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WVA POSITION STATEMENT
WELFARE OF ANIMALS DURING LAND TRANSPORTATION
Terrestrial livestock and poultry

Position

The welfare of livestock during land transportation is a global concern. Recognising the challenges posed by the transportation phase, the WVA emphasises the need for refined, reduced, or replaced transportation practices to minimise stressors that can lead to compromised welfare and health.

All stakeholders bear a collective responsibility for the welfare of these animals. Drivers, transport companies, organisers, owners, and handlers must fulfil their duty of care for the animals entrusted to them in accordance with the existing regulations. Veterinarians globally play a pivotal supporting role in safeguarding animal welfare during transportation. Enhanced education and competency, legislation and enforcement are necessary to uphold welfare standards worldwide. Simplifying and clarifying regulations will facilitate effective monitoring and enforcement across regions, thereby ensuring animal well-being.

Background

Farm animals have historically been subject to human-imposed constraints, prioritising production efficiency in agricultural techniques. However, there is a growing consensus on prioritising animal health and welfare, particularly during transportation, where millions of live animals are transported globally each year. Unfortunately, animal transportation poses significant risks to welfare, and animals may suffer poor conditions or death due to factors like unfit animal selection, inappropriate vehicle design, inconsiderate handling techniques, too long distances and inadequate feed, water, break facilities, and preparation, as well as harsh climatic conditions, including severe heat or cold stress, among others. These issues not only lead to suffering but can also result in financial losses from carcass bruising and other causes of downgrade, impacting food safety and non-alignment with the One Health approach.

Animal transportation, whether over short or long distances, inevitably causes stress due to herding and loading techniques, tight spaces, unfamiliarity with the loaded peers, vehicle and conditions at the destination, and exposure to adverse environmental conditions.

To address these challenges, a robust and well-supported veterinary workforce is essential. Veterinarians play a crucial role in implementing and enforcing welfare standards, and in educating stakeholders, ensuring that animals are transported humanely and safely. The WVA advocates for unified, clear, and consistent regulations worldwide, supported by adequate resources and training for veterinarians and other stakeholders involved in animal transportation.

- **Key Aspects for Transportation** ([Annex](#))

Effective management practices play a pivotal role in enhancing animal welfare during transportation. Thorough preparation and careful selection of livestock fit for intended transport¹ are foundational. Animals must be assessed to ensure they are in good health and condition to withstand the transport.

Clear criteria are essential to identify unfit animals, such as those with injuries, illnesses, lameness or in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Owners and managers have a duty to ensure only animals in suitable physical and mental states are transported.

Loading and unloading practices are critical to minimising stress and preventing injuries. Proper catching and handling techniques, supervised by skilled personnel, ensure the vehicles, boxes or crates are appropriate, in good condition, well maintained, and animals are not overcrowded.

Scientific guidelines tailored to each species and mode of transportation should offer guidance on animal transportation with adequate space.

Ventilation systems are essential for regulating temperature and relative humidity and maintaining air quality within transport facilities, which is crucial for managing thermal stress during transportation. The WVA emphasises that animals should not be transported during extreme temperatures worldwide unless effective mitigation strategies are in place (vehicles adequately equipped to maintain a safe and acceptable temperature for the animals). Stalls should protect animals from thermal discomfort, with sufficient ventilation or air conditioning systems providing continuous airflow. Access to water at well-designed stations throughout the journey ensures animals remain hydrated, supporting their overall welfare.

Additionally, drivers must be trained to identify unwell animals during the journey and take all appropriate actions necessary, including how to perform euthanasia if required. Furthermore, drivers should employ a gentle driving style, including smooth acceleration, careful braking, and cautious manoeuvring, to minimise stress and discomfort for the animals.

To benefit animal welfare, minimising transport time is crucial. Transport lengths, including time spent on a lorry loaded onto a vessel, are carefully considered and minimised where possible, adhering to global limits based on scientific evidence. It is necessary to have a journey plan specifying, as applicable, stocking density, watering and feeding arrangements, rest points, inspection and monitoring procedures, contingency measures, and destination arrangements.

- **Biosecurity and disease transmission**

The WVA emphasises integrating these measures for safeguarding animal health during transport. Effective **biosecurity** in transportation can prevent the spread of pathogens. This includes regular cleaning and disinfection of vehicles and equipment, as well as driver biosecurity protocols. Ensuring adequate space, ventilation, and access to water not only enhances animal welfare but also strengthens biosecurity efforts by reducing stress levels and mitigating its impact on the immune systems.

Transportation significantly influences disease susceptibility and transmission. Animals showing signs of illness are unfit for transport. Stress during transport can activate latent infections, increasing the likelihood of disease transmission. Strict biosecurity measures and direct transport without mixing animals of different health statuses and origins are essential for disease prevention.

To mitigate disease risks and ensure animal welfare, efforts should focus on minimising live animal transport where possible and considering alternatives (e.g., trade of carcasses and genetic material).

- **Regulations and enforcement**

The WVA advocates for robust implementation and enforcement of laws governing animal transportation. Specialised officers and veterinarians play a crucial role in overseeing transportation activities to ensure compliance with regulations and welfare standards, conducting regular inspections and enforcement throughout the transportation process, from departure to destination.

¹ <https://publications.mla.com.au/login/eaccess?elink=53CBD1EC44F5F3FD8691DC77>

Checks and controls, particularly in the export of animals, are essential to ensure that animals reach their destination in optimal condition. This underscores the mutual interest of operators and exporters in adhering to welfare regulations and standards.

Trade Practices

The WVA underscores the importance of trade practices that align with global welfare standards, such as the WOAAH Terrestrial Code². Adhering to minimum welfare standards for animals at all stages of trade not only ensures animal welfare but also yields economic benefits by enhancing product quality and reducing mortality rates.

Prioritising animal health and welfare standards in trade practices enhances sustainability and profitability. The WVA calls for collaboration with stakeholders across the supply chain to collectively uphold and improve these standards.

International trade should maintain welfare standards throughout the entire journey, from farm to slaughterhouse. This approach helps mitigate the risks associated with the global spread of infectious diseases, including those transmitted through animal transport and trade, such as infectious diseases, vector invasion events, and the importation of vector-borne pathogens.

Resources

1. EFSA Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW); Scientific Opinion concerning the welfare of animals during transport. *EFSA Journal* 2011; 9(1):1966.[125 pp.]. doi:[10.2903/j.efsa.2011.1966](https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2011.1966)
2. International Animal Health Code (IAHC). Chapter 7.3. "Transport of Animals by Land." Updated version. World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).
3. World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). (2016). Technical Note on Training Programme on Welfare of Animals During Long Distance Transport by Land (Ver. 07/12/2016). Retrieved from https://rr-europe.oie.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/tot-ldt_technical-note_final_en.pdf
4. Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. (2012). Land Transport of Livestock. Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines, Edition One, Version 1.1, 21 September 2012. Retrieved from <https://animalwelfarestandards.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Land-transport-of-livestock-Standards-and-Guidelines-Version-1.-1-21-September-2012.pdf>
5. World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). (19 de enero de 2026). Statement on Animal Welfare during transport. <https://www.woah.org/en/statement-on-animal-welfare-during-transport/>