

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

INTENSIVE LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

Report by the
Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare

June 1990

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TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CONDUCT OF INQUIRY

The intensive livestock production inquiry is the sixth specific inquiry undertaken since the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare was established in November 1983 to inquire into and report upon:

'the question of animal welfare in Australia, with particular reference to:

- (a) interstate and overseas commerce in animals;
- (b) wildlife protection and harvesting;
- (c) animal experimentation;
- (d) codes of practice of animal husbandry for all species; and
- (e) the use of animals in sport.'

To date the Committee has presented five reports to the Senate:

Export of Live Sheep from Australia	1985
Dolphins and Whales in Captivity	1985
Kangaroos	1988
Animal Experimentation	1989
Sheep Husbandry	1989

A report on its inquiry into animal welfare issues involved in the racing industry (thoroughbred, standardbred and greyhound racing) is currently being finalised by the Committee.

The inquiry into intensive livestock production was undertaken because of the developing concern in Australia that the welfare of our domestic livestock is being jeopardised in many of the housing systems currently operating.

Issues of concern about intensively produced livestock were raised when this Committee was first established. The Committee has been receiving submissions, taking evidence and inspecting facilities over a number of years on the three areas of most concern - the pig, chicken meat and egg industries. This report focusses on these three areas.

Public hearings and other meetings were held in Canberra and interstate at which representatives of Government and industry bodies, veterinary associations, animal welfare organisations, and research scientists gave evidence in support of their written submissions. Witnesses who appeared before the Committee are listed in Appendix 1. Details of Committee inspections are listed in Appendix 2. The transcript of evidence is available for inspection at the Senate Committee Office, the Australian National Library and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library.

During the course of this inquiry the Committee received valuable assistance from many organisations and individuals. The Committee acknowledges the efforts made by those who prepared submissions and gave evidence. It also thanks those who provided the opportunity to inspect production facilities.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN REPORT

ACEP	Australian Council of Egg Producers
AFWA	Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals
ANZFAS	Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies
APIA	Australian Poultry Industries Association
APPF	Australian Pork Producers Association
AVA	Australian Veterinary Association
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DARA	Victorian Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs
MAFF	UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

RECOMMENDATIONS

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Welfare and Welfare Assessment

1. The Committee recommends that research funding bodies ensure that all intensive livestock production studies and specific animal welfare related research methodologies take an integrated approach to problems addressed so that findings contain elements of matters relating to housing environment, animal reaction to it, specific management issues, and animal/human interaction. (Paragraph 3.42)

PART TWO: THE DOMESTIC FOWL

Cage Housing of Layers

Stocking densities

2. The Committee recommends that as an initial step the maximum stocking density for cages with three or more birds be reduced from 52 kilograms per square metre to 46 kilograms per square metre. (Paragraph 5.41)
3. The Committee favours a shift away from the current practice of calculating floor space per hen by kilogram of live-weight per unit of floor area and recommends that in future, the space allowance for hens be expressed in terms of square centimetres of floor area per bird. (Paragraph 5.42)
4. To give effect to the Committee's objective of addressing the need for further reductions in stocking densities for hens the Committee recommends the following reforms:

- (a) that each cage have a minimum area for each bird of:
- 1000 square centimetres where one hen is kept in a cage;
 - 750 square centimetres where two hens are kept in a cage;
 - 600 square centimetres where three or more hens are kept in a cage; and
- (b) that an early date of effect be introduced for new cages with a phasing-in period to apply for existing systems. (Paragraph 5.43)

5. The Committee recommends that the stocking densities for laying hens be regularly reviewed by the Sub-Committee on Animal Welfare of the Australian Health Committee within the Australian Agricultural Council. (Paragraph 5.44)

Overstocking

6. The Committee recommends that more regular inspections of commercial establishments be undertaken by the appropriate authorities to monitor husbandry practices generally and to ensure that stocking densities do not exceed those specified in the Code of Practice for the domestic fowl. (Paragraph 5.50)

Cage design

7. The Committee, recognising the significant welfare benefits that may derive from the introduction of innovative cage design, recommends that the Commonwealth Government provide tax incentives to encourage farmers to invest in cages incorporating improved design features. (Paragraph 5.70)

Alternative Housing Systems

8. The Committee recommends that the banning of laying cages be considered when it can be demonstrated that viable alternative systems can be developed suitable to Australian conditions and that these alternative systems have positive welfare advantages. (Paragraph 6.79)
9. The Committee recommends that a combination of cage and non-cage production systems be continued with market forces dictating the relative market share of the different systems. (Paragraph 6.79)
10. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government fund a research project in Australia to examine and evaluate alternative housing systems that may be suitable to Australian conditions and that this review:
 - (a) examine overseas research findings into alternative housing systems;
 - (b) assess the welfare benefits and any welfare disadvantages of such systems;
 - (c) evaluate the economic viability of alternative systems; and
 - (d) consult with poultry producers, State Governments, the veterinary profession, and specialist ethologists, both in the initial and subsequent stages of the project. (Paragraph 6.81)

Husbandry Practices

Beak Trimming

11. The Committee believes that beak trimming should only be performed by competent operators and recommends that more formal training and supervision be introduced by the poultry industry for beak trimmers so that improved standards of practice may be achieved. (Paragraph 7.32)

Induced Moulting

12. The Committee recommends that only humane methods of induced moulting be utilised and notes, with approval, the preferred method of feeding barley ad libitum. (Paragraph 7.48)
13. The Committee believes that moulting practices that deprive birds of food or water for excessive periods cannot be justified on welfare grounds and recommends that the starvation method of induced moulting be prohibited. (Paragraph 7.48)

Handling and Transport

14. The Committee recommends that the information contained in the Codes of Practice for road transport of livestock be more widely disseminated by government extension services, poultry companies, transport operators and the veterinary profession. (Paragraph 8.15)

15. The Committee believes that sufficient resources should be provided to ensure that the provisions of the Code are enforced and recommends that additional manpower resources be provided to each State and Territory Department of Agriculture to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Codes of Practice for road transport of livestock. (Paragraph 8.16)

Broiler Chickens

Stocking Densities

16. The Committee recommends that the maximum stocking densities for broilers in sheds be set at a rate consistent with the live-weight of the birds immediately prior to processing to ensure that overcrowding does not occur. (Paragraph 9.18)
17. The Committee recommends that the stocking densities for broiler chickens be regularly reviewed by the Sub-Committee on Animal Welfare of the Australian Health Committee within the Australian Agricultural Council. (Paragraph 9.19)

Processing of Broilers

18. The Committee believes that all slaughtering practices should ensure a humane death and that as to the methods of slaughter, other than by decapitation, the Committee recommends that in all instances broiler chickens be stunned prior to slaughter in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the Codes of Practice for poultry at slaughtering establishments. (Paragraph 9.56)

19. The Committee recommends that research be conducted into effective means of stunning in an effort to overcome the problems associated with the current methods. (Paragraph 9.56)

PART THREE: PIGS

Intensive Pig Housing

Research and Evaluation

20. The Committee recommends that the Pig Research Council actively encourage research to address the cost equation associated with capital costs of pig housing and loss of production with a view to clarifying some welfare stress issues. (Paragraph 11.70)
21. The Committee recommends that the maximum recommended stocking densities for growing and adult pigs in groups be reviewed to take account of the advances in understanding of physiology and behaviour and the welfare consequences of pen space, stocking rates and group sizes. (Paragraph 11.71)

Sows

22. The Committee recommends that future trends in housing the dry sow should be away from individually-confined stall systems and that this be reflected in the Codes of Practice for the welfare of the pig. (Paragraph 11.72)
23. The Committee recommends that tethering of sows be banned. (Paragraph 11.72)

24. The Committee, noting that sow size has increased over the years, recommends that immediate attention be given to ensure that stalls and farrowing crates currently in use do not cause suffering due to cramping. (Paragraph 11.73)
25. The Committee recommends that the Codes of Practice for the pig be revised to ensure stalls and crates reflect the body dimensions of large sows. (Paragraph 11.73)
26. On the issue of farrowing crates, noting that piglet mortality due to sow overlay is a major welfare consideration, the Committee recommends the encouragement of some producer pilot systems to test the viability of designs which will allow sows more freedom of movement and access to a separate exercise area at least some time each day. (Paragraph 11.74)
27. The Committee recommends that governments and the industry encourage the adoption of alternative approaches to accommodating sows through their various stages and the improvement in husbandry skills needed to avoid welfare problems. (Paragraph 11.75)
28. The Committee questions the management practice of birth induction and recommends that the welfare implications of prostaglandin use be investigated. (Paragraph 11.76)

Housing Systems Evaluation

29. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government fund a research project in Australia to examine and evaluate housing systems that may be suitable to Australian conditions and that this review:

- (a) examine overseas research findings into alternative housing systems;
- (b) assess the welfare benefits and any welfare disadvantages of such systems;
- (c) evaluate the economic viability of alternative systems; and
- (d) take account of the views of producers, industry service providers, design engineers and specialist ethologists. (Paragraph 11.77)

Tax Incentives

30. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government provide tax incentives to encourage producers to upgrade their systems to incorporate improved design features to improve pig welfare. (Paragraph 11.78)

Overstocking

31. The Committee recommends that the appropriate authorities ensure that regular inspections of intensive pig production units be undertaken to monitor husbandry practices generally and to ensure that stocking densities do not exceed those specified in the Codes of Practice for welfare of the pig. (Paragraph 11.79)

Pig Husbandry Practices

Tailbiting

32. The Committee, noting that taildocking involves some pain and stress, **recommends** that stockpersons are properly trained in the procedure, so that the task is undertaken with dexterity and with as little trauma to the pig as possible. (Paragraph 12.39)
33. The Committee recommends that further research into the causal factors of tailbiting be undertaken as the issue is so closely linked to overall aspects of pig welfare in close confinement production. (Paragraph 12.39)

Teeth clipping

34. The Committee is surprised at the high susceptibility to infection which apparently occurs in intensive systems and noting the emphasis placed on the health benefits of intensive production **recommends** that further research be conducted into the underlying reasons for infection that necessitates teeth clipping. (Paragraph 12.40)

Pigs-Off Farm Handling

35. The Committee, noting the importance of a multi-sector approach to strategies to minimise stress, deaths, and decrease yield and quality losses during post-farm handling of pigs, **recommends** a State and Territory-wide multi-sectoral review of off-farm handling of pigs with a view to upgrading existing codes of practice and disseminating information to service providers, producers, transporters, abattoirs and other interested parties. The review process should take account of the views of animal welfare organisations and specialist ethologists. (Paragraph 13.16)

36. The Committee recommends that in addition to ensuring that information is widely disseminated on the proper handling of pigs from farm loading to slaughter, adequate monitoring should also be undertaken to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Codes of Practice associated with the transport and slaughter of livestock. (Paragraph 13.17)

PART FOUR: THE WAY FORWARD

Stockmanship, Education and Training

37. The Committee recommends:
- (a) that the subject of animal behaviour be recognised as an integral component of the curriculum in agricultural and veterinary colleges in Australia, especially as a component of welfare;
 - (b) the development of certificate training courses for stockpersons in the pig and poultry industries by Technical and Further Education and agricultural college courses;
 - (c) funding initiatives be developed to support skills training of stockpersons unable to gain access to formal training courses; and
 - (d) the Pig Industry Research Council, the Chicken Meat Research Council and the Egg Industry Research Council give greater priority to welfare-related stockmanship research. (Paragraph 14.24)

38. The Committee also recommends that the Codes of Practice be revised to take account of advances in the understanding of the importance of stockmanship in the welfare of animals in intensive systems. (Paragraph 14.25)

Legislation and Regulation

39. The Committee recommends that to ensure that the Codes of Practice remain relevant there should be continuing revisions as appropriate and major reviews every five years to take account of technological changes in husbandry practices, include advances in the understanding of domestic fowl and pig physiology and behaviour, and to reflect prevailing community attitudes. Codes should include statements on the importance of suitable education and training in maximum welfare in intensive systems. The review process should take account of the views of the industries, industry service providers, consumer and animal welfare organisations, and specialist ethologists. (Paragraph 15.7)
40. Noting that each State and Territory Government has the responsibility to implement policies and enact and upgrade existing legislation which it thinks will best enhance animal welfare within its jurisdiction the Committee recommends:
- (a) legislation for the prevention of cruelty to animals and other relevant Acts specify that Codes of Practice for the welfare of animals must be followed; and
 - (b) that State and Territory Governments around Australia develop a complementary legislative and regulatory approach to animal welfare. (Paragraph 15.9)

Conclusion

Standards for Husbandry Systems

41. Noting that standards are set for a range of commodities which are released onto the market the Committee recommends that governments with responsibility in this area develop standards for new and modified animal husbandry systems. (Paragraph 16.4)