



# Farmnote

## Transporting livestock: when are animals fit to load?

*Dr Don Moir, Senior Veterinary Officer*

In the increasingly complex world of transporting livestock, of licences, permits, declarations and journey plans, there remains one constant: the responsibility to look after the safety and well-being of the animals in your care.

There are very specific legal requirements under animal welfare legislation for people working with livestock. Each of the Australian states and territories has its own Act and regulations that deal with this area, but all are essentially similar. In Western Australia the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* states:

**'a person in charge of an animal is cruel to an animal if the animal is transported in a way that causes, or is likely to cause, it unnecessary harm.'**

'Unnecessary harm' includes injury, pain and distress.

The 'person in charge' has a wide definition in the Act. It may be:

- the owner
- a person who has custody
- a person who has control
- a staff member of any of the above
- the owner or occupier of the place where the animal is
- the owner or occupier of the vehicle where the animal is.

If a person loads an animal that is unfit for transport, the farm owner, farm manager, farm staff, livestock agent and/or truck driver could be held responsible.

### **What animals should not be loaded?**

Only transport animals that are strong and healthy (see box). Do not load animals that are at risk of going down during the journey due to weakness or lameness, those that have existing conditions such as wounds or cancers that are likely to be aggravated during transport and those that cannot see.

### **IS THIS ANIMAL FIT TO LOAD?**

*Owners and transporters are both responsible for only loading fit animals. Before loading any animal for transport, check that it:*

- ✓ can walk normally
- ✓ can bear weight on all legs
- ✓ is free from visible disease or injury
- ✓ is strong enough to keep up with the mob
- ✓ can see out of one eye (both eyes for export)
- ✓ is not in late pregnancy

### **IF IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT**

Animals that are not fit to load need to be kept on farm and either treated or humanely destroyed.

Animals in late pregnancy are also not fit to load. This includes sheep more than four months pregnant, cattle more than eight months pregnant and pigs over 80 days pregnant.

Owners and truck drivers can obtain a pictorial 'ute guide' called 'Is it fit to load?' from their local Department of Agriculture and Food office, or direct from Meat and Livestock Australia (phone 02 9463 9333, [www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au)). The guide covers the most common conditions affecting livestock that make them unfit to load.

Table 1 lists common conditions which would make an animal unsuitable for transport. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, so if in doubt the 'person in charge' should either leave the animal out or contact a veterinarian.

### **Important disclaimer**

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Agriculture and Food and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.

## Exemptions to the rules

Under national and state codes of practice for transporting livestock, in special circumstances weak, sick or injured animals may be transported short distances under veterinary advice:

- for emergency humane slaughter if no alternative exists
- to a veterinary clinic or hospital for treatment
- after bushfires, provided transport will not result in more pain and suffering
- out of drought-affected areas.

However, to avoid placing themselves at risk of breaching animal welfare legislation, owners need to ensure they have veterinary advice before undertaking any of these journeys.

## Export

Animals destined for export need to meet extra standards:

- sheep must be a minimum of 28 kilograms liveweight for export by sea, or 20kg for export by air
- cattle must be a minimum of 200kg liveweight
- weaned for at least 14 days before transport
- cannot be thin, or over-fat
- no pink eye
- can see out of both eyes
- no scabby mouth
- no long horns.

The export buyer and/or agent will select the animals suitable to accept into the feedlot. Owners must not include rejected stock in the consignment or export owners may bill them for disposing of the animal.

## Standards and guidelines

In 2009 the Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed the *Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals – Land Transport of Livestock*. These nationally agreed standards and guidelines will replace provisions on land transport in the various model codes of practice that apply in Australia.

In this document, the 'standards' set out the minimum acceptable transport standards that must be met. They are intended to be written into each state and territory's legislation, giving consistency across Australia. Each standard can be considered as a 'must do'.

Guidelines will be the recommended level of practice for animal welfare but will not be legally

Category	Unsuitable for transport
Systemic conditions	Emaciated and weak Uncoordinated, collapsed, weak Unwell, lethargic, dehydrated Ill-thrift In late pregnancy
Musculoskeletal system	Fractures Lameness or abnormal gait Unable to fully bear weight on all legs Deformity
Gastrointestinal system	Dysentery or profuse diarrhoea
Nervous system	Significant nervous symptoms (circling, incoordination) Abnormal or aggressive behaviour/ intractable or violent (distressed)
External/skin	Significant lacerations Open or discharging wounds or abscesses Cancers Cutaneous myiasis (flystrike) Ballanitis (pizzle rot in sheep) Grossly enlarged udder Grossly enlarged testicles Rectal or vaginal prolapse
Head	Blindness in both eyes Respiratory distress—difficulty breathing Cancer eye

enforced. Guidelines represent a higher level of welfare, and can be considered as a 'should do'.

The full document can be seen on the internet at <http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au>.

## Implications for farmers

With an increasing focus on welfare from the community and regulatory authorities, people transporting animals that are unfit to load are placing themselves at risk. Not only are they causing unnecessary suffering to their livestock, they:

- will come to the attention of inspectors who check animals arriving at saleyards, abattoirs and export feedlots
- will have animals rejected, which will result in no payment
- will be billed with the cost of destruction and disposal of an animal that requires it
- will get a reputation with buyers and exporters as a supplier of unsuitable stock
- will damage the reputation of their industry.

## More information

For more information, contact your local Department of Agriculture and Food veterinarian or visit the Meat and Livestock Australia website at [www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au).