

POULTRY TRANSPORT

Code of practice
for the
Transport of Poultry
in
Western Australia

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PREFACE

The **Code of practice for the transport of Poultry in Western Australia** is based on *The Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals - Land transport of Poultry* and has been adapted for use in Western Australia. The original *Model Code* was prepared for the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management (SCARM) and endorsed by the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ) for use as a national code. It was prepared in consultation with the relevant industry organizations and state agencies.

This code has been prepared to assist all persons handling or using poultry in Western Australia, and reference to this code is made in Regulations provided under Section 25 of the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* for the purposes of a defence against cruelty. It is not intended to be used for either audit or compliance purposes.

This Western Australian version of the code is supported by the livestock industries and the Department of Agriculture. It is based on current knowledge and technology. It will be reviewed in the future on a needs basis, to take account of advances in the understanding of animal physiology and behaviour, technological changes in animal husbandry and their relationship to the welfare of animals.

For anyone using animals for scientific purposes, as defined in the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, this code should be read and used in conjunction with the “scientific use code”.

Further copies of this code are available from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development or from the internet at: <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au>

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1 INTRODUCTION

This *Code of Practice* is intended as a guide for people who are involved in transporting domestic poultry and other birds. The provisions of this code emphasise the responsibilities of the poultry producer, agent, catching crew and transport personnel. They are intended to encourage considerate treatment of birds so that transport stress and injury are minimised. The general objective is to minimise any adverse effects on birds by ensuring they are transported to their destination as safely as possible. To prevent birds being without food or water for more than 18 hours there should be contingency plans for truck or processing plant breakdowns. For this Code, transport includes the delivery of chicks to farms from the hatchery, and the period from removal of the birds from their living area to other accommodation or to slaughter. Apart from the need to consider the well-being of poultry during the transport process, everyone involved must also be mindful of the road transport regulations that apply in all of the States and Territories.

2 RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 Employers

2.1.1 Employers have an obligation to train employees in the use of equipment and in the humane care and handling of poultry.

2.2 Owners

2.2.1 Owners of poultry operations have a responsibility to provide facilities and equipment that enable bird handling, loading and unloading to take place without causing injury or undue suffering to the birds. Correct building design, accessibility to transport, and location and appropriate design and use of cages and equipment greatly improve the humane handling of poultry. Producers are encouraged to adopt new technology in relation to shed and cage designs that improve the well-being of poultry being transported.

2.2.2 Persons organising the transport of poultry must be aware of any requirements for health certification. Approvals and documentation must be completed before the journey. This is particularly important for interstate and export movements, and will minimise delays that may adversely affect the well-being of the birds. Further information can be obtained from the local office of the Department of Agriculture or Primary Industry.

2.3 Drivers

2.3.1 The driver of a road vehicle is responsible for the care and welfare of birds during transport unless either an attendant or agent appointed by the owner travels with the consignment.

2.3.2 Contingency plans should be made to minimise any delay that could be stressful to birds. Driver must ensure that they are provided with the name and telephone number of the owner/agent of the birds in case there are any delays or if any emergency action is required.

2.3.3 Truck drivers should drive safely to minimise disturbance to birds.

2.3.4 Before departing, the driver must check the load is secure and there are no loose birds.

2.3.5 Provision for regular inspections during transit must be made during the journey (See Section 6.3).

2.4 Rail transportation

2.4.1 Consignment of poultry by rail may involve a number of different people. It is therefore important for the welfare of the birds that there is a clear understanding and acceptance of responsibilities by the owner/agent and railway staff during the various phases of transportation.

2.4.2 The owner/agent is responsible for:

- careful selection, loading and unloading of poultry;
- dealing with injured birds or other emergencies when notified by the railway authority;
- providing contact names and phone numbers for the owner, agent and person responsible at destination.

2.4.3 The railway authority is responsible for:

- providing well maintained carriages;
- the conduct of staff;
- inspecting poultry during transport and either correcting problems or advising the owner/agent if emergency action is required.

3 MINIMISING STRESS

3.1

Stress is a cumulative response of an animal to its surroundings and may be increased when birds are subjected to major changes, such as during transportation.

3.2

Birds being transported are subject to several stresses including:

- catching and handling;
- deprivation of food, water and freedom of normal movement;
- changes in climatic conditions;
- unfamiliar surroundings, noises and sensations.

3.3

Unnecessary transport of birds must be avoided. Any transport that is required should be carried out safely and in a manner that minimises stress, pain and suffering.

3.4

Particular care needs to be taken with end-of-lay hens. They may be vulnerable to injury as their bones may be weak.

4 PRE-TRANSPORT PREPARATION

4.1 Selecting poultry for travel

4.1.1 The owner or agent must ensure that only fit and healthy birds are selected for travel. Sick, injured or weak birds must be rejected. The person in charge of the flock is responsible for assisting in the selection process, and must remove birds that are unfit for transport prior to the arrival of transportation.

4.1.2 Humane and effective arrangements should be made by the owner or agent for the handling and care of any birds rejected as unsuitable for loading.

4.2 Water and feed requirements

4.2.1 Birds, excluding day-old chicks, should not be held in containers for longer than 24 hours unless they have access to water. When a delay is expected and holding time is likely to exceed 24 hours, birds should be released into a shed where they have access to feed and water, or immediate slaughter should be arranged at another slaughterhouse.

4.2.2 Birds, excluding day-old chicks, must receive feed during the 24 hours prior to travel, but it is advisable not to feed birds destined for slaughter for 3-6 hours before loading. Birds must not be deprived of water prior to loading.

4.2.3 The time spent in containers is calculated from the time the birds are first placed in them, not from when the journey begins.

4.3 Shelter

Every effort should be made to protect birds from the adverse effects of direct sunlight, radiant and reflected heat, wind, rain and hail.

4.4 Cleanliness

Cages must be thoroughly cleaned and if necessary disinfected before poultry are loaded into them.

4.5 Transport container design

4.5.1 Birds may only be carried in properly designed cages or crates. They must not be transported with their legs tied.

4.5.2 Cages and crates should be designed, monitored and managed so that birds are not injured when being placed in or taken out. Cage doors should be as large as practical, and not be less than 20 cm wide and 25 cm high.

4.5.3 There should be no protrusions or sharp edges on the framework. Hinges and latches must not project into the cage.

4.5.4 Crates or cages used for the transport of poultry should be of a design that, when properly maintained and managed, prevents escape from, or the protrusion of any part of a bird through the crate, such that it could be entrapped or damaged during handling or transport. Cage floors should be rigid or supported to prevent collapse onto structures or crates below.

4.5.5 Containers should be ventilated and of sufficient height to allow poultry, excluding turkeys, to stand and move about during transport. It should be noted that turkeys are prone to injury if allowed to stand in crates. Turkey crates must be appropriately designed to minimise injury.

4.5.6 Containers should be fitted with locking systems that prevent escape during transportation.

5 LOADING POULTRY

Different species of poultry must not be mixed during travelling.

5.1 Catching and loading

5.1.1 Planning the catching and loading procedure well in advance will allow adequate time for birds to be handled quietly in a way that does not cause them injury.

5.1.2 All members of catching and transporting crews should be provided with adequate instructions, and be knowledgeable about the basic aspects of animal welfare and bird handling.

5.1.3 Containers of live birds should be moved in a horizontal position. If a conveyor is used for loading crates of live birds, the conveyor angle must prevent tilting of containers causing birds to pile up. Containers must not be thrown or purposefully dropped. They should be moved smoothly during loading, transport, and unloading.

5.1.4 Several mechanical poultry harvesters have been developed and others will be developed in the future. Producers, catchers, and transporters should keep themselves informed on this technology and ensure that only devices proven to be humane are used to gather birds. These methods are recommended only when it has been shown they reduce stress and injury to the birds.

5.2 Loading density of birds

5.2.1 The number of birds per container depends on available floor space, body size of the birds, and the prevailing environmental conditions at the time of transport. All birds should be able to rest on the floor at the same time and remain evenly distributed.

5.2.2 Weather conditions should be considered when determining load densities for growing and adult birds. The minimum space allowance should be increased during summer especially if the weather is hot and humid. On hot days, loading of turkeys should be avoided.

5.2.3 The recommended minimum floor space to be provided for each category of poultry in cold weather is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Transport container space requirements

Category	Floor space
day-old chicks	400–475 chicks per m ²
poultry less 1.0 to 1.6 kg	40 birds per m ²
poultry 1.6 kg to 2.2 kg	36 birds per m ²
poultry 2.2 kg to 3.0 kg	28 birds per m ²
poultry 3.0 kg to 5.0 kg	20 birds per m ²
poultry more than 5.0 kg	100 cm ² per kg

5.3 Facilities for handling caged poultry

5.3.1 End-of-lay hens are susceptible to bone breakages, especially when they have to be removed from cages, handed on, and placed in transport containers. Therefore, transport containers should be placed as close as possible to the cages.

5.3.2 Before collecting the hens, any hindrances from fixtures and fittings, especially sharp edges or protrusions, must be removed from the cages or transport containers.

5.3.3 There must be easy access to each cage for the catcher. Hens should be removed from the cage one at a time, and during removal the breast should be supported.

5.3.4 For spent hens consideration should be given to using a ‘breast support slide’ which is a simple device to smooth the removal of birds from the cage. A breast support slide is easily constructed and can be designed to suit most makes of cages. In work done in Europe, its use has been found to significantly reduce damage to the breast area in tests on several hundred thousand birds. The breast support slide is made of sheet metal, rests in the feed trough and provides a smooth angled surface on which the bird slides out of the cage.

5.4 Facilities for handling loose-housed poultry

5.4.1 Care must be taken in catching birds so as to avoid injuring them.

5.4.2 Procedures to facilitate catching loose-housed birds and to prevent the piling of birds in corners include:

- reducing the light intensity in the pen;
- using blue bulbs to provide adequate illumination for humans but not for poultry;
- corralling birds with a net or screen at the loading door.

5.4.3 Range birds can be loaded more easily by moving them in small groups.

5.4.4 If flooding occurs in buildings, dry bedding should be provided where practical, in order to minimise the problems associated with transporting wet birds.

5.5 Loading poultry for transportation

5.5.1 Broiler chickens should be caught in sheds in which the lighting has been reduced and should be placed in crates in a manner that minimises movement of the chicken and prevents injury and distress. For broiler chickens weighing 2.0 kg or less that are loaded by hand, 5 chickens can be carried in each hand. For chickens weighing more than 2.0 kg, 3 or 4 chickens should be carried in each hand, depending on their weight.

TABLE 2. Transport container height requirements

Category	Minimum height (cm)
day-old chicks, turkey poults, ducklings	12
broiler chickens	23
starter pullets, ducks, spent hens, meat and layer breeders	25
turkeys	32 or greater

5.5.2 Layer hens should be carried by hand with the head hanging downwards, they should be held by both legs and care taken to prevent flapping wings hitting solid objects. If poultry are carried by one leg only, there is a far greater chance of the birds dislocating their hips. For layer hens, it is recommended that one person should remove the bird from the cage, and hand it to a second person, in a manner that allows 5 hens to be carried at a time in each hand.

5.5.3 The same standards of care in handling should apply to hens housed in non-cage systems. Where possible food troughs, drinkers and moveable perches should be removed from the catching area before catching starts. Where there is no suitable access of the road vehicle to free-range units, alternative transport to the road vehicle must be provided. In addition, it is recognised that more labour may be required for catching birds housed under free-range systems and adequate labour should be supplied in order not to prolong loading time.

5.5.4 Poultry in general, must not be lifted or carried by the head, neck, wing or tail. However, it is acceptable to carry adult geese by the base of both wings and ducks by their necks, as these species may be injured when they are carried by their legs.

5.5.5 Geese, ducks, turkeys and other large birds may be herded towards the loading area and even into the container or vehicle.

5.5.6 There should be sufficient lighting to permit inspection of the birds during loading, transport and unloading.

5.5.7 Containers must be kept in an upright position and lifted and placed in position with care. They must not be dropped or thrown.

5.5.8 Containers must be securely attached to the transport vehicles to prevent injury to the birds should the containers move or fall off the vehicle.

5.5.9 Care must be taken to ensure that all poultry are placed carefully into crates or carrying containers. Any escaped birds must be re-caught and handled humanely.

5.6 Transporting day-old chickens

5.6.1 Day-old chickens should be healthy and vigorous. They should be placed in suitably ventilated boxes without overcrowding.

5.6.2 Care should be taken to ensure adequate ventilation of the boxes, particularly when they are stacked.

5.6.3 Birds should be protected from direct sunlight and cold draughts.

5.6.4 Packing materials used inside boxes should be new, clean, dry and non-toxic.

5.6.5 The floor space provided for day-old chickens during transportation should not be less than 21–25 cm² per bird or 400 – 475 chicks m² (see Table 1). More space should be allowed for turkey poults and goslings and less for quail chicks.

5.6.6 Each consignment should be clearly identified with the date and time of dispatch and written instructions provided regarding holding conditions and contact person, and marked clearly for the attention of those responsible for transportation.

5.6.7 Every attempt must be made to avoid chilling or overheating the birds, and any delays in transport must be minimised. The consignment should leave as soon as possible after hatching, and must reach the farm of destination within 72 hours of hatching.

5.6.8 Chicks should be placed in a brooding environment immediately after delivery.

5.7 Transporting pigeons

5.7.1 Transport containers for squabs should have a maximum height of 15 cm and should provide a minimum floor space of 200 cm² per bird.

5.7.2 Adult pigeons require a minimum floor space of 450 cm² per bird during transport.

6 TRANSPORT PROVISIONS

6.1 Shelter

6.1.1 Birds being transported may be affected by wind chill if they become wet. Birds at the front and the back of the vehicle must be protected from the extremes of the weather while being transported.

6.1.2 Temperature between the top and bottom and front and back can differ significantly, and transporters must be aware of this when considering the wellbeing of the birds being transported.

6.1.3 Covers must be used to protect birds in containers from wind and rain, and from excessively hot or cold conditions. However, transporters must be aware of the need to ensure that the birds do not suffer from a lack of ventilation if the trucks are covered. Shade is necessary in hot weather when transport vehicles are stationary.

6.2 Ventilation

6.2.1 The air circulation in transport units should:

- provide enough oxygen for the birds;
- remove smells and gases;
- control temperature and humidity.

6.2.2 The supply of fresh air in enclosed vehicles must be checked regularly and adjusted as necessary.

6.2.3 Birds must not be carried in the boot of a car without regard of need for temperature control or ventilation.

6.2.4 Containers must be stacked in a way which facilitates good ventilation. Insufficient spacing can prevent heat loss and interfere with the circulation of air between containers.

6.2.5 Birds must not be placed in excessive draughts.

6.2.6 The air temperature in a load of live poultry, other than day-old chicks should ideally be maintained between 10–30°C. During hot weather, depending on the humidity and the airflow, the number of birds per container may need to be reduced to keep load temperatures within the acceptable range. In still, hot, humid conditions, consideration must be given to the way in which containers are stacked so that air circulation between and through the containers is maintained.

6.2.7 When the temperature of the load in transit (or once loaded) exceeds 30°C the vehicle should not be left stationary for more than 45 minutes. Regardless of the environment temperature, whenever facilities are not available for protection from the weather, birds in transit should not be required to sit in a parked vehicle for more than 2 hours.

6.2.8 Poultry should not be transported during the hottest part of the day on very hot days and particularly during periods of high humidity.

6.3 In-transit inspections

6.3.1 Inspections of birds should be conducted by either the driver or an attendant within 30 minutes of the start of a journey and after that at regular intervals depending on the road and weather conditions. The conditions to which the day old chicks are subjected should be monitored regularly.

6.3.2 Birds found injured, distressed or with a limb protruding should be given immediate assistance.

6.4 Duration of travel and rest stops

Rest stops are usually undesirable when transporting poultry. For all classes of poultry other than day-old chicks, travel, including the catching and unloading of poultry, must be completed within 24 hours unless there is access to food and water for all the birds.

7 UNLOADING

7.1 General requirements

7.1.1 Similar requirements to those listed under *Loading* apply to unloading, but birds will be tired and more stressed after a journey.

7.1.2 Birds must be given access to water when unloaded, unless they are being unloaded for immediate slaughter.

7.1.3 Where poultry are sold at saleyards they should be unloaded without delay and placed in pens or cages with access to feed and water.

7.1.4 Poultry should not be held at saleyards for more than 24 hours.

7.1.5 Injured birds unloaded from containers should be slaughtered immediately.

7.1.6 Containers must be unloaded with care. Any birds which escape should be caught immediately.

7.1.7 Birds for slaughter should be slaughtered as soon as possible.

7.1.8 Birds must not be left at their point of destination unless an authorised person takes charge of them. It is the responsibility of the person taking delivery of the birds to ensure that the birds are housed safely.

8 HUMANE SLAUGHTER OF POULTRY

Birds should be stunned and bled, or decapitated, or killed by cervical dislocation, or carbon dioxide gassing with minimal handling and in such a manner, either manually or mechanically, that minimises distress and bruising or other injury.