

Land Transport of Horses

Consultation Paper, February 2021

Horses are transported for many reasons. This includes sales, competition, sport, leisure, breeding and slaughter. Transport can be stressful for horses, harming their welfare. The vehicle used, handling methods and care during transport all play a part.

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines - Land Transport of Livestock (the Standards and Guidelines) were published in 2012. The standards are used by State and Territory governments to make animal welfare laws. The guidelines explain best practice for everyone involved in livestock transport. However, scientific knowledge, industry best practice and community expectations have evolved since the Standards and Guidelines were first developed.

In 2020, an independent inquiry into cruelty in the management of retired racehorses (the [Martin Inquiry](#)) identified problems with the way horses were being transported. The Martin Inquiry recommended that some of the guidelines should become law in Queensland. However, as livestock often travel between States and Territories a national approach was required.

Agriculture Ministers from the Commonwealth, States and Territories therefore agreed to a review of the Standards and Guidelines to make sure they were suitable for horses. The Animal Welfare Task Group (the Task Group) was tasked to carry out the review.¹

The Task Group has identified a number of horse welfare issues in the Standards and Guidelines. They have agreed to consult on proposals to improve the specific standards and guidelines for horses. 'Horses' includes all *Equus caballus* or *Equus asinus* and their hybrids. The Task Group is not looking at the land transport of other livestock at this time.

The following resources have been used to identify issues and develop the proposals:

- Martin Inquiry findings and recommendations
- animal welfare inspections and investigations
- recent scientific research papers
- international standards and guidelines from Europe, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and the World Animal Health Organisation.

How we will consult

During February-March 2021 we will be talking with the horse industry, equestrian groups, the livestock transport industry, transport regulators, animal welfare groups, equine vets and other key stakeholders across Australia.

¹ The Task Group is led by Queensland. It has members from all government animal welfare agencies, including:

- Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland
- Department of Primary Industries, New South Wales
- Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, Tasmania
- Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Victoria
- Department of Primary Industries and Regions, South Australia
- Department of Primary Industries, Western Australia
- Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, Northern Territory
- ACT Government
- Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment, Australian Government

Generally, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Queensland) is consulting organisations with national coverage. State and Territory animal welfare agencies are contacting local stakeholders.

Governments will make all efforts to reach out to stakeholders. If you know of others with a direct interest, please share the paper. All constructive input is welcome.

Next steps

This paper does not represent the final, agreed proposals – it is only intended to provide a basis for discussion with stakeholders.

Once consultation has closed, the Task Group will review all feedback and refine the proposals. The Task Group will prepare draft amendments to the Standards and Guidelines. Stakeholders will be invited to review the draft amendments to the Standards and Guidelines when they become available. Regulatory impact analysis will be carried out in accordance with Australian Government Office of Best Practice Regulation requirements.

Once final proposals and draft Standards and Guidelines are agreed nationally, the State and Territory governments may review their animal welfare laws in relation to land transport of livestock and make changes if appropriate.

Further information

Contact Lisa Crowle at the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland on (07) 3087 8846 or AnimalWelfareProject@daf.qld.gov.au

Proposals for discussion

Note: You may wish to refer to the current Standards and Guidelines as you read these proposals. Get a free copy at <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/land-transport/>

This paper only discusses proposals for changes to the Standards and Guidelines. Many of the existing standards and guidelines will continue without change. There will be some consequential amendments (for example, where a new standard means that a guideline on the same topic is no longer necessary).

Providing water and rest during the journey

Horses need regular water for their health and wellbeing. The current standards allow horses to go without water for up to 24 hours. Recent research shows this is too long. Horses may drink more when allowed to rest.

The following new standards are proposed for watering times for horses depending on journey and rest times, as follows:

- Horses are to be provided with reasonable access to water prior to loading. Reasonable access is defined in the Standards and Guidelines as meaning “an opportunity for a minimum of four consecutive hours for livestock to be able to drink water of a suitable quality and quantity to maintain their hydration”
- Horses are not required to be provided with water during a journey of less than 4 hours.
- During a journey of at least 4 hours but less than 8 hours, a horse is to be provided with either

- continuous access to water; or
- a 30 minute water stop every 4 hours. The water stop may be provided without unloading the horse from the vehicle.
- During a journey of 8 hours or more a horse is to be provided with:

EITHER:

- Sufficient space for the horse to lie down and absorbent bedding or drainage provided to remove urine, and
- a 30 minute water stop every 4 hours. The water stop may be provided without unloading the horse from the vehicle, and
- A stop of 30 minutes every 8 hours where the horse is offered water and feed. This stop may also be provided without unloading the horse from the vehicle.

OR

- a 30 minute water stop every 4 hours. The water stop may be provided without unloading the horse from the vehicle, and
- A stop of 30 minutes every 8 hours where the horse is unloaded and offered water and feed.
- Spelling requirements after long journeys will be as follows:
 - Lactating mares, mares in the last trimester of pregnancy and foals are required to have a spell of at least 12 hours after a 12 hour journey. This requirement is unchanged.
 - Other horses must have a spell of 24 hours after a 36 hour journey. This requirement is unchanged.
 - However, for other horses, a spell of 12 hours after 24 hours will no longer be required, as the new standards provide conditions suitable for a 36 hour journey.
- A new guideline should recommend the use of on-board watering systems.

Record keeping requirements for provision of water

A new standard is proposed that requires a written record of last access to water, regardless of journey time. This is currently only required for journeys longer than 24 hours. It is proposed that no special form for this record will be specified – transporters can decide how and where to keep the record, but it will need to be made available for inspection when required. The record will allow inspectors to check the standards are met. The record will also inform the next person in the transport chain so that they know when they need to provide water.

Prevention of heat stress

Horses are susceptible to heat stress.

It is proposed that a new standard be introduced that requires any vehicle used for horse transport has overhead shelter. Also, the vehicle must have active ventilation to make sure air is circulated.

New guidelines are proposed that recommend that:

- horses are to be assembled for transport when temperature is less than 27 degrees Celsius, and
- horses are transported at night during very hot weather.

Fit for the intended journey

Situations may occur where the transport of horses in very poor condition is needed. This may be so they can have veterinary treatment, agistment, or sanctuary. Where horses must be destroyed, it is not always easy to do this on the farm humanely. In these cases, transport to a knackery or abattoir may be needed.

Transporting horses in very poor condition should always be the last resort because it may worsen their already weak state and adversely affect their welfare. It is proposed that the standards require that a horse with a body condition of 0 or 1 must only be transported under written advice from a vet. A guideline should recommend that such a horse only travel the shortest distance necessary.

Minimum age of foals for transport

It is proposed that a new standard be introduced that prohibits the transport of new-born foals with unhealed navels unless a veterinarian has approved the transport in writing. This standard is in line with international standards in Europe and Canada.

A new guideline should also recommend that recently weaned foals be given access to water during transport. This will reduce the risk of dehydration.

Space allowance – loading density and clearance

A horse that is comfortable can be transported over a longer period without excessive stress. New proposed standards for space allowance are therefore based on journey length. The standard would require sufficient space for a horse to stand in comfort and maintain its balance. Minimum dimensions are included to help transporters work out loading density and stall height.

The proposed standard would require that mares with their foals have enough space for the foal to suckle. Foals and young horses would also be given space to lie down. Mares in the last four weeks of pregnancy and mares that have given birth in the last 7 days also require more space.

It is proposed that a new standard require sufficient distance between the floor and ceiling or overhead structures of the transport vehicle or float to allow a horse its full range of head motion. A minimum clearance of 1.5 times the wither height of the tallest horse in the stall is proposed.

A summary of these proposals is presented in **Table 1**.

In addition, a new standard is proposed to prohibit the use of double-decker trailers to transport horses. This would include smaller horses, ponies and donkeys.

A new guideline is proposed to recommend that horses travel in a backward facing position. Research has shown that this is likely to reduce stress.

A new standard is proposed to require bedding on the floor of a vehicle for journeys longer than 24 hours.

A new guideline is proposed that would recommend that bedding be:

- one centimetre thick for every 100 kilometres of journey
- dry, clean, and absorbent
- cleaned, replaced or refreshed at least every 24 hours
- soft wood shavings or straw
- dust and splinter free.

Table 1 – Space allowance proposals for new standards

Journey type	Criterion	Minimum dimensions (must meet criterion <u>and</u> be no less than measurements below)
<p>Horses over six months for journeys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 8 hours, and • 8-24 hours where horses are unloaded and offered food and water every 8 hours. 	<p>Sufficient space to maintain comfortable standing position and balance, and allow for full range of head motion without contacting ceiling or overhead structures.</p>	<p>Floor space 1.9m² per animal</p> <p>Height from floor to ceiling of any overhead structures - 1.5 times the height of the tallest horse's withers</p>
<p>Horses over six months for journey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8-24 hours where horses are not unloaded • 24-36 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient space to maintain comfortable standing position and balance, and allow for full range of head motion without contacting ceiling or overhead structures. <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient space to lie down. 	<p>Floor space 2.4m² per animal.</p> <p>Height from floor to ceiling of any overhead structures - 1.5 times the height of the tallest horse's withers</p>
<p>A foal with its mother</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient space to maintain comfortable standing position and balance, and allow for full range of head motion without contacting ceiling or overhead structures. <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient space for the foal to suckle and lie down. 	<p>Floor space 1.4m² in addition to the space allowance for the mother</p> <p>Height from floor to ceiling of any overhead structures - 1.5 times the height of the mother's withers</p>
<p>Mare in last four weeks of pregnancy or that has given birth within last seven days</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient space to maintain comfortable standing position and balance, and allow for full range of head motion without contacting ceiling or overhead structures. <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sufficient space to lie down <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any additional space recommended by a veterinarian. 	<p>Floor space 2.4m² per animal.</p> <p>Height of stall 1.5 times the height of the mare's withers.</p>

Mix of animals transported together

It is proposed that a new standard be introduced that prohibits handled and unhandled horses being mixed for transport. It is also proposed that the current guidelines about stallions, unhandled horses, pregnant mares, and mares with their foals being segregated from other animals be elevated to standards.

A new standard is proposed that requires hind shoes to be removed where horses travel in groups to sale or slaughter.

A new guideline should recommend that any mares in heat are segregated as far as possible from stallions.

A new guideline should recommend that any means of segregation should allow social contact but prevent kicking or biting.

Additional detail should be added to the guidelines on training horses to be handled before transport. Unhandled or inexperienced animals should be treated with extra caution. They should have more time to get used to their surroundings. Unhandled horses in small groups can be taught loading by feeding them next to the vehicle, then from the ramp, then inside the vehicle.

Horse boots are widely used to prevent leg injuries. They should be mentioned in the guidelines as an option. The guideline should also be amended to recommend that various protective options not be used on horses that are not already accustomed to them before transport.

Use of dogs to work horses during transport

There is a need to clarify that dogs are not to be used to work horses during the transport process. Even muzzled dogs may cause horses to become flighty depending on their experience with dogs. This presents risks to the horse's welfare. It also risks the safety of the handlers and the dog itself.

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Saleyards and Depots prohibit the use of dogs to work horses. In contrast, the land transport Standards and Guidelines are inconsistent on the use of dogs with horses. The horse-specific standard SB8.12 prohibits the use of dogs to work horses but a general standard implies that muzzled dogs may be used to work horses. Also, a guideline only recommends, rather than requires, that dogs are not used to work horses.

It is proposed to clarify that dogs must not be used to work horses during transport by removing mention of horses from general standard SA5.11 and removing GB8.31. This will prevent confusion.

Use of restraints

A new standard is proposed to prohibit cross-tying to restrain horses during transport. Cross-tying puts pressure on both sides of the horse's face and prevents it moving its head. This can cause panic and injury. Cross-tying also prevents the horse from clearing its airway as it cannot lower its head. This can lead to respiratory problems during transport.

A new guideline should recommend that if horses are to be restrained for transport, they are tied in a way that allows the horse its full range of head movement, for example by a single rope under the chin with the other end of the rope tethered at wither height. The restraint should not prevent access to food and water.