



Animal welfare policy statement

NFF policy position

Animal welfare¹ is fundamental to farmers. The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) is committed to working with its members and with governments and others to continuously improve animal welfare outcomes and to ensure Australian farmers are recognised as global leaders.

The NFF is also committed to ongoing and transparent dialogue with the community about the management of animal welfare. Engagement with the community based on trust and transparency is a core tenet of the NFF's 2030 Roadmap for a \$100 billion agriculture sector.

All animals deserve to be treated with care and respect. Australian farmers care about their animals and are best placed to drive continuous improvement in welfare outcomes. Farmers also value the trust that the community places in them and know that community acceptance of the way they care for animals is essential to the agriculture industry's success.

Key issues

Defining animal welfare

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health, animal welfare means 'the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies'². The NFF recognises animals as being able to feel and perceive the world around them, and considers that an animal is in a good state of welfare where it is healthy, well nourished, safe, comfortable and able to express normal patterns of behaviour, as supported by unbiased scientific evidence.

The NFF's policy is informed by the Five Domains Model, which looks to balance positive and negative effects to ensure livestock lead 'a good life' within the bounds and practicalities of production³. Good animal welfare is supported by knowledge and skilled management.

¹ Animal welfare should be read here as encompassing the physical health and welfare of the animal.

² World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), 2019. Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Chapter 7.1 *Introduction to the recommendations for animal welfare*, p1.

³ David J. Mellor, 2016. *Updating Animal Welfare Thinking: Moving beyond the "Five Freedoms" towards "A Life Worth Living"*. *Animals*, Mar 2016 6(3), 21 <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/6/3/21>.

Setting and revising animal welfare standards

The NFF supports the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines*⁴ for setting minimum welfare standards in Australian agriculture. The standards and guidelines were developed jointly by industry and government to harmonise and streamline livestock welfare regulation in Australia, resulting in welfare improvements that are grounded in science and practical for industry.

The agreed standards are intended to be legislated by all state and territory governments, with the guidelines serving the development of industry-based and/or individual's assurance programs. Industry representative bodies have an important role to play not only in the development of the standards and guidelines, but also in advocating for and promoting their uptake and revision as required.

Industry-led assurance programs provide a highly effective market driver for the adoption of standards of welfare above those that are legally required. Regulation of minimum welfare standards and industry-led programs driving enhanced welfare outcomes also underpin market access and enhance Australia's international reputation.

Engaging with the community and benchmarking

Community expectations are continually evolving, and the community – and our trading partners – increasingly have an interest in what happens on farm and through the supply chain. It is the responsibility of industry to engage with the Australian community and to develop ways of demonstrating its integrity. This should be backed by a practical, unbiased, science-based and consultative system for setting national minimum welfare standards, and appropriately resourced and skilled regulatory enforcement at a state level.

Industry-led initiatives like the sustainability frameworks are already supporting industry to communicate animal welfare credentials and aspirations to the community, and to drive on-farm practice improvements informed by unbiased science. These initiatives should be supported into the future.

Research, development, extension and adoption

Industry has invested millions of levy dollars into research, development, extension and adoption (RDE&A) to improve animal welfare outcomes. It is vital that these industry-driven investments and government co-contributions continue into the future. Industry plays a leading role in guiding expenditure on RDE&A, to ensure producers and supply chain operators have access to the latest animal welfare information and tools that can be applied practically. The R&D effort must be able to be responsive to industry needs and market signals, and extension and adoption should be prioritised.

⁴ <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/>

Role of governments

While industry must continue to lead, governments play an important role in supporting and working with industry to ensure good animal welfare outcomes.

State and territory governments have responsibility for regulating and enforcing minimum standards for farm animal welfare.

The NFF believes the Australian Government's role is to:

- Provide national leadership and coordinate national agricultural animal welfare policy.
- Drive national consistency in regulation of animal welfare by state and territory governments.
- Coordinate and co-invest with industry in national agricultural animal welfare RDE&A.
- Regulate the livestock export industry to ensure acceptable animal welfare outcomes continue to be achieved.
- Engage bilaterally and multilaterally to influence international policy priorities for animal welfare in line with Australia's trade interests and in keeping with good animal welfare practice as referenced in the Australian welfare standards.

There must be a functional national forum - reporting to the Agriculture Ministers Forum - through which the Australian, state and territory governments and industry work together to develop national welfare standards or refine existing standards, and drive consistent implementation of those standards. A nationally consistent approach to regulation provides certainty to industry and consumers.

Role of industry

Livestock industries are responsible for managing animal welfare and promoting and driving continuous improvement in welfare outcomes on farm and through the supply chain, including by:

- Working in partnership with governments, welfare organisations and the research sector to develop and refine the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines*.
- Co-investing in, supporting, and informing the direction of animal welfare RDE&A.
- Engaging with and responding in a coordinated way to market and community expectations regarding animal welfare practices.
- Working with governments to ensure international trade negotiations take account of Australia's commitment to continuous animal welfare improvements along the supply chain, in line with the animal welfare standards, which are developed for Australian production systems.

- Industry representative bodies taking a lead role in national animal welfare policy development and standard setting; in educating the community about farm animal welfare; and in engaging with producers to ensure good welfare outcomes on farm and through the supply chain.

Compliance and enforcement

Not complying with animal welfare regulations is unlawful and unacceptable. States and territories are responsible for prescribing appropriate penalties as a deterrent for breaches of animal welfare regulations, and the NFF recognises the need for disciplinary action against offenders. It is essential that compliance and enforcement functions are adequately resourced, and delivered by appropriately skilled personnel with a genuine understanding of the industry.

Animal husbandry procedures

As part of a commitment to continuous improvement industry will continue to pursue best practice for all husbandry procedures and where practical adopt alternatives for aversive practices as they become available. These husbandry procedures are conducted with the whole of life welfare of the animal in mind, and are required for the health and safety of the animal and the safety of the stock person. Industry should continue to promote the administration of effective analgesia when required.

Management of established pest animals

Controlling pest animals to reduce predation on livestock, competition for feed and risk of disease spread is an important animal welfare issue and is critical for the sustainability and profitability of farm businesses. Pest animals should be controlled using Australian best practice approved control methods. The NFF supports ongoing RDE&A into new and improved control methods and technology, which will support farmers to continue to deliver effective pest control to protect livestock welfare and farm profitability, and to improve environmental outcomes and stewardship.

What the industry needs

The NFF, together with its members – particularly the livestock peak councils and state farming organisations – demonstrates its commitment to continuous improvement in farm animal welfare through national policy and advocacy efforts.

While industry must take a leadership role, governments play an important part in ensuring ongoing improvements in animal welfare outcomes. The NFF has identified the following priorities for government and industry action:

- All state and territory governments should legislate to adopt the agreed *Australian Animal Welfare Standards*.
- The Australian and state and territory governments must commit to resourcing the ongoing development and periodic revision of the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines*, and in conjunction with industry, to ensuring that the standards and guidelines continue to

be informed by unbiased, up to date scientific advice and practical, evidence-based industry experience.

- The rural Research and Development Corporations should continue to collaborate on animal welfare RDE&A efforts and the Australian Government must continue to match levy funding for animal welfare RDE&A.
- Governments should recognise the role of industry in managing animal welfare and in promoting and driving continuous improvement in welfare outcomes.
- Industry should continue to lead initiatives driving practice improvement.
- Governments should commit to working with industry and animal welfare organisations to develop a national strategy for production-animal welfare, building on the now defunct Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.
- Governments should ensure animal welfare related regulation for domestic production and exported Australian livestock is outcomes focused, efficient and effective.
- The Australian Government should honour funding commitments for industry initiatives that seek to improve welfare of Australian livestock in-market, while streamlining regulatory efficiency.