



### Continuous improvement in animal welfare on Australian cattle feedlots

Ensuring the health and well-being of its cattle is a priority for the Australian feedlot industry. In 2011 Australian Lot Feeders' Association undertook a review of how effectively the industry is addressing animal welfare to ensure lot feeders continue to meet industry, government and community expectations in the production of grain fed beef. The outcomes from this review have been used to guide investment in improving animal welfare outcomes on feedlots.

We recognise that we are responsible for continually working to improve our animal welfare performance and ensuring that we are proactive and transparent in the care of our animals. Through Meat & Livestock Australia, the industry delivers a range of research, development and adoption programs to support lot feeders in caring for their cattle. The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme, the feedlot industry's quality assurance program, provides an effective tool for feedlots to demonstrate their commitment to meeting community, market and government expectations in animal welfare.

I am proud to introduce this document, which provides information on the successful animal welfare initiatives that the industry has implemented since the initial review in 2011.

James Palfreeman  
Chair, Animal Health and Welfare Committee  
Australian Lot Feeders' Association



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## Overview

In 2011 Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) undertook a review of how effectively the industry is addressing animal welfare to ensure lot feeders continue to meet industry, government and community expectations in the production of grain fed beef. ALFA has since invested significantly in policy development and research and industry extension and training programs in animal welfare. Some of the successful animal welfare initiatives that the industry has implemented since the review include:

- Regular amendments to the feedlot animal welfare standards and incorporation of best practice guidelines under the industry's quality assurance program (National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme, NFAS), in response to new research in feedlot animal welfare and to meet changing consumer and market expectations.
- Investment in animal welfare research, development and feedlot extension and adoption projects through the allocation of a significant proportion of the grain fed levy through Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA).
- Development and delivery of accredited training and workshops in animal welfare.
- Contribution to, and support for, the development and implementation of enforceable nationally consistent Australian Animal Welfare Standards.
- Monitoring of animal performance and animal welfare outcomes through an industry benchmarking project.
- Appointment of a Technical Services Officer to provide on the ground information to lot feeders in animal welfare.
- Recognition and promotion of excellence in feedlot animal welfare outcomes through industry awards and scholarships.



Animal Welfare Officer Training – March 2015

This document has been developed to demonstrate the investment the Australian feedlot industry has made to the continuous improvement in animal welfare outcomes since the review in 2011.

## Strategic Planning in Animal Welfare

Outcomes from the 2011 ALFA Animal Welfare Review were addressed during the development of ALFA's strategic plans. The current ALFA Strategic Plan for 2015 – 2020 includes an industry imperative for "*Continuous improvement in animal health and welfare whilst maintaining consumer expectations over time*". Agreed actions to achieve this imperative include:

- Support the development of practical and achievable research and development projects to deliver improved animal health and welfare outcomes.
- Improve the extension and adoption of animal health and welfare research and development outcomes.
- Develop agreed objective and measurable baseline and benchmarking criteria in animal health and welfare and monitor and assess over time.

ALFA also contributes to the development and implementation of the red meat industry strategic plan (MISP) which includes strategies addressing improving animal welfare across the supply chain. Through MLA, ALFA also contributes to a number of other cross-sectoral Research, Development and Extension (R, D & E) strategies including the National Primary Industries Animal Welfare R, D & E Strategy.

## Feedlot Animal Welfare Priorities

Following the initial animal welfare review in 2011, the following animal welfare priorities for the feedlot industry were identified and addressed through both investment in research and/or updates to NFAS:

- Mitigating the risk of heat stress (excessive heat load) whilst on the feedlot
- Ensuring sick or injured cattle are managed appropriately and, where necessary, are humanely euthanased
- Ensuring there is a management plan in place to minimise the animal welfare risks to pregnant cattle and calves born in feedlot pens
- Manure and dag management
- Handling cattle to minimise stress
- Ensuring cattle are fit to load and transport
- Undertaking additional animal welfare internal audits and developing Animal Welfare Officer accreditation programs.

Since 2011, ALFA has also identified additional priorities in animal welfare and subsequently has invested resources in a number of other animal welfare related research and adoption activities targeting:

- Cattle acclimation
- Bedding
- Bovine Respiratory Disease management
- Dust suppression
- Fly control
- Heat stress (excessive heat load) in lairage at the processing plant
- Cattle motivation
- Animal welfare benchmarking.

The industry is also developing a National Feedlot Animal Health Management Program which addresses aspects of animal health management that are of relevance to animal welfare, including good animal husbandry practices that improve both animal health and welfare.

Further information on specific industry investment in projects aiming to improving animal welfare outcomes is provided later in the document.

## Providing Assurance

The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme has been in place since 1994. The industry quality assurance program has around 400 accredited feedlots, representing a significant proportion of industry capacity. The scheme includes a number of industry standards including for animal health and welfare, environmental conservation and product integrity. Every accredited feedlot is independently audited on an annual basis to ensure they comply with the standards. In addition, accredited feedlots are also expected to undertake an annual internal full audit and a specific internal animal welfare audit.

Since 2011 a number of new processes and standards have been introduced under NFAS to support improved animal welfare outcomes on feedlots. Examples include:

- “ Feedlots must conduct an additional dedicated Animal Welfare Internal Audit at a six month interval to the full internal audit.
- “ Feedlots must have a documented Excessive Heat Load Action Plan, which includes procedures for monitoring and managing the welfare of cattle at the feedlot during periods of excessive heat load.
- “ Feedlots must have a documented Pregnancy and Calving Management Plan.
- “ Feedlots must adhere to relevant legislation and regulations including the Australian Animal Welfare Standards for Land Transport.
- “ Humane euthanasia methods must result in immediate loss of consciousness followed by death while unconscious. Humane euthanasia must be carried out by a competent person or under direct supervision of a competent person.

## Animal Welfare Legislation

ALFA continues to support the nationally consistent implementation of Australian Animal Welfare Standards. Since 2011, ALFA has contributed to the development of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards for Land Transport and the Australian Animal Welfare Standards for Cattle. The Australian Animal Welfare Standards & Guidelines for Land Transport were endorsed by all States and Territories in 2012 and they were consequently adopted under NFAS, feedlots are now annually audited against them. The Australian Animal Welfare Standards & Guidelines – Cattle are in the process of being adopted under NFAS following their recent endorsement by States earlier this year. The standards are legal requirements that must be met. They create clear and consistent regulations based on current scientific knowledge, recommended industry practices and community expectations.

## Investment in Animal Welfare Research and Development

Every year ALFA allocates a significant proportion of the Grain Fed Beef Levy to research projects, delivered by MLA, addressing improved understanding and adoption of animal welfare issues. These include:

### Acclimation study

Acclimation is a term loosely applied to a range of measures designed to reduce the stresses associated with cattle settling into life in a feedlot. Whilst the measures employed vary between operations they are built on the principles of low stress stock handling and aim to familiarise animals with their pen and working areas so they are comfortable in the new environment. An acclimation study is currently being undertaken to quantify the effects of acclimation on performance, animal health and animal welfare.

### Benchmarking of animal welfare

ALFA has established criteria and is working with MLA to assess the ongoing sustainability performance of the feedlot sector, including in the areas of animal health and welfare. The data, which is being collected through a number of mechanisms, will allow industry to establish a benchmark for indicators of animal health and welfare performance and then, on an on-going basis, continue to measure against these to enable industry to demonstrate its continuous improvement in animal welfare over time.

### Bedding

Outcomes from reports on the implications of different bedding options for hospital pens, and in the management of weather conditions to reduce muddy pens and heat stress have been incorporated into feedlot guidance material.

### Bovine Respiratory Disease management

Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) is the most common cause of illness and death in Australian feedlot cattle. In addition to the costs associated with treatment, wasted feed and cattle deaths, BRD also results in performance losses due to decreased weight gain and feed conversion efficiency. ALFA is investing in a number of projects to identify management strategies

to prevent and control BRD to improve feedlot productivity, profitability and animal welfare.

### Dust suppression

The impact of dust on the health and welfare of feedlot cattle, and the workplace health and safety implications for the feedlot workforce, is a key issue. A project to collate information on dust suppression technologies and techniques is currently under consideration by ALFA.

### Effect of mud on cattle motivation for feedlot or pasture environments

In previous work, free choice testing was conducted to determine how the preference of cattle for a commercial feedlot or pasture environment changes with different pasture availabilities. It was found that cattle chose to spend 25-30% of their time in the feedlot and this was not influenced by pasture availability. A subsequent project was approved by ALFA to re-evaluate the previous results when the feed reward is removed and ad lib feeding methods applied. A second component of this project will examine the impact on the animals' preference when feedlot pens are muddy.

### Fly control

Nuisance flies are recognised as a significant feedlot animal welfare problem. They also impact on working conditions, human health, potential chemical residue risks and production losses. Testing of the application of a myco-insecticide (a natural fungal biopesticide) is demonstrating positive results in the control of nuisance flies in feedlots.

### Heat load management

A website and associated forecasting tool called the Cattle Heat Load Toolbox has been developed to provide information and tools for Australian lot feeders

on how to prepare for and manage heat stress or excessive heat load in cattle. This includes a weather forecasting tool that can be linked to feedlot weather stations to provide location specific updates and warnings of potential excessive heat load events through emails and SMS. In 2016/17 further work is being done to review and update all heat load extension and guidance material to ensure their accuracy and consistency, including the development of a smartphone app to assist with the monitoring and managing of cattle for heat stress.

#### **Humane euthanasia**

A comprehensive humane euthanasia manual will be made available to feedlots shortly. The manual is designed to assist feedlot staff in making timely, appropriate decisions on the management of sick or injured cattle.

#### **Management of feedlot dags**

The management of feedlot dags remains a major issue for the lotfeeding sector and significant investment has been made since 2011 in identifying options for the prevention and/or treatment of dags.

### **Awareness and Adoption**

ALFA and MLA engages with feedlot industry stakeholders across the supply chain to both ensure that lot feeders are aware of, and adhere to, their responsibilities with respect to good animal welfare outcomes and to promote the work the industry is doing in this area. ALFA also contributes to numerous national, state and industry level animal welfare forums and committees, including providing input into the Animal Health Australia published Animal Health in Australia (AHIA) series of annual reports which provide a comprehensive summary of Australia's animal health status and system. Other activities include:

#### **Feedlot Technical Services Officer**

In 2013, ALFA and MLA jointly funded a Feedlot Technical Services Officer position to provide practical on the ground assistance and advice to all lot feeders regarding a range of technical matters including, but not limited to, animal health and welfare. This service is provided free of charge to all lot feeders and includes the one-on-one provision of assistance in the continuous improvement of animal welfare outcomes on feedlots.

#### **Feedlot Technology Adoption Group**

The Feedlot Technology Adoption Group is a web-based feedlot extension model, funded by MLA, developed in conjunction with ALFA and delivered by FSA Consulting. It provides lot feeders with access to an online library of information, including on animal health and welfare matters, through a range of different web-based media, such as direct emails, a

#### **Heat load nutrition**

A review of the nutrition and metabolism of heat stressed beef cattle identified that rumen and gut health are core to minimising heat stress damage in feedlot cattle. A comprehensive and intense 5-year program of both applied and basic research activities has been developed to address the problem. A successful project outcome will deliver new knowledge on the impact of acute and chronic heat stress events on the physiology and metabolism of feedlot cattle.

#### **National Animal Health Management Program**

A comprehensive feedlot National Animal Health Management Program is currently under development. This program will ensure feedlots have access to information on evidence-based infection prevention and control measures, and ensure that when animal health treatments are required, that they are used appropriately and prudently to minimise the potential development of antimicrobial resistance (in both cattle and humans).

standard website and an interactive social media page on Facebook.

#### **Animal welfare education**

The feedlot industry endorsed qualification *AHC33311 Certificate III in Feedlot Operations* contains a number of animal welfare related modules including euthanase livestock, implement animal health control programs, coordinate and monitor livestock transport, monitor animals in intensive production systems, monitor pen condition and ration suitability.

#### **Animal welfare training**

In 2015, 146 people within the feedlot sector participated in the inaugural ALFA Animal Welfare Officer (AWO) accredited training courses. The training targeted those people employed in the feedlot that have overall responsibility for monitoring and supervising animal welfare practices within a

feedlot operation. Participants that successfully completed the assessments received a certificate of attainment for the following competencies *MTMP414A Oversee humane handling of animals* and *MTMP2010A Apply animal handling and welfare requirements*. Further courses are being held in 2016. ALFA animal health and welfare workshops were delivered in a number of locations in 2011 and 2013 and heat load specific workshops were held in 2014. Workshops on hoof trimming to treat lameness were delivered as part of the BeefWorks 2015 Conference.

### **Feedlot veterinarians and nutritionists**

Another resource for the feedlot industry is our industry veterinarians and nutritionists. They offer both clinical and consultancy services, information and support to feedlots on animal health and welfare matters and also contribute to the development and delivery of ALFA workshops and training. The feedlot veterinarians regularly work directly with their feedlot clients to offer animal welfare related extension activities including advice and training in disease prevention and treatment and animal handling and behaviour, animal welfare auditing and outcomes from feedlot research projects. ALFA has also recently appointed feedlot veterinarian and consultant Dr Tony Batterham as an ALFA Councillor and member of the ALFA Animal Health & Welfare Committee, representing the AVA special interest group, Australian Cattle Veterinarians. Tony's veterinary background and feedlot knowledge and expertise is invaluable to the ALFA Animal Health & Welfare Committee, ensuring policy and project discussions and decisions reflect the latest in science and technical information in all areas of feedlot animal health and welfare.

Industry veterinarian and nutritionist meetings are held twice a year to provide updates on new or amended national or ALFA policy and recent research outcomes in animal welfare and to address any emerging potential animal health and welfare issues.

### **Regular meetings with the RSPCA and retailers**

ALFA regularly meets with the RSPCA and retailers to provide updates on NFAS developments, ALFA activities and animal welfare related research. The meetings are also an opportunity for ALFA to learn of any emerging animal welfare issues or community concerns, ensuring we can then address them proactively.

### **Working across the supply chain**

ALFA and MLA is working with the National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council (MINTRAC),

Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) and Australian Meat Processor Corporation (AMPC) to implement management plans to minimise the risk of heat stress in cattle across the supply chain.

ALFA is also planning to deliver extension activities, including workshops to cattle producers, to ensure cattle destined for feedlots are appropriately prepared prior to their arrival at the feedlot.

### **Animal welfare communications**

ALFA regularly keeps its members informed of animal welfare related matters through a range of communication tools including:

- A fortnightly ALFA e-newsletter "*Around the Pens*".
- The ALFA Lotfeeding magazine, published in conjunction with Fairfax every second month
- A seasonal AWO e-newsletter to ensure AWOs remain engaged by providing support and information on the successful implementation and auditing of good animal husbandry practices on feedlots.
- A biannual industry conference, 'BeefEx', addressing both domestic and international issues facing the industry. BeefEx regularly includes presentations on topical animal welfare issues on feedlots including, for example, from international feedlot cattle welfare and behaviour experts such as Dr Temple Grandin and Dr Tom Noffsinger. Presentations at BeefEx 2016 will include information on cutting edge disease detection and diagnosis techniques.
- Ad-hoc issue alerts and information updates, as relevant, such as to warn feedlots to prepare for impending excessive heat load events.

### **Communication to the general public regarding the feedlot industry and its practices**

Since 2011, ALFA has undertaken a variety of activities to continue to highlight to the general public that it is open and transparent regarding the industry's management of cattle. These include:

- A YouTube channel with videos outlining the Five Animal Welfare Freedoms, how they apply in a feedlot industry context and how the feedlot industry meets these requirements. Videos featuring two feedlot families and highlighting how they live and interact with their cattle.
- A new website which includes briefing notes, frequently asked questions, myths and facts and feedlot photos along with YouTube videos regarding various aspects of the feedlot sector.
- Feedlot tours with community influencers.

### Putting practice into action

Teys Australia Charlton Feedlot in Victoria had five staff members from their livestock and management team attend the Animal Welfare Officer training course, held in Moama in March 2015.

After returning from the course and completing their Animal Welfare audit assessment, areas for potential improvement were identified. "The drafting gates from the induction shed were identified as having a pretty sharp angle for the cattle to turn, and had the potential for animals to slip and fall when being processed" said Ashley Sheahan, Charlton Feedlot Manager. "Rubber matting was already being used at the front of the chute however some animals were still slipping as they went through the drafting gates" added Ashley.

Alterations have now been made to the induction yards to positively improve the health and welfare of animals being processed through the facility, including:

- The drafting gates have been moved further away from the chute to allow the cattle more time before having to turn the corner.
- Rubber belting and opened out, half car tyres have been used to further line the posts and rails to add additional protection against bumps and bruises for the cattle.
- Rubber matting has been further extended through the drafting area.

"The changes have taken speed off the cattle before they have to turn and eliminated the slips and falls through this area" Ashley observed.

Other changes around the yards have been the installation of rubber matting at the base of the unloading ramp and changing from the use of straw to woodchips as a bedding material in the sick cattle pens.

These changes ensure cattle are received and processed to their feeding pens with reduced stress and a lowered chance of injury. "The health and welfare of the cattle at the feedlot is always of the highest priority and animal welfare audits allow for continued monitoring and improvements." Ashley concluded.

## Rewarding Excellence in Animal Welfare Outcomes

### Elanco Feedlot of the Year Award

The Elanco sponsored Feedlot of the Year Award (FLOTY) is a prestigious event open to all accredited feedlots and supported by a robust independent judging process. Categories include Animal Welfare.

### Zoetis Education Medal

The Zoetis Education Medal, awarded annually, is open to persons that are enrolled in or have graduated from an ALFA-recognised accredited training program. Winners must have demonstrated excellence in feedlot operation skills including in the management of cattle to ensure good animal welfare outcomes.

### Performance Feeds Young Lot Feeder Achiever Award

ALFA encourages the growth and development of youth in the feedlot industry, and this prestigious award showcases the vast array of talent currently within the industry. The Performance Feeds Young Lot Feeder Achiever Award is an opportunity for young people in the feedlot industry to identify a potential issue that impacts, or is likely to impact, the lot feeding industry and propose solutions to this issue. Past entries to the award have addressed animal welfare issues such as lameness, improving stock handling, changing staff culture with respect to animal welfare and identifying and addressing public perceptions of animal welfare issues.

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