are made into leather. This is a controversial practice as although the cull has been shown to have environmental benefits, some wildlife protection groups such as Wildlife Aid state that there can be negative consequences. Only certain species of kangaroo can be culled and as the activity usually takes place at night, campaign groups caution that hunters would struggle to ensure that only the authorised species are targeted. Further adult kangaroos are often culled whilst carrying infant kangaroos known as joeys. Orphaned joeys either do not survive or have to be hand reared up by foster carers⁴³.





FARM ASSURANCE SCHEMES

RSPCA Australia have developed an Approved Farming Scheme, created with the aim of improving welfare for farm animals. Certification to the Approved Farming Schemes requires compliance to various other standards including: Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Poultry; Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Pigs; Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals – Land Transport of Livestock; and Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals⁴⁴.

The Australia Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System (AAWCS) is a certification programme designed to promote and award best practice animal welfare. The programme includes: cattle and calves, sheep, pigs, deer, goats, buffalo and horses⁴⁵. Certification of this programme is dependent upon the scope of the quality management system that is in place. The system must address: management procedures and planning; design and maintenance of facilities and equipment; staff competency; management and humane destruction of weak, ill, or injured livestock; management of livestock to minimise stress and injuries; and humane slaughter procedures⁴⁶.

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