

**New Zealand Veterinary Association Policy with Guidelines – 17 September 2015**

**FITNESS OF LIVESTOCK FOR TRANSPORT  
INCLUDING VETERINARY CERTIFICATION**

**Introduction**

It is a legal requirement under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 that animals must be fit for transport i.e. free from injuries, disease, abnormal behaviour or physical abnormalities. However, the Animal Welfare (Transport within New Zealand) Code of Welfare 2011 does allow for the transport of animals, in some instances, that are sick, injured or deformed. A veterinary declaration must be completed and must accompany the animal(s) when transported.

**(Veterinary Declaration Certificate pads can be ordered from the New Zealand Veterinary Association).**

**General principles for transport**

- Transport is inherently stressful for livestock – animals are subject to close confinement in truck crates over variable road conditions and weather. If the health of any animal is already compromised prior to being selected for transport the stress of transportation may exacerbate the condition, possibly resulting in death.
- Animals should arrive at their destination in a state similar to that when loaded.
- The duration of the journey should be as short as possible.
- An animal that is sick, injured or deformed may be transported only if it is certified by a veterinarian following a clinical examination.
- An animal that is not fit for transport should either be:
  - treated (by a veterinarian).
  - destroyed humanely.
  - killed for home consumption; or
  - killed on farm by an approved pet food operator.

**Legal requirements**

Under Section 23 of the Animal Welfare Act it is an offence to transport an animal whose condition or health renders it unfit for such transport.

The code of welfare for the transport for animals (the code) provides greater detail and information on the matters which should be taken into account when selecting animals for transport.

The NZVA guidelines provide further information to veterinarians especially in regard to assessing animals that may not comply with the minimum standards.

Minimum Standard 6 of the code states the following regarding selecting and accepting animals for transport:

### Minimum Standard No. 6 – Selecting and Accepting Animals for Transport

- (a) Proper care must be taken when deciding whether it is appropriate to transport young, old, pregnant or otherwise physiologically or behaviourally compromised animals.
- (b) Animals must not be transported if they are likely to give birth during the journey or be affected by metabolic complications of late pregnancy as a result of the journey.
- (c) Animals must not be transported unless they are fit enough to withstand the entire journey without suffering unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress.
- (d) Animals to be transported must be able to stand and to bear weight evenly on all limbs.
- (e) Animals with horns or antlers of a length that may cause injury or be damaged must not be transported, except where special provision is made for such animals to be transported so that they do not cause injury and are not injured themselves.
- (f) Animals must not be transported with bleeding antler or horn stumps, or within seven days of being disbudded, dehorned, castrated, tail docked or having velvet antler removed, except yearling deer where approved rings have been used.
- (g) Animals must not be transported if they display any injuries, signs of disease, abnormal behaviour or physical abnormalities that could compromise their welfare during the journey, unless a veterinary declaration of fitness for transport has been completed.

### Lame animals

- Animals must be able to stand and to bear weight evenly on all limbs (refer to Appendix 1).
- Certification of such animals requires a thorough examination of the animal.
- The animals have to be evaluated both at rest (standing) and moving (walking).
- The veterinarian must be satisfied that the animals will be able to walk up and down the loading ramp at the start and the end of the journey and are unlikely to be compromised during transport.
- There may be cases where an animal has an abnormal gait or imperfect mobility not involving pain and/or distress. For example, an animal with a healed amputated claw or a deformity may be eligible for transport providing it can bear weight and walk without pain.
- An animal with an amputated limb or foot must not be transported; one with a healed fracture may be suitable provided it satisfies the above criteria.
- Animals, especially cattle, with fractured legs, are in some instances not treated but left in a paddock to heal “naturally”. This is unacceptable and is contrary to the Animal Welfare Act because the person in charge has not provided appropriate treatment for the animal to manage pain and distress. If you are asked to certify this type of case, taking the history may determine how the animal was managed at the time of the injury. It is **not appropriate** to provide a veterinary certificate if the animal was not treated.
- Animals being transported for veterinary treatment e.g. for a fractured leg must be provided with adequate pain relief and/or immobilisation as required.
- Animals with neurological symptoms (cranial, spinal, or regional) must not be transported if their mobility and stability when standing and moving is sufficiently limited or compromised e.g. knuckling of legs, ataxia, staggers, paresis. These animals have an increased risk of falling and incurring further injury or trauma.

## Animals unable to be certified for transport

- If the animal is not able to be certified fit for transport, the owner/person in charge must be given written options of treatment, home kill, pet food or euthanasia.
- This must be complied with in a timely manner, and the veterinarian should provide the agreed option in writing to the owner/person in charge. It should be signed by both parties.

## Transport to slaughter – general principles (see Appendix I for guidance on specific conditions which could preclude transport to slaughter)

- It is the responsibility of the person in charge of any animal that is destined for slaughter and that has an injury, deformity or abnormality that could affect its suitability for transport, to call a veterinarian prior to transport to assess that suitability. If the animal is assessed as suitable, a completed veterinary certificate must accompany that animal when transported to slaughter. This is a requirement of the Animal Products Act 1999. Without such a veterinary declaration, these animals may not be eligible for slaughter for human consumption. Certification also satisfies the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act to ensure that the welfare of animals being transported is protected.
- When requested to provide a certificate, veterinarians are being asked to make a statement only about the suitability of an animal for transport. They are not being asked to provide an opinion on suitability for human consumption (if the animal is being transported to slaughter) – this decision will be made at the slaughter premises. However, some awareness of the acceptability of an animal for slaughter for human consumption will enable a more holistic approach to be taken for each individual case, so that the expectations of the owner/person in charge, the veterinarian and slaughter plant can best be satisfied, and animal welfare is not further compromised by unnecessary transport.
- Any animal transported to slaughter for pet food requires the same degree of scrutiny and is subject to the same animal welfare standards as animals destined for slaughter for human consumption.
- A veterinarian who is unsure of the suitability or otherwise of the fitness of an animal to be transported and slaughtered is strongly advised to contact a MPI Verification Services (MPIVS) veterinarian at the intended slaughter premises destination for guidance. The details and phone numbers of MPI offices at slaughter premises are kept on the NZVA website see <http://www.nzva.org.nz/MPIVScontact>

## Certification

The Veterinary Council's Code of Professional Conduct defines certification as the action of providing a written assurance or notification to any person about any animal or animal product (in this context 'written' includes using electronic means), and states that:

- Veterinarians must maintain the integrity of certification.

Further explanatory notes on certification are available on the Veterinary Council website – [www.vetcouncil.org.nz](http://www.vetcouncil.org.nz)

In completing the certificate for fitness for transport, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Once veterinarians have agreed to certify an animal as fit for transport, they need to ensure that certification is appropriate and within Veterinary Council guidelines.
- The identification of an animal/s must be accurately recorded.
- Veterinarians must complete a separate certificate for **each** injured or deformed animal, or for **each** group of animals with the same or similar condition. However, when asked to certify a

group of animals, veterinarians should address the issues that have resulted in the condition for which certification is required. It is inappropriate for slaughter premises to be used as dumping grounds for unfit animals if no attempt is being made to minimise the development of such conditions. Veterinarians should be aware that MPIVS veterinarians will query repetitive presentation of unfit animals from a particular farmer, so that particulars of attempts to address such problems on farm may be requested.

- Veterinarians should be confident that the expiry date they specify on the certificate sets a timeframe within which no significant deterioration in the animal's condition will occur – the time frame will reflect the nature of the problem but **must not exceed 7 days**. The owner/person in charge of the animal should be reminded that a certificate is valid for the specified period only.
- If circumstances (such as geographical isolation) mean the 7-day timeframe cannot be met, the veterinarian may allow up to 3 extra days, but **ONLY** if in the veterinarian's opinion there will be no significant deterioration in the animal's condition. Failing this, a re-evaluation will be required (this may mean a further examination).
- The veterinarian must specify the conditions under which an animal is to be transported. For example, a separate compartment, how many other animals are to be transported in the same compartment, on the bottom deck etc.
- The distance to travel and the time spent on the truck need to be considered when assessing any animal for transport – time and distance **must be as short as possible**, with the animal going directly from the farm to the **nearest slaughter premises**.
- The location of the slaughter premises must be stated<sup>1</sup>. **The nearest premises may not be that normally used by the owner/person in charge.**
- **Certified animals should be considered as animal welfare or hospital cases.** If the nearest slaughter premises cannot slaughter them, then other on farm options need to be considered.
- It is the responsibility of the owner/person in charge of the animal to advise the transport operator of any certified animal requiring transport when contacted regarding the consignment, and of conveying all conditions **to the operator** before his/her arrival at the point of pick-up.
- It is the responsibility of the owner/person in charge of the animals to advise his/her agent and the slaughter premises of the **pending arrival** of a certified animal before the animal is transported.
- It is the responsibility of the transport operator and processor to ensure the animal is transported to the **stated premises and not re-routed**.

## Responsibility

The person in charge of an animal changes as it moves from the farm to its final destination. The responsibility for implementing the minimum standards therefore lies with the person(s) selecting and presenting animals for transport, and also the person(s) or organisation(s) accepting the animals for transport.

Transport operators and their staff need to consider the fitness for transport of animals they are to carry and are obliged to refuse animals that they consider to be unfit for transport unless they have veterinary certification.

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### Note:

Section 29 of the Animal Welfare Act makes it an offence to counsel, procure, aid or abet any other person to do an act or refrain from doing an act as a result from doing an act as a result of which an animal suffers unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.nzva.org.nz> for slaughter plant locations.

## Appendix 1

The following provides guidance on conditions that would normally preclude transport. However in some instances it may be possible to transport such animals. Owners or persons in charge of animals with these conditions must seek veterinary advice on eligibility for transport.

This list is not definitive. It mirrors the list of conditions that MPI VS considers are not acceptable for transportation, except where a veterinary certificate is provided.

Animals presented with a veterinary certificate will generally be accepted at a slaughter premises based on the judgement of the certifying veterinarian and the directions on the veterinary certificate having been complied with by the owner/person in charge.

### All species – Conditions not acceptable for an animal to be transported

1. **Acute systemic infection, sick, or showing evidence of an infectious disease.** Clinically these animals may have an elevated temperature, be depressed, have abnormal respiration, there may be signs of discharge, etc.
2. **Purulent discharge** i.e. discharging pus from a wound or orifice.
3. **Acute external injury, wound or trauma** that would, without treatment, compromise its welfare.
4. **Chronic injury not substantially healed** that would compromise the welfare of the animal.
5. **Recumbent and unable to stand.**
6. **Abdominal incidents that cause pain** e.g. intussusceptions, twisted bowel, twisted uterus.
7. **Retained foetal membranes.**
8. **Prolapsed uterus, vagina, or rectum. (Note possible exception – See Porcine section for grower pigs).**
9. **Blindness** in both eyes and likely to become distressed or suffer injury.
10. Any **long-standing infection or condition** that would have responded to veterinary treatment but where neglect has led to unnecessary pain and suffering. Sending such an animal to slaughter as a form of “treatment” is not acceptable.
11. **Any condition not listed where there is obvious pain or distress.**
12. The code of welfare for transport allows transport of animals **no earlier than 7 days of being disbudded, dehorned, castrated, tail docked or having velvet antler removed.** A longer period may be required if wounds have not sufficiently healed. It is not appropriate to provide a veterinary certificate in these circumstances.
13. Animals with **marked angulations/deformities of a limb as a consequence of a past fracture are likely to attract increased scrutiny and possible investigation** as to the proper and adequate treatment of those animals at the time of the acute injury.
14. **An animal that may give birth during transport or in lairage.**
15. **Body condition score** below those defined as acceptable in the codes of welfare.
16. **Animals which are unable to stand and to bear weight evenly on all limbs. See under Bovine Conditions clause 14 and Ovine Conditions clause 10 where specific guidance has been provided regarding the use of a mobility scoring system to assess lameness and ability to bear weight for cattle. At this stage NZVA does not have any specific guidance tools for veterinarians asked to certify other species of livestock.**

## Bovines – Conditions not acceptable for an animal to be transported

1. **Ingrowing horns** that are contacting the skin or eye.
2. **Broken horns** which are recent and/or bleeding.
3. **Horns that may cause injury to other animals** during transport or in lairage. (Horned cattle or aggressive animals must be penned separately if pen mates cannot avoid injury in the space provided).
4. **Cancer eye.** An animal can only be transported to slaughter provided the cancer is confined to the eye and eyelid (i.e. early stage eye cancer up to 2cm [NZ \$1 coin] that is not bleeding or discharging). An animal with an eye cancer that is larger than 2cm, involves the whole eye, has extended to surrounding tissues, the orbit, and lymph nodes or is discharging pus, is flyblown or is likely to haemorrhage should not be certified for transport. Such an animal must be treated or destroyed humanely on farm. It is not acceptable to allow cancer eye lesions to continue to grow and cause the animal unnecessary pain and distress. Early intervention is required and owners/persons in charge may face prosecution under the Animal Welfare Act if they are not proactive in either seeking veterinary treatment or culling and disposal.
5. **Acute pinkeye** with serous or mucopurulent discharge and/or blindness affecting both eyes.
6. **Mastitis** where there are signs of fever or the udder is hot, red or swollen or discharging, or necrotic.
7. **Grossly enlarged or distended udders.**
8. **Large abdominal hernias** which are associated with discomfort or distress.
9. **Penile/preputial conditions** where there is haemorrhage, swelling, abscessation, or discharge. Veterinarians will be presented with bulls that have just broken/injured their penis (generally dairy bulls) or bulls that may have broken/injured their penis some time previously (e.g. beef bulls).

Regardless, once a bull is presented for examination it is imperative that the veterinarian makes a rapid decision whether these bulls can be transported. The veterinarian will need to decide whether the bull is otherwise in good health, not distressed, fit to travel, and the transport distance is as short as possible.

Veterinarians should check for an ability to urinate and if unsure can check any ventral swelling for the presence of urine. The presence of urine in the abdominal cavity may render the bull unfit for human consumption, due to carcass contamination as well as abscessation.

It may be advisable that when veterinarians receive requests to examine and possibly certify these bulls, that the owner/person in charge books transport and killing space before the veterinary examination occurs. The owner/person in charge must be advised though that this does not mean that the bull will be certified - this is the decision of the veterinarian.

This is also a good example of where the owner/person in charge should advise the slaughter premises of the bull's pending arrival, so that the animal can be killed immediately on arrival.

10. **Photosensitisation/facial eczema skin lesions** where the lesions are extensive, bleeding or infected.
11. **Woody tongue and lumpy jaw** where there is evidence the condition is of long standing and there has been no attempt to treat, or the body condition of that animal has deteriorated significantly.
12. Likelihood of developing **acute metabolic problems** where recommended measures have not been taken to minimise the risk. These might be cows in late pregnancy, or which have recently calved or are lactating.
13. **A calf that is weak** or showing signs of disease or **dehydration**.

#### 14. **Animals that are unable to stand and to bear weight evenly on all limbs.**

Veterinary judgment is required to determine if the lameness of an animal not bearing weight evenly is due to a non-painful condition (conformational fault, gait abnormality), or a painful condition (both acute and chronic).

In making a decision whether cattle are fit to be transported, veterinarians should review the **DairyNZ lameness scoring system –**

[http://www.dairynz.co.nz/page/pageid/2145876957/Heathy\\_Hoof\\_Lameness\\_Scoring\\_Video](http://www.dairynz.co.nz/page/pageid/2145876957/Heathy_Hoof_Lameness_Scoring_Video)

- **0 & 1** are fit for transport.
- **2** may be certified fit for transport with specific instructions within the certificate.
- **3** is NOT fit for transport.

This scoring system has been developed specifically for dairy cattle but may provide useful guidance for assessing beef breeds.

#### 15. **Certification of compromised large bulls** may present particular problems (not all slaughter premises can handle them). If suitable premises within a realistic distance cannot be found, you need to make a judgement call on what is best for the animal. Humane destruction or the pet food option may be more appropriate when suitable slaughter premises are not within a reasonable distance.

### **Ovines – Conditions not acceptable for an animal to be transported**

**Note** - Sheep tend to be assessed as a mob. Welfare issues in sheep should be assessed similarly to other species, on an individual animal basis.

1. **Fly strike/blown.**
2. **Acute or chronic skin infections** that are extensive, infected or raw, and likely to cause pain and distress.
3. **Dog bite wounds** (these animals may be lame, or have open or infected wounds).
4. **Shearing injuries** that are multiple, extensive or infected skin wounds, or deeper tissue wounds.
5. **Fresh shearing cuts** that have not healed (other than the occasional nick).
6. **Ingrowing horns** that are contacting the skin or the eye.
7. **Excess wool length** that could lead to heat stress during transport.
8. **Generalised facial eczema.**
9. **Large abdominal hernias** which are associated with discomfort or distress.
10. **Lameness**  
Foot rot or foot scald that is sufficiently severe, resulting in animals being unable to bear weight evenly on all four limbs.

Veterinary judgment is required to determine if the lameness of an animal not bearing weight evenly is due to a non-painful condition (conformational fault, gait abnormality), or a painful condition (both acute and chronic).

For sheep being presented for slaughter, the number of sheep affected and the degree of lameness per mob is taken into account. 10% of a mob (being ten or more animals) presenting with grade 2 lameness (as defined in the MPI VS procedure using a mobility score system) would be considered to be unacceptable and may result in a warning from MPI. Where two or more sheep in a line show grade 3 lameness the decision to transport would constitute an animal welfare breach. (Note: The MPI VS procedure for lameness assessment uses the same system as the Dairy NZ system linked to in Bovine Conditions Clause 14).

## Cervines – Conditions not acceptable for an animal to be transported

Deer are very susceptible to stress. Deer selected for transport need to be sufficiently fit and robust to ensure that adverse welfare outcomes do not occur.

1. **Recently velvetted stags/bleeding antler stubs/broken velvet antler.** Stags must not be sent for slaughter within 7 days of velvetting. Spikers velvetted in accordance with the mechanical block system with approved analgesic rings must be transported to slaughter within 72 hours of velvetting and the rings must remain intact.
2. **Velvet or hard antler exceeding 110mm** measured from the centre of the skull between the pedicles.
3. **Overaggressive deer** that may cause injury to other deer or their handlers.
4. **Hinds expected to give birth** within 21 days (the industry recommendation is that pregnant hinds are not transported after 1 October).
5. Deer (dams or fawns) that have been **weaned for less than 10 days**.

## Porcines – Conditions not acceptable for an animal to be transported

1. **Tail bites** where the lesion is swollen, discharging, or affects the pig's ability to walk and stand normally.
2. **Generalised arthritis** where the animal is unable to bear weight evenly on all four legs.
3. **Skin lesions.** Animals with acute severe lesions or chronic lesions with secondary infection.
4. **Prolapsed uterus, vagina, or rectum in sows.**
5. **Rectal prolapses in grower pigs** that are traumatised, infected or necrotic. (Grower pigs with minor fresh prolapses may be transported if care is taken to minimise trauma).
6. **Pot-belly pigs with a rectal stricture.**
7. **Large abdominal hernias** that are likely to contact the ground, or that are likely to be or already are traumatised.
8. **Aural haematomas** that are of sufficient size that damage or rupture is likely during transport or in lairage.

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## Resources

- Animal Welfare Act 1999
- Animal Products Act 1999
- Requirements for the on-farm killing of farmed animals to be supplied for pet food (<http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/animalproducts/legislation/notices/animal-material-product/animal-consumption/acspecksfarmedmammalsonfarmslaughterwithapprovalform.pdf?20071221>)
- Animal Welfare (Transport within New Zealand) Code of Welfare 2011