



RSPCA Australia Standard
Layer Hens

September 2023 | V1.1

RSPCA 

RSPCA AUSTRALIA STANDARD

LAYER HENS

2023

V1.1

This RSPCA Australia Standard applies to eligible systems that house layer hens for egg production in Australia. This Standard must be read in conjunction with the RSPCA Certified Operations Manual which contains information about the program's processes and operations.

This Standard has been developed in accordance with the Standards Development Document to achieve a balanced approach having regard, among other things for the RSPCA's policies and the extent to which it is possible and practical to implement such policies in a commercial production system.

This Standard includes mandatory animal welfare requirements and production practices, as well as non-mandatory guidelines that indicate the direction of change which may be made with future Standard revisions to continue improving the welfare of layer hens.

Previous editions: 2015, 2011, 2009

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- THE STANDARD..... 4**
- 1 STAFF TRAINING AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES 4**
 - Training and competency 4
 - Internal assessment 4
 - Animal Care Statement 4
 - Record keeping..... 5
- 2 HEALTH 6**
 - Veterinary Health Plan..... 6
 - Vaccination 6
 - Medicines 6
 - Health monitoring 6
- 3 SOURCING AND PLACEMENT OF PULLETS 8**
 - Sourcing of pullets..... 8
 - Pre-placement activities 8
 - Pullet placement 8
- 4 FEED AND WATER 9**
- 5 ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING..... 10**
 - Shed facilities 10
 - Temperature and ventilation 10
 - Litter 10
 - Lighting..... 11
 - Nest boxes 11
 - Perches and ramps 11
 - Environmental enrichment 12
- 6 VERANDA 13**
- 7 OUTDOOR AREA 14**
- 8 STOCKING DENSITY 15**
- 9 ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND MANAGEMENT 16**
 - Bird observation 16
 - Induced moulting 16
- 10 ANIMAL HANDLING 17**
- 11 EUTHANASIA AND ON-FARM KILLING AT DEPOPULATION 18**
 - Captive bolt 18
 - Controlled atmosphere killing using carbon dioxide gas 19
 - Manual cervical dislocation 19
- 12 CATCHING AND TRANSPORT 20**
 - Preparation for catching 20
 - Catching..... 20

	Post catching	20
	Transport.....	21
13	SLAUGHTER	22
	Lairage	23
	Stunning.....	23
	Controlled atmosphere stunning systems.....	23
	Electrical waterbath stunning systems.....	24
	Bleed out.....	25
	Animal-based welfare assessment	25
	GLOSSARY	26

THE STANDARD

1 STAFF TRAINING AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

Training and competency

- 1.01 Persons responsible for the management and/or handling of birds must be appropriately trained and **competent** in their tasks as they relate to the requirements of the Standard, including:
- a) recognising signs of ill-health
 - b) appropriate care and/or treatment of injury, disease, or distress
 - c) maintaining the housing environment
 - d) general management and husbandry
 - e) observing birds and identifying normal appearance, vocalisation and behaviour, including nesting, dust bathing, foraging and perching
 - f) observing birds and identifying abnormal appearance, vocalisation and behaviour, including **bird dirtiness, feather loss, wounds, injuries, aggression and injurious pecking**
 - g) **euthanasia** and on-farm killing of birds, including observing signs of death
 - h) catching, handling, loading, transport and unloading of birds
 - i) slaughter of birds, including observing **signs of unconsciousness**
 - j) accurate record keeping.
- 1.02 Records of staff training and standard operating procedures must be maintained.
- 1.03 Staff must be available to respond **promptly** to problems that arise.

Internal assessment

- 1.04 All farms must have internal assessment systems that:
- a) monitor and verify conformance with the requirements of the Standard
 - b) identify problems where they occur
 - c) provide possible actions to address problems
 - d) maintain records of all completed internal assessments.

Animal Care Statement

- 1.05 An Animal Care Statement must be kept and implemented that describes general management and standard operating procedures, including:
- a) procedures for reporting breaches of animal welfare legislation
 - b) internal assessment systems, including regularity of assessments
 - c) contingency plans and procedures to manage **shed** conditions in the event of power failure, equipment failure or other breakdowns, fire, flood, drought, **extreme weather** conditions, or other **major reportable events**
 - d) supply and placement of birds
 - e) maximum bird placement number for each **shed**
 - f) feed and water, including contingency plans for problems with supply and/or formulation issues and changes to feed provision during **extreme weather** conditions

- g) environment and housing, including nest boxes, **perches**, **ramps** and **environmental enrichment**
- h) maintaining appropriate internal **shed** temperatures
- i) lighting programs, including dark periods and any changes to lighting provision during **extreme weather** conditions
- j) husbandry and animal management procedures, including bird observations, and management and monitoring of **injurious pecking**
- k) bird handling
- l) catching
- m) transport, including emergency arrangements and measures to minimise the risk of **heat stress** and **cold stress**
- n) on-farm killing and/or slaughter.

Record keeping

- 1.06 Facility and live bird records must be maintained from placement until **depopulation**, and include:
- a) the size of the usable area/s
 - b) genetic strain of birds
 - c) total number of birds placed in each **shed** at **placement**
 - d) total mortalities, separated into deaths and birds **euthanased**
 - e) reasons for **euthanasia**, including the type of injury if birds are **euthanased** due to injury
 - f) back-up power supply tests as per the manufacturer recommendations
 - g) alarm checks of power supply and automatic equipment for ventilation, heating or cooling
 - h) daily checks of automatic equipment for ventilation, heating or cooling
 - i) daily minimum and maximum **shed** temperatures at bird head height
 - j) daily **ammonia readings**
 - k) **ammonia readings** within one hour after any litter maintenance activities
 - l) litter supplies, including the source, type and volume of litter
 - m) any problems identified and the action taken.

2 HEALTH

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

Veterinary Health Plan

- 2.01 A Veterinary Health Plan must be kept and implemented that describes bird health management and monitoring procedures, including:
- a) biosecurity, including quarantine, cleaning and sanitation
 - b) routine health monitoring, including identification and treatment of weak, ill or injured birds
 - c) vaccination program, including vaccinations received as **pullets**
 - d) use of veterinary medicines, including **antimicrobials**
 - e) use of any other treatments or additives, including probiotics
 - f) **euthanasia** of birds and signs of death, including procedures for mass euthanasia
 - g) physical injury, including **trigger levels** for **keel bone fractures**
 - h) preventing **injurious pecking**, including **trigger levels** for **feather loss** and **wounds**
 - i) identification and treatment of disease
 - j) control of internal and external parasites
 - k) production outcomes, including egg production
 - l) mortalities and the **trigger levels**
 - m) pest control procedures to restrict access of wild birds, predators and rodents to the **flock**.

Vaccination

- 2.02 The Veterinary Health Plan must incorporate a vaccination program to protect birds from diseases for which an effective vaccine is available and which may represent a risk to the birds at a particular **farm** as determined by **veterinary advice**.

Medicines

- 2.03 **Antimicrobials** must only be administered for therapeutic purposes under **veterinary advice**.
- 2.04 Any **antimicrobial** classified by the Australian Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on **Antimicrobial Resistance** as being of 'high' or 'medium' importance for human medicine is not permitted for use in layer hens, unless **veterinary advice** indicates that the only effective treatment option is an **antimicrobial** from these categories.

Health monitoring

- 2.05 Quarantine and biosecurity procedures must be in place to minimise the risk of introducing and spreading disease among birds.
- 2.06 Birds that are of ill health or have been injured must be appropriately treated or **euthanased promptly**.
- 2.07 Where the cause and/or appropriate treatment of ill health in the **flock** is unable to be identified, **veterinary advice** must be sought immediately and followed accordingly.

- 2.08 Dead birds must be removed from the **shed promptly** and disposed of in a safe and hygienic manner.
- 2.09 Any **major reportable event** must be reported **promptly** to RSPCA Certified and records maintained and include:
- a) date the problem was identified
 - b) nature of the problem
 - c) date the action was taken
 - d) nature of the action taken.
- 2.10 Health records for each **flock** must be maintained and include:
- a) vaccinations
 - b) diseases
 - c) injuries
 - d) treatments or medicines administered, including **antimicrobials**
 - e) dates of veterinarian visits, including any problems identified and the action taken
 - f) dates, reason and outcome of birds temporarily segregated from the **flock**
 - g) incidences of any **trigger level** reached, including **feather loss, wounds, keel bone fractures** and mortalities, notes of any problems identified and the action taken.

3 SOURCING AND PLACEMENT OF PULLETS

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

Sourcing of pullets

- 3.01 **Pullets** must be sourced from a cage-free rearing system that is similar to the laying facility housing system.
- 3.02 Where beak-trimmed **pullets** are sourced, the procedure must be:
- a) performed on day-old **pullets** at the hatchery by a **competent** operator using an infrared technique and appropriately calibrated equipment
 - b) limited to the minimum amount necessary to prevent beak regrowth that would require retrimming
 - c) even, rounded and consistent across the **flock**.
- 3.03 Where it is identified that **pullets** have been incorrectly beak trimmed, the supplier must be notified **promptly**.
- 3.04 Beak trimming procedures not specified in the Standard must not be sourced unless prior consent has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.

Guideline: Effective management strategies should be in place to prevent injurious pecking and maintain good feather cover in flocks in order to phase out the practice of beak trimming.

- 3.05 For each **placement of pullets**, records must be maintained and include:
- a) type of cage-free rearing system from which **pullets** are sourced
 - b) name of the rearing facility and **shed** number from which **pullets** are sourced
 - c) date and time the **pullet placement** in each **shed** is completed.

Pre-placement activities

- 3.06 Records of completion of pre-**placement shed** preparation must be maintained and include:
- a) cleaning and sanitising of the **shed**
 - b) flushing the water lines
 - c) checking water and feed availability and quality
 - d) maintaining appropriate temperature, air quality and ventilation
 - e) litter provision where required
 - f) operation of appropriate lighting and provision of **light intensity**.

Pullet placement

- 3.07 Upon arrival of the transport vehicle at the laying facility, **pullets** must be placed **promptly** in the **shed**.

4 FEED AND WATER

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

- 4.01 Birds must have continuous access to feed and water from when they are placed in the **shed**, unless:
- a) being treated under **veterinary advice**
 - b) during preparation for catching or transport
 - c) when necessary during litter maintenance activities.
- 4.02 Where feed and/or water are temporarily withheld from the **flock**, birds must not be off feed or water for more than 18 hours.
- 4.03 Where feed and/or water are temporarily withheld from the **flock**, records must be maintained and include:
- a) date
 - b) reason for withdrawal
 - c) length of withdrawal.
- 4.04 Feeding and drinking equipment must be:
- a) operating to ensure the daily feed and water requirements of birds are met
 - b) designed, distributed, and positioned to allow all birds to access feed and water with minimal effort.
- 4.05 Feed and water must be:
- a) palatable and of suitable quality
 - b) available in sufficient quantity to meet the daily requirements of birds.

5 ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

Shed facilities

- 5.01 All birds must have continuous access to a **shed**.
- 5.02 The **shed**, equipment and other facilities in and around the **shed** must be designed, constructed, operated and maintained to:
- a) ensure bird safety
 - b) minimise the risk of injury, **entrapment**, escape, and disease
 - c) limit the entry of pathogens, pests, and animals that could cause distress or transmit diseases to birds.
- 5.03 Where all or part of the **shed** consists of raised flooring, the design must:
- a) provide adequate support for birds' feet
 - b) prevent manure build-up protruding through the floor.
- 5.04 A maintenance program must identify and rectify any facility defects.
- 5.05 Where animals classified as pests are present and could cause distress or transmit disease to birds, an animal control program must be in place to:
- a) use the most humane effective techniques that are applicable to the situation
 - b) reduce the risk of impact on non-target species.
- 5.06 Where electrified wire is used to prevent birds from laying floor eggs it must only be used during nest box training.

Guideline: The use of electrified wire should be phased out and replaced with effective management strategies to prevent floor eggs.

Temperature and ventilation

- 5.07 The **shed** and equipment for ventilation, heating or cooling must be designed, constructed, operated and maintained to:
- a) ensure bird comfort
 - b) manage air quality, humidity, ammonia, and dust
 - c) minimise the risk of **heat stress** or **cold stress**.
- 5.08 **Shed** conditions must be managed so that ammonia levels do not exceed 15ppm at bird head height.

Litter

- 5.09 Birds must have continuous access to litter in the **shed** upon **placement**, unless access to an **outdoor area** will be provided immediately once nest box training has been completed.

- 5.10 Litter in the **shed** must:
- a) cover at least 1/3 of the **shed** floor
 - b) be of a minimum average depth that allows birds to dust bathe and forage
 - c) be maintained in a dry and friable condition.

Lighting

- 5.11 In each 24-hour period, birds must have a minimum of:
- a) eight hours continuous light period
 - b) eight hours continuous dark period at night.
- 5.12 **Light intensity** in the **shed** must ensure, unless during catching, that:
- a) during the light period, the floor area in the **shed** at bird head height is lit at ≥ 10 lux
 - b) during the dark period at night, lights in the **shed** must be turned off.
- 5.13 **Light intensity** in the **shed** between lighting periods must be adjusted in a gradual manner.
- 5.14 Flickering lights in the **shed** must be replaced or repaired **promptly**.
- 5.15 Artificial lighting in the **shed**, unless during catching, must provide birds at least the **visible light wavelength spectrum** to humans.

Guideline: The use of natural sunlight or artificial lighting with UVA and UVB within the spectrum should be provided to birds daily during the light period.

Nest boxes

- 5.16 Birds must be provided a minimum of one single nest for every seven birds or 1m² nest boxes for every 120 birds based on **shed placement** number.
- 5.17 Nest box flooring must not consist of wire or plastic-coated wire.
- 5.18 Nest boxes must be enclosed with solid sides and provide a suitable substrate that encourages nesting behaviour.
- 5.19 Nest boxes must be kept dark, unless during nest box training when nest box lighting, where used, must only be used in the morning.

Perches and ramps

- 5.20 Birds must have access to **perches** in the **shed** unless during preparation for catching or where temporary removal is required for litter maintenance.
- 5.21 Birds must be provided a minimum length of 150m of **perches** per 1000 birds based on **shed placement** number.
- 5.22 **Perches** must be constructed and positioned to:
- a) be evenly distributed throughout the **shed**
 - b) support the keel bone and feet (footpad and toes excluding toenails) of birds

- c) be raised at a variety of heights with at least 1/2 of **perches** at ≥ 60 cm above the floor
 - d) have at least 20cm clearance above.
- 5.23 For **tiered systems**, birds must have access to **ramps** in the **shed** that are constructed and positioned to:
- a) be of a minimal slope to allow birds to walk up and down the **ramp** with normal gait
 - b) provide a continuous surface
 - c) provide a non-slip surface.

Environmental enrichment

- 5.24 Birds must be provided:
- a) at least two different types of **environmental enrichment** objects in the **shed**
 - b) a minimum of two **environmental enrichment** objects for every 1000 birds based on **shed placement** number.
- 5.25 **Environmental enrichment** must be provided, maintained, replaced or changed to ensure continuous easy access and maintain interest for all birds, unless the **shed** is being prepared for catching or where temporary removal is required for litter maintenance.

6 VERANDA

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

The following requirements must be met where the product label indicates that birds have had access to a **veranda**.

- 6.01 Birds must be given access to the **veranda** immediately once nest box training has been completed.
- 6.02 Birds must be given the choice to access the **veranda** during daylight for a minimum of eight hours each 24-hour period, unless:
 - a) **extreme weather** conditions require birds to be temporarily kept indoors
 - b) under direct **veterinary advice**, including during treatment specified in the Veterinary Health Plan
 - c) on the day of catching for transport, on-farm killing, or slaughter.
- 6.03 Records must be maintained daily and include:
 - a) dates and times that openings to the **veranda** were opened and closed
 - b) dates and reasons where fewer than eight hours access per 24-hour period was provided.
- 6.04 The total available **usable area** in the **veranda** must be at least 1/3 the size of the **shed** floor **usable area**.
- 6.05 The **veranda** and openings must be designed and constructed to provide:
 - a) all birds the opportunity to access the veranda using normal posture
 - b) shade and shelter, including protection from weather
 - c) adequate air quality, temperature, and humidity
 - d) natural light.
- 6.06 The **veranda** must be actively managed and maintained to:
 - a) encourage birds to access all areas
 - b) provide suitable substrate covering the entire floor that allows birds to dust bathe and forage
 - c) control disease and parasites
 - d) avoid injury or mortality.

7 OUTDOOR AREA

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

The following requirements must be met where litter is not provided in the **shed** and/or where the product label indicates that birds have had access to an **outdoor area**.

- 7.01 Birds must be given access to the **outdoor area** immediately once nest box training has been completed.
- 7.02 Birds must be given the choice to access the **outdoor area** during daylight for a minimum of eight hours each 24-hour period, unless:
- a) **extreme weather** conditions require birds to be temporarily kept indoors
 - b) under direct **veterinary advice**, including during treatment specified in the Veterinary Health Plan
 - c) on the day of catching for transport, on-farm killing, or slaughter.
- 7.03 Records must be maintained daily and include:
- a) dates and times that openings to the **outdoor area** were opened and closed
 - b) dates and reasons where fewer than eight hours access per 24-hour period was provided.
- 7.04 A maximum of 2,500 birds per ha of **outdoor area** must be available to birds.
- 7.05 The **outdoor area** must be designed and actively managed and maintained to:
- a) ensure bird safety
 - b) encourage birds to dust bathe and forage
 - c) provide palatable vegetation
 - d) provide **overhead cover**
 - e) control disease and parasites.
- 7.06 The design, number and position of openings that provide access to the **outdoor area** must:
- a) allow birds to pass through easily and unhindered using normal posture
 - b) give birds at ground level within the **shed** a clear view of the **outdoor area**
 - c) take into account prevailing weather conditions.
- 7.07 Birds must be provided a minimum of 25m² of **overhead cover** per 1000 birds based on the **shed placement** number.
- 7.08 **Overhead cover** must be:
- a) first located within 20m from openings to the **outdoor area**
 - b) distributed evenly across the total available **outdoor area**
 - c) of sufficient height for birds to stand under using normal posture
 - d) constructed, placed and maintained to encourage bird use.

8 STOCKING DENSITY

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

8.01 **Stocking density** of the **usable area** in the **shed** must not exceed:

- a) seven birds per m² for **floor-based systems**
- b) nine birds per m² for **floor-based systems** with access to an **outdoor area**
- c) nine birds per m² for **tiered systems**.

9 ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND MANAGEMENT

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

- 9.01 Management or husbandry procedures that directly impact bird welfare and are not specified in the Standard must not be performed unless prior consent has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.

Bird observation

- 9.02 Bird observations must be:
- a) carried out at least three times in every 24-hour period
 - b) increased during periods of adverse environmental conditions (including hot weather), disease outbreak or any other circumstance where bird health or welfare may be compromised.
- 9.03 Where abnormal observations occur, any problems identified and the action taken must be recorded.
- 9.04 A sample of birds representative of the **flock per shed**, must be assessed every four weeks from the day of **placement** in the **shed** for:
- a) **bird dirtiness**
 - b) **feather loss.**
- 9.05 A sample of birds representative of the **flock per shed**, must be assessed at or after **depopulation** for **keel bone fractures**.

Induced moulting

- 9.06 Induced moulting of birds is not permitted.

10 ANIMAL HANDLING

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

- 10.01 Bird handling and the total time birds are handled must be kept to a minimum.
- 10.02 Birds must be approached and handled:
- a) calmly and quietly
 - b) with an awareness of the bird's natural **flight zone**
 - c) in a manner that avoids pain, suffering and/or distress
 - d) in a manner that avoids injuries and mortalities.
- 10.03 Birds must be caught, picked up and carried individually with both hands supporting the body of the bird while holding the wings against the bird's body or with one hand securing the legs and the other holding the bird against the person's body, unless:
- a) during catching for on-farm killing or transport, where birds may be caught by both legs then lifted up and carried by holding both legs in one hand, with no more than two birds in each hand
 - b) during shackling at slaughter, where birds may be caught by one or both legs, then gently lifted up by both legs and each leg then gently inserted into the shackle.
- 10.04 Catching aids which may cause injury, entanglement, or result in birds being suspended or dragged must not be used.
- 10.05 Other bird handling techniques not specified in the Standard must not be performed unless prior consent has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.

11 EUTHANASIA / ON-FARM KILLING FOR DEPOPULATION

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

- 11.01 **Euthanasia** and on-farm killing of birds must be carried out in an effective manner that avoids pain, suffering and/or distress.
- 11.02 Birds must be **euthanased** immediately if they are of ill health, injured or have some other physical impediment and are not able to respond to treatment or recover.
- 11.03 The permitted methods for **euthanasia** and on-farm killing of birds are:
- a) captive bolt device
 - b) controlled atmosphere killing using carbon dioxide gas
 - c) manual cervical dislocation.
- 11.04 Other **euthanasia** and on-farm killing methods not specified in the Standard must not be performed unless prior consent has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.
- 11.05 Birds must have death confirmed by checking for the absence of the **nictitating membrane reflex**, and at least two of the following signs:
- a) no **corneal reflex**
 - b) no **pupillary light reflex**
 - c) no rhythmic breathing
 - d) no neck tension
 - e) no vocalisation.
- 11.06 For **euthanasia**, individual birds must have death confirmed immediately after application of the method.
- 11.07 For on-farm killing methods, birds must have death confirmed **promptly** after application of the method.

Captive bolt

- 11.08 Captive bolt devices must be designed, manufactured, maintained and operated to be:
- a) appropriate for the size of the bird
 - b) fit for purpose
 - c) able to achieve death at the first attempt.
- 11.09 The operator of a captive bolt device must:
- a) appropriately restrain the bird to enable accurate positioning of the device so that it is in contact with the head of the bird
 - b) aim and discharge the device straight down on the midline of the head, between the eyes and ears where the brain is located.

Controlled atmosphere killing using carbon dioxide gas

- 11.10 For controlled atmosphere killing using carbon dioxide gas, a detailed standard operating procedure, including the gas concentrations used, must be submitted and prior consent obtained from RSPCA Australia.
- 11.11 Controlled atmosphere killing using carbon dioxide gas must take place in a purpose-built container that is designed, manufactured, maintained and operated to ensure rapid unconsciousness and death, while:
- a) having sufficient floor space and height to allow birds to sit or stand comfortably in a single layer
 - b) allowing visual observation of birds inside the container
 - c) having monitors that indicate the gas temperature that birds are exposed to in the container
 - d) being used in accordance with the agreed standard operating procedure.
- 11.12 Carbon dioxide gas concentration must not exceed 40% until birds have lost consciousness, followed by concentration $\geq 40\%$ until death.

Manual cervical dislocation

Guideline: The use of manual cervical dislocation for euthanasia and on-farm killing should be phased out and replaced with effective alternative methods, such as captive bolt devices or controlled atmosphere killing.

- 11.13 Manual cervical dislocation must be performed:
- a) without the use of objects or equipment to assist
 - b) holding the bird with both legs in one hand and the head in the other, unless the bird has apparent leg problems, in which case the base of both wings must be held in one hand instead of the legs, with the weight of the bird supported against the person's body
 - c) using a single and controlled stretching motion that dislocates the first neck vertebrae from the cranium and severs the spinal cord, causing death at the first attempt.

12 CATCHING AND TRANSPORT

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

The following requirements will be implemented and assessed by 1 July 2026.

- 12.01 All persons involved in the catching, loading, transport and unloading of birds must:
- a) meet on-farm biosecurity procedures
 - b) be aware of and be able to implement emergency arrangements.
- 12.02 Action must be taken to minimise the risk of **heat stress** or **cold stress** to birds at catching, loading, unloading, during transport and while the vehicle is stationary.

Preparation for catching

- 12.03 Birds must have access to water until immediately before catching commences.
- 12.04 Bird disturbance in preparation for catching must be minimised.
- 12.05 Any bird not **fit for the intended journey** must be identified and treated or **euthanased** immediately.

Catching

- 12.06 At least one senior member of the catching team must be made responsible for supervising and maintaining the Standard throughout the catching process.
- 12.07 Loading birds into transport crates or modules must take place inside the **shed** or as close to the **shed** as possible.
- 12.08 Birds must be placed onto the floor of the transport crate or module, not thrown, swung or dropped into a crate or module.
- 12.09 Transport crates or modules must:
- a) be clean and intact
 - b) provide sufficient floor space to allow birds to sit comfortably at the same time
 - c) be of a height and have openings of sufficient size to avoid injury to the birds
 - d) not be tilted at an angle that may impact bird welfare by piling or smothering
 - e) be closed in a manner that avoids **entrapment** of any birds.

Post catching

- 12.10 Where part of a **flock** is removed from the **shed**, the remaining birds in the **shed** must **promptly**:
- a) be checked and encouraged to redistribute evenly throughout the **usable area**
 - b) be provided feed and water
 - c) have all nest boxes, **perches**, **ramps** and **environmental enrichment** redistributed within the **shed** where applicable.

Transport

- 12.11 **Transporters** must have emergency arrangements in place that include out of hours contacts and standard operating procedures for protecting bird welfare in the case of breakdowns, unexpected delays, accidents, and other circumstances that may affect the welfare of the birds during the journey.
- 12.12 Access roads and **pick-up** pads must be well maintained to provide a level and compacted surface and kept clear to ensure access at catching and loading for transport.
- 12.13 Transport crates or modules must be placed onto the transport vehicle at a speed and angle that minimises tilting and avoids injury to birds.
- 12.14 Records for catching and transport must be maintained and include:
- a) source **farm** and **shed**
 - b) name of the persons and company responsible for catching and transport
 - c) names of persons involved in the catching of birds
 - d) time and date feed and water are withdrawn
 - e) time and date catching commenced and concluded
 - f) number of birds caught
 - g) time and date of departure from **farm**
 - h) time and date of arrival at destination
 - i) any problems identified and the action taken.

13 SLAUGHTER

NOTE: Words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard form part of the requirement/s and are defined in the GLOSSARY.

The following requirements will be implemented and assessed by 1 July 2026.

- 13.01 The **slaughtering establishment** must nominate a designated person/s who is:
- responsible for the oversight of animal welfare at the facility
 - responsible for animal-based welfare assessments and monitoring of live bird handling and slaughter
 - on site when live birds are being unloaded, handled and slaughtered
 - knowledgeable in all facets of handling and slaughter
 - responsible for monitoring adherence to the Standard
 - responsible for ensuring that breaches of animal welfare legislation are reported to the relevant regulator and RSPCA Certified.
- 13.02 A Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system must be installed and operational to allow a clear, unobstructed view and recording of live birds at:
- unloading from transport vehicles into **lairage** area
 - loading of transport crates or modules onto the system prior to **stunning**
 - removal from transport crates or modules prior to **stunning** where applicable
 - all shackling points prior to **stunning** where applicable
 - electrical waterbath stunning systems at **stunning** unit entry and exit and along the entire waterbath
 - controlled atmosphere stunning systems at the point where birds lose consciousness during the **stunning** process and at **stunning** unit exit
 - bleeding out, including neck cutting and back-up neck cutting.
- 13.03 Procedures for the use and review of CCTV footage must be in place and have:
- routine reviewing of footage at least once per shift covering a representative sample of bird sizes and shift times
 - availability for viewing (both stored and real-time footage) by RSPCA Certified
 - storage of footage for a minimum of 14 days
 - dates of routine monitoring with any problems identified and the action taken recorded.
- 13.04 **Stunning** and slaughter equipment must be:
- designed, manufactured, maintained and operated to provide effective restraint, **stunning**, and bleeding out
 - checked at least at the start of each shift
 - checked and adjusted to accommodate bird size when required
 - checked and adjusted after a breakdown or line stoppage.
- 13.05 Procedures must be in place to manage equipment failure and other breakdowns that may impact on bird welfare and must:
- ensure that effectively **stunned** birds are processed or **euthanased promptly**
 - ensure other birds are managed until the issue has been rectified.
- 13.06 Methods of **stunning** and slaughter not specified in the Standard must not be performed unless prior consent has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.

13.07 Records must be maintained and include:

- a) source **farm** of birds
- b) number of birds dead on arrival and mortality rate
- c) reason/s for death on arrival, if mortality **trigger level** reached
- d) date and time of checks in **lairage** to monitor bird welfare and signs of **heat stress, cold stress** or other signs of distress
- e) holding time (time in **lairage**)
- f) slaughter date
- g) number of birds slaughtered.

Lairage

13.08 Upon arrival at the **slaughtering establishment**, birds must be placed in a **lairage** area that is:

- a) covered to provide shelter and shade to birds
- b) fitted with fans and misting equipment
- c) designed and operated to provide adequate air exchange between and within transport crates or modules
- d) able to allow effective inspection of all birds.

13.09 Birds must be checked on arrival and regularly thereafter to identify any birds suffering from injury, **heat stress, cold stress** or other signs of distress.

Stunning

13.10 Birds must be **stunned** prior to slaughter using one of the following methods:

- a) controlled atmosphere stunning
- b) electrical waterbath stunning.

13.11 Birds must be checked for **signs of unconsciousness** post **stunning**.

13.12 Where any problem with the **stunning** system is identified, action must be taken immediately and recorded.

13.13 Persons must be available at all times when the **stunning** system is in operation to make adjustments immediately when required.

Controlled atmosphere stunning systems

13.14 Gas concentration monitors must:

- a) accurately indicate the gas concentration
- b) be calibrated regularly, as per the manufacturer's recommendations
- c) have dates of calibration with notes of any problems identified and the action taken recorded.

13.15 The controlled atmosphere stunning system must be fitted with a visual or audible alarm which is automatically triggered when the equipment is not functioning effectively.

- 13.16 Where carbon dioxide gas is used for controlled atmosphere stunning systems, concentrations must not exceed $\geq 40\%$ until birds have lost consciousness.
- 13.17 Where a shackling carousel is used, it must be constructed and managed to avoid unconscious birds exiting the **stunning** unit falling to the floor.

Electrical waterbath stunning systems

Guideline: Electrical waterbath stunning systems should be phased out and replaced with alternative stunning systems that do not require the shackling of conscious birds prior to slaughter.

- 13.18 Transport crates or modules must be checked for birds that remain behind and any remaining birds immediately removed.
- 13.19 Transport crates or modules must be inspected following unloading of birds, and disposed of or repaired if they may cause injury to birds.
- 13.20 The shackling line and shackles must be:
- a) an appropriate size for birds
 - b) designed and operated to minimise wing flapping, head raising, or disturbance to birds at any stage on the line.
- 13.21 A breast comforter must be in place for birds from the point of shackling until the stunner entry, and maintain contact with the breast of the bird in a manner that does not cause injury, discomfort and/or distress.
- 13.22 Any birds that have severe visible injuries must:
- a) not be shackled
 - b) be **euthanased** immediately.
- 13.23 Shackling crews must place both the bird's legs in the shackles simultaneously and:
- a) firmly but gently
 - b) in a manner that minimises disturbance and wing flapping
 - c) in a manner that avoids excessive swinging in the shackles
 - d) in a manner that birds cannot fall from the shackle line
 - e) only if shackles are clear of obstructions.
- 13.24 Birds must not be suspended from the shackle line for more than 60 seconds prior to **stunning**.
- 13.25 Shackles must:
- a) be wet at the point where the feet of the birds touch the shackle
 - b) have water applied prior to birds being placed in the shackles.
- 13.26 The shackling area must be checked regularly to ensure that no birds have been left behind.
- 13.27 Equipment, calibration, and procedures for electrical waterbath stunning systems must ensure that the:
- a) risk of birds receiving pre-stun shocks is minimised

- b) bird's head is in immediate contact with the electrified water and for the entire length of the waterbath
- c) **electrical waterbath stunning parameters** are effective for the birds and the type of **stunning system**
- d) **electrical waterbath stunning parameter** settings are accurately monitored
- e) deviations from the set **electrical waterbath stunning parameters** are rectified immediately.

Bleed out

- 13.28 Birds must have their neck cut in a manner that severs both carotid arteries to ensure bleed out without regaining consciousness.
- 13.29 Bleed out time must be long enough to ensure birds are dead prior to entering the scald.
- 13.30 Manual and automated neck cutting systems must have at least one back-up knife-hand at all times ensuring that birds are cut effectively to bleed out without regaining consciousness.
- 13.31 Where any **red birds** are identified:
 - a) action must be taken to address the problem and avoid reoccurrence
 - b) action taken must be recorded
 - c) total number of **red birds** must be recorded.

Animal-based welfare assessment

- 13.32 Following equipment calibration and when significant equipment adjustments are made, a sample of at least 100 RSPCA Certified birds must be assessed and recorded for the number of birds:
 - a) receiving pre-stun shocks (electrical waterbath stunning systems only)
 - b) not effectively **stunned**
 - c) not effectively cut.

GLOSSARY

NOTE: The glossary defines words/phrases highlighted in **bold** within the Standard and which form part of the requirement/s of the relevant standard.

aggression	Exhibited behaviour often associated with dominance and the establishment of a pecking order. Signs of aggression include aggressive attacks from birds directed at the head, neck of another bird, aggressive pecking, loud vocalisation and chasing or fighting other birds. Aggression is assessed by the total number of birds showing aggression and the specific type of behaviours observed.
ammonia readings	Measurements of ammonia concentration at bird head height using an ammonia meter or ammonia test paper at locations representative of litter condition in the shed.
antimicrobial	An agent that kills or stops the growth of microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. Antimicrobials may be used therapeutically for the treatment of a disease or they may be used to prevent the occurrence or spread of disease. Ionophores and non-ionophore coccidiostats are a subcategory of antimicrobials used in poultry production to kill or inhibit protozoal infections. For the purpose of the Standard, the term ‘antimicrobial’ excludes anthelmintics, antiseptics, disinfectants, essential oils, feed enzymes, prebiotics, probiotics, and organic acids.
bird dirtiness	The amount of dirt a bird has on their feathers. The scoring method for bird dirtiness is based on the layer hen AssureWel scoring system. Bird dirtiness is assessed by scoring one side of the bird (except the feet and legs) with the following scoring method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 = Clean: the bird is clean, no area of soiling • 1 = Moderate dirtiness: there is soiling on at least one part of the bird but no area ≥ 5cm maximum dimension • 2 = Substantial dirtiness: there is soiling on one or more parts of the bird ≥ 5cm maximum dimension.
cold stress	A condition in which a bird is unable to maintain core body temperature within the normal range during periods of cold ambient temperature resulting in core body temperature falling below the normal range. Signs of cold stress include huddling, shivering, feather fluffing, pale comb, lethargy and collapse.
competent	Having the necessary knowledge, experience, skill and ability to undertake a task successfully.
corneal reflex	Blinking in response to touching the eye of a bird.
depopulation	The process that occurs at the end of layer hens' productive life, where birds are caught and either killed on farm or transported to a slaughtering establishment for slaughter.
electrical waterbath stunning parameters	Factors that affect the outcome of an electrical stun including voltage (V), total current (mA), frequency (Hz), current type (AC or DC), average current per bird, stun duration (secs) at number of birds per minute, and number of birds in the waterbath.

entrapment	A situation in which the body or part of the body of a bird is trapped, and the bird is unable to free themselves.
environmental enrichment	Improvement of the environment, which increases behavioural opportunities (e.g., pecking and ground scratching) and the opportunity for birds to have positive fulfilling experiences. Environmental enrichment (either fixed or able to be moved around by birds) may include, but is not limited to, organic and non-organic manipulable materials such as pecking blocks, balls and other moveable objects, food items and bales of straw. Provision of sensory enrichment (e.g., sound, lighting, feed) in addition to enrichment objects should also be considered.
euthanasia/euthanased	Humanely ending the life of a bird when it is in the interest of the bird's welfare and using a technique that avoids further pain, suffering or distress.
extreme weather	A weather event which can include heavy and/or prolonged rain, hail, snow, wind, or extremely high or low temperatures that may affect the welfare of the exposed bird.
farm	The site at which birds are housed.
feather loss	The loss of feathers over the body of a bird, particularly on the back and wings. The scoring method for feather loss is based on the layer hen AssureWel scoring system. Feather loss is assessed by separately scoring the head/neck area and back/vent area of the bird with the following scoring method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 = No/minimal feather loss: no bare skin visible, no or slight wear, only single feathers missing • 1 = Slight feather loss: moderate wear, damaged feathers or 2 or more adjacent feathers missing up to bare skin visible <5cm maximum dimension • 2 = Moderate/severe feather loss: bare skin visible ≥5cm maximum dimension.
fit for the intended journey	A bird that satisfies all the criteria for catching, loading and transport which includes being strong enough to undertake the journey, can walk normally and bear weight on both legs, is not emaciated or visibly dehydrated, is not blind in both eyes, is not in a condition that could cause it increased pain or distress during transport, and is not suffering from visible distress or injury.
flight zone	The area around a bird that if encroached upon by a potential threat, will trigger escape behaviour. This is the distance a bird will let a person approach before moving away.
flock	A group of birds of the same or similar age raised together within the same usable area of a shed.
floor-based systems	Shed where birds are housed at ground level.

heat stress	A condition in which a bird is unable to maintain core body temperature within the normal range during periods of hot ambient temperature resulting in core body temperature exceeding the normal range. Signs of heat stress include loss of appetite, increased respiration rate, open beak breathing, lethargy, and reluctance to move.
injurious pecking	Severe feather pecking behaviour directed at other birds which can also lead to cannibalism. Signs of injurious pecking include pecking directed at the body feathers of other birds around the back, tail and wings, feather eating, feather damage or removal, or bare areas around the tail or vent. Injurious pecking does not include preening or gentle pecking of other birds, which is a normal social, investigatory behaviour.
keel bone fractures	<p>Keel bone fracture prevalence is assessed by palpating the keel bone by running a thumb and finger down the sides focusing on the bottom 1/3 of the keel bone, for the presence or absence of deviations, deformities and/or calcium deposits (lumpiness) indicative of healed fractures.</p> <p>An assessment of a keel bone fracture is based on the following scoring method:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 = no deviations, deformities or thickened lumpy sections • 1 = mild deviations, deformities or thickened lumpy sections • 2 = severe deviations, deformities or thickened lumpy sections.
lairage	Designated area at the slaughtering establishment used for the purpose of holding birds prior to slaughter.
light intensity	The amount of light emitted by a light source expressed in lux.
major reportable event	A circumstance that has a significant adverse impact on the welfare of the birds. A major reportable event includes sustained at or above trigger level mortality rate/s or unusual/unexpected incidences of high mortality; injury or disease including those resulting from endemic and/or exotic disease outbreaks; natural events; predator incursions; infrastructure or equipment failure; poor bird management (including keel bone fractures, injurious pecking, cannibalism); feed supply and/or formulation issues; transportation; bird handling; or other circumstance deemed reportable by company/producer standard operating procedures. In the case of a suspected exotic animal disease, the relevant state/territory government department must be notified.
nictitating membrane reflex	The third eyelid slides across horizontally in response to touching the eye of a bird.
outdoor area	An outside space immediately adjacent to the shed. Netting may be used to cover or enclose the outdoor area.

overhead cover	Artificial or natural shade and shelter (not including the shed) that is provided in an outdoor area and offers birds protection from overhead predators and the sun, and which is safe and easily accessible for birds. Overhead cover is measured as the area directly underneath the artificial structure or natural feature. Shade cast by the shed or eaves is not included as satisfying the requirement for overhead cover.
perches	Structures above the floor on which birds step up or jump on to sit, stand or roost. Typically, perches are rigid horizontal structures on which birds balance, although perches may be provided in the form of platforms to facilitate use.
pick-up	Removal of live birds from the shed. This includes partial or full catching for depopulation and transport for slaughter.
placement	The action of putting a group of birds arriving at the farm together into a shed.
promptly	To make a priority and address with little or no delay.
pullet/pullets	A young layer hen that has not started laying eggs. Pullets are usually raised at specialised pullet rearing facilities and are then caught, transported and placed in the laying facility at around 16-18 weeks of age.
pupillary light reflex	The pupil constricting in response to a bright light shining into the eye of a bird.
ramps	Sloping structures joining the floor and/or a tiered level to a different level on which birds step up or jump on to sit, stand or walk along. Ramps have a continuous plastic or wire grid surface and facilitate birds accessing different levels, including access to a veranda and/or outdoor area.
red bird	A bird carcass which is red in colour at exit of scalding which indicates the bird may not have had their neck cut effectively.
shed	A housing structure consisting of at least four walls and a roof that provides all birds with protection from cold, heat, wind, and rain.
signs of unconsciousness	Indicators used at the slaughtering establishment after stunning which demonstrate that a bird is no longer aware of its surroundings and able to feel pain. Signs of unconsciousness may include, but are not limited to, an absence of spontaneous blinking, lack of nictitating membrane reflex, lack of pupillary light reflex, lack of corneal reflex, no rhythmic breathing, no vocalising, no wing flapping, no swallowing, no head shaking, no reaction to comb pinch, and no muscle tone.
slaughtering establishment	A facility where animals are slaughtered for the purpose of meat and meat products, such as an abattoir or knackery.
stocking density	Space allowance expressed in bird/m ² calculated on the basis of the number of birds and the usable area available per flock.

stun/stunned/stunning	A procedure (or the act of carrying out a procedure) that renders a bird unconscious and insensible to pain. A stun is effective where, following the stunning procedure, the bird is unconscious and will not (or be allowed to purposely) regain consciousness prior to neck cutting (bled out) and prior to entering the scalders.
tiered systems	Shed where birds are housed on one or more levels above ground level and may also include floor area at ground level.
transporter	The company responsible for a poultry transport vehicle and its driver.
trigger level	A predetermined threshold which sets in motion a course of action to investigate and address the cause of a breach of that threshold.
usable area	A floor area available to birds that includes tiers, slats, and covers over manure belts. Excludes the area inside the nest (which minimises nest soiling and allows the nest area to be dedicated to egg laying) and areas that do not have clear headroom or are too narrow for birds to enter.
veranda	A roofed area attached to a shed in which birds can forage and dust bathe. A veranda provides natural light and adequate ventilation, through a combination of solid and permeable walls (e.g., wire netting). May also be called winter garden.
veterinary advice	Recommendation/s provided by a registered veterinarian with expertise in poultry health.
visible light wavelength spectrum	The segment of the electromagnetic spectrum of light that the human eye can see, which is wavelengths from approximately 380 to 700 nanometres. Different size wavelengths appear visually as different colours, for example 450nm appears blue, 550nm appears green and 650nm appears red.
wounds	Visible fresh or older injuries, including bleeding. Wounds are assessed by the total number of birds with wounds and the location of wounds. Wound locations are categorised as head (includes head, beak and neck areas), back (includes end of neck to the beginning of the tail) and tail/vent wounds.

END OF THE STANDARD



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