Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock

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Introduction

The Australian Government introduced mandatory standards for the long-distance transport of animals to overseas markets in 2004. These (1) Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) are referenced in Commonwealth law and the livestock export industry must comply with the standards as a condition of a license to export.

The ASEL cover a ‘whole of chain’ approach from sourcing and preparation of livestock on farm to their unloading in the overseas destination country. They were developed using expert working groups and were subject to extensive consultation, including formal public consultation. Five standards relate to sea transportation of animals and a sixth standard is specific to the air transportation.

- Sourcing and on-farm preparation of livestock
- Land transport of livestock
- Management of livestock in registered premises
- Vessel preparation and loading
- Onboard management of livestock
- Air transport of livestock.

They remain under constant review and have been revised three times in the past two years. They provide transparent, consistent and clearly identifiable requirements that exceed the World Organisation for Animal Health’s standards and also exceed standards, where they exist, in other exporting countries.

MV Cormo Express Incident and review of livestock exports

The ASEL were developed in response to the MV Cormo Express incident in 2003 when a consignment of sheep was rejected by Saudi Arabian officials over alleged disease concerns. After subsequent rejection of the sheep by some other countries, the sheep were finally discharged in Eritrea 80 days later.

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Immediately following this incident, the Australian Government commissioned Dr John Keniry to lead a review of the live export trade (2). The review made 8 recommendations, seven of which were accepted by the Government.

The Review concluded that the welfare of the animals in the livestock export trade was a primary consideration in all areas of the industry and all stages of the livestock export chain, from farm to discharge into the market (2).

The Australian Government was deemed responsible for safeguarding the broader animal welfare interests of the Australian community in the export process by setting clear standards for the export of livestock, administering them firmly and consistently, and for ensuring governance and reporting arrangements during the export process were transparent (2). Australian livestock export consignments must meet international criteria, importing country requirements, Australian animal health and welfare standards and the ASEL.

Recommendation One (2) from the review called for the development of a national standard for livestock exports, the “Australian Code for Export of Livestock”, which:

- focused on the health and welfare of the animals during export
- was consistent with the Model Codes as they were updated
- engaged States and Territories and considered the views of industry and animal welfare groups in the development of the standard
- recognised the outcomes sought in the export of livestock and took into account the whole process for sourcing, preparing, assembling and transporting animals for export

The Review recommended that an interim national standard must be in place by 1 May 2004 and finalised by 31 December 2004. This was achieved and a Code framework was endorsed by agricultural ministers through Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) in May 2004 – as a sound basis upon which to develop comprehensive standards for the whole of the livestock export chain. Initial standards were then completed using expert working groups in time to meet proclamation of new legislation arrangements on 1 December 2004.

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) managed implementation of the recommendations from the Keniry Review on behalf of the Government. The animal welfare area of DAFF reviewed the existing Australian Livestock Export Standards (ALES) developed by the export industry (11) and convened some eighty experts and stakeholders in six expert working groups in 2004 to develop the initial ASEL. DAFF managed the extensive consultation process, including sixty days public consultation. A Livestock Export Standards Advisory Committee (LESAC) was established to oversee the development of this work.

Initial standards were enacted on 1 December 2004 to meet legislative requirements and work then commenced on version 1 of the ASEL, taking into account comments received during stakeholder and public consultation. LESAC was re established to provide on-going advice to DAFF and the Minister on appropriate standards.

Work has continued on the standards, supported in some instances by specific research jointly funded by \(^2\) Meat and Livestock Australia, the Australian Livestock Export Corporation (\(^3\) LiveCorp) and the Australian Government.

The following versions of the revised standards have been endorsed by PIMC:

- Version 1 – July 2005
- Version 2 – September 2006

\(^2\) Meat & Livestock Australia provides research and development and marketing services to the red meat industry

\(^3\) Livecorp is a not for profit industry body owned and funded through contributions by livestock exporters that manages the direction and delivery of industry funded programs and services
Policy approach

The Australian Government supports the livestock export trade because it is a legitimate trade that supports thousands of Australian families. The trade is worth around $727 million a year in livestock sales (4) and is estimated to provide almost $1 billion in wages. The jobs of more than 10,000 people in remote, rural, regional and metropolitan areas—including farmers, truck drivers, stockmen, stevedores and vets—are connected to livestock exports (5).

The Australian Position Statement on the Export of Livestock (3) describes the export chain and provides an Australian Government statement of guiding principles. It outlines roles and responsibilities, reporting and monitoring requirements and international cooperation arrangements.

It provides a framework for the development and further review of ASEL. It explains the:
- roles and responsibilities in the export chain
- Australian animal health and welfare requirements
- operating environment
- guiding principles and expected outcomes throughout the live export chain, and
- responsibility of the three layers of government (Australian, state and territory, and local governments).

The ASEL are based around a whole of chain approach (3), summarised in Figure 1.
The initial land transport phase commences when the first animal is loaded onto a vehicle at the property of origin and ends when the last animal is unloaded at the premises approved or registered by AQIS. A second phase of land transport commences when the first animal is loaded onto a vehicle to leave the premises and ends when the last animal is unloaded at the embarkation port. Where the property of origin is also the premises, the land transport phase commences when the first animal is loaded onto a vehicle and ends when the last animal is unloaded at the embarkation port.

The pre-embarkation assembly of animals for export commences with the unloading of the first animal from the vehicle at the approved or registered premises and ends with the loading of the last animal onto the vehicle for departure from the premises, whether or not the animal is passed as fit for export.

Vessel preparation includes selection and preparation of a suitable vessel to transport livestock overseas. Loading of the vessel is said to commence with the arrival of livestock at the port of loading. Loading ends when the last animal has been loaded onto the vessel and an export permit and health certificate is issued by AQIS. Loading includes an inspection of the livestock for health and fitness to travel at the port, before the animals are moved onto the vessel.

On-board management covers the period from the time the first animal is loaded onto the vessel until the time the last animal is unloaded at the final port of disembarkation.

Disembarkation commences after the arrival of the vessel at the first overseas port (and acceptance of the consignment, or part thereof, by the competent authority of the country). It commences with the unloading of the first animal and ends when the last animal is unloaded from the vessel. The Australian Government’s jurisdiction over the animals ceases when disembarkation is complete.

After disembarkation, the health and welfare of the livestock is the responsibility of the importer, under the authority of the importing country. The Australian Government and the Australian livestock export industry are committed to furthering the health and welfare of livestock in importing countries. Improvements at all stages of the livestock handling chain are being achieved by the fostering of cooperation and goodwill, the sharing of Australian technical expertise, the provision of educational and training opportunities, and support for infrastructure.

Figure 1 The livestock export chain

Risk assessment

All livestock exporters must hold a current export licence and are subject to annual review (6).

For each consignment, Australian Government legislation requires the livestock exporter to undertake adequate planning encompassing a thorough risk assessment

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4 Not all steps are applicable for all species and purposes
and development of appropriate risk mitigation measures. The planning must cover the sourcing, land transportation, treatments and inspections before export, and specific plans to manage the animals’ health and welfare during the journey from Australia to the importing country, whether by air or by sea.

Exporters must submit a notice of intention (NOI) to export, and a consignment and risk management plan (CRMP) to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) of the DAFF for each export consignment. AQIS then formally sends the exporter an Approved Export Program (AEP), which details any particular treatments or inspections deemed necessary.

Veterinarians accredited by AQIS (accredited veterinarians) must then ensure that animals are prepared in accordance with the approved AEP and the ASEL (7), in line with legislative requirements. All voyages over 10 days require an accredited veterinarian to be on board, in addition to accredited stockmen that must be on all sea voyages.

All livestock vessels used for the export of livestock must comply with all Australian and international vessel biosecurity requirements. They must also comply with requirements for the safe carriage of livestock as indicated by a valid Australian Certificate for the Carriage of Livestock issued by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority for the species to be carried (8, 9). Vessels must comply with the general provisions and design requirements of Marine Orders 43 as well as new ventilation requirements on all vessels built on or after 27 May 2004 (9).

A further tool to manage risk has been the development of a software program for heat stress assessment (10). This computer program is used by licensed livestock exporters to calculate and quantify risks for a particular deck on a specific livestock vessel for a specified time of year and specific route. It is used to generate the load plans for each deck of specific vessels to minimise heat stress risks.

**Implementation**

The live export industry is an international trade in which the commercial parties negotiate the detailed specifications of individual consignments. The Australian Government provides the legislative and administrative framework in which livestock
exporters, operators of registered premises and accredited veterinarians are licensed and regulated by AQIS.

Livestock sourced for export must also meet all requirements under relevant state and territory legislation and state and territory governments are responsible for ensuring that these requirements are met. Areas of state and territory responsibilities include animal health and welfare, livestock transport, vehicle registration and operation, occupational health and safety, and environmental protection and operation of companies.

Figure 2 is a risk-based framework for the health and welfare of livestock in the live export chain. It highlights the association between the Australian Position Statement on the Export of Livestock, national model codes, legislation and the ASEL. The export industry and its service providers e.g. transport operators, deliver the ASEL through quality assurance programs and documented arrangements. These procedures are outlined in the exporter’s operations and governance manuals submitted to AQIS as part of granting an export licence.

![Figure 2 Risk-based framework for the health and welfare of livestock in the live export chain](image)

**Competencies, education and training**
The ASEL make reference to competent animal handlers as a critical part of the export risk management framework. AQIS accredits veterinarians who undergo specific training for their role on livestock vessels. LiveCorp conducts a rigorous training course to accredit stockpersons (13). Applicants must provide references, a curriculum vitae, undergo knowledge assessment and training and complete a written test. They must also demonstrate successful performance on two voyages before attaining accreditation.

The training program covers the role of the stockman, pre-shipment procedures and factors, onboard management of the livestock, environmental factors, health problems and discharge of livestock at destination ports. The accredited stockpersons and/or accredited vets must complete a daily report on the health and welfare of animals (14). These reports are provided to AQIS and exporters to assist in monitoring the progress of the consignment.

The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy is assisting LiveCorp to conduct training courses for stevedores on livestock handling.

**Benchmarking the Standards against World’s Best Practice**

A benchmarking study published in March 2006 evaluated the ASEL against other livestock export standards in all countries that participate significantly in the livestock export trade (12). The study compared Australia against New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, China, South Africa, Ireland, the US and UK, Canada and various African and European countries.

Standards for each phase of the supply chain were evaluated using the appropriate criteria from the following list (12):

- Outcome focus;
- Risk management;
- Assignment of responsibilities;
- Detailed standards;
- Training and key competencies;
- Remedial actions;
- Supporting legislation;
- Contingency planning;
- R&D program;
The benchmarking process revealed that Australia has world-best livestock export standards in terms of coverage (of species and phases of transportation) and capacity to deliver acceptable outcomes (measured against animal welfare indicators). Australian standards were also seen as a platform for other countries to develop and enhance their own standards and assist in efforts to harmonise standards globally (12). An independent review by the national body of the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals, RSPCA Australia, was critical of the ASEL, their development and enforcement (15). This deduction is not uniformly shared by LESAC, governments and other stakeholders in the live export trade.

In line with the Keniry Review recommendations (2), Australia has negotiated a number of memoranda of understanding with Middle East trading partners. Australia does not have jurisdiction to apply the ASEL in other countries. However, the Australian Government and the livestock export industry are actively working with trading partners, providing funding and training to improve animal welfare outcomes. For example, assistance has been provided in developing regional strategic plans for the Middle East, Asia, the Far East and Oceania to encourage those countries toward meeting the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) international animal welfare guidelines.

**The future**

A review of LESAC has recently been completed and recommendations are currently being considered by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Meanwhile, a further major review of the ASEL is underway by a small expert group. This task involves reviewing version 2.1 of the ASEL to confirm which of these are standards and which are guiding principles based on their ability to be enforced and/or their animal welfare implications.
References


