

FACT SHEET

ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES – POULTRY



Victorian
Farmers
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BACKGROUND

On 18 August 2022 the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry released the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry*. The Standards and Guidelines were developed by the Independent Poultry Welfare Panel commissioned by all Agriculture Ministers in 2019.

'Standards' are the animal welfare requirements that will be put into effect in state and territory legislation, and must be met under law for farm animal welfare purposes. 'Guidelines' are voluntary and are recommended practices to achieve desirable animal welfare outcomes.

The most significant changes to the Standards and Guidelines made by the independent panel include:

- A phase-out of conventional layer hen cages over 10 to 15 years (at the latest by 2036), depending on the age of current infrastructure
- A requirement to provide environmental enrichment for chicken meat breeders
- Changes to the minimum light intensity and required periods of darkness, ventilation and temperature parameters for all species

NEXT STEPS

Each state and territory is considering implementation options during 2022, with further discussions by all Agriculture Ministers in early 2023.

Four options surrounding implementation have been recommended:

Option 1

Maintain the existing Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry 4th Edition (MCOP).

Option 2

Introduce the proposed Standards and Guidelines as voluntary.

Option 3

Introduce the proposed 'Standards' as compulsory and the 'Guidelines' as voluntary.

Option 4

Introduce the proposed 'Standards' as compulsory and the 'Guidelines' as voluntary - with an extended phase out period allowing the use of conventional cages until 2046.

VFF CONCERNS

The VFF is concerned the proposed phasing out of conventional caged systems will have significant ramifications for existing farm businesses as well as for food security. We are also wary that the proposed 'Standards' have been founded on mere opinion and public perception, rather than actual and objective science surrounding animal welfare.

The VFF is working through the Standards and Guidelines, consulting our members and industry on specific issues. For example, we are concerned by the proposed 750 cm² per bird floor space without structural adjustment, which states that stocking density would not be reduced. We will be seeking clarity from government as to how a stocking rate reduction would not be necessary as this equates to a 1.6 bird reduction.

PROPOSED CHANGES

The proposed changes will be based on the modelling assumptions outlined in Option 3.

Cages

The minimum height of all cages is to be 55 cm over the useable space. Perch or platform space for hens is to be a minimum of 15 cm per laying hen.

All caged laying hens must have:

- 750 cm² of useable space per bird if kept in a cage of two or more birds
- 1000 cm² of useable space if a bird is kept in a single cage

Hens must have access to a scratch area and/or claw shortening device as well as appropriate substrate for pecking, foraging, and scratching, unless the birds have access to an outdoor area.

All cage-based housing facilities installed after 1 July 2022 must meet these requirements.

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Any cage-based housing system must meet the requirements of these 'Standards':

- From 1 July 2032, if the cage system was installed before the close of 31 December 2011
- From 1 July 2033, if the cage system was installed after 31 December 2011 but before the close of 31 December 2012
- From 1 July 2034, if the cage system was installed after 31 December 2012 but before the close of 31 December 2013
- From 1 July 2035, if the cage system was installed after 31 December 2013 but before the close of 31 December 2014
- From 1 July 2036, if the cage system was installed after 31 December 2014

Moulting

In the proposed 'Standards', non-fasting induced moulting is still permitted but only in exceptional circumstances — that is, no longer permitted for routine use.

By 1 July 2025, the light intensity during light periods for young poultry for the first three days after hatching is at least 20 lux at bird level.

Beak trimming

Strategies should be in place to reduce the need for beak trimming. Beak trimming methods must ensure no more than 30% of the upper and lower beak is removed.

By 1 July 2025, beak trimming when undertaken in a hatchery, must be done using an infrared beam within 24 hours of take-off.

By 1 July 2025, hot blade beak trimming must not be used except under veterinary advice.

Ammonia

Ammonia levels must not exceed 15 ppm at bird level in sheds.

Lighting

By 1 July 2025, the light intensity during light periods for young poultry for the first three days after hatching is at least 20 lux at bird level.

By 1 July 2025, the light intensity for poultry is at least 10 Lux at bird level during light periods, except under veterinary supervision.

By 1 July 2025, poultry must be provided a minimum total of at least six hours of darkness within a 24-hour period with at least one uninterrupted period of darkness of at least four hours except:

- Birds up to seven days of age
- To prevent huddling or clumping behaviours during very hot weather
- Poultry on the day of pick-up
- Laying and breeder birds up to 16 weeks of age
- During a disease outbreak under veterinary supervision

Chicks up to seven days old must have a minimum of one hour of continuous darkness for any 24-hour period, except for young birds raised under heat lamps or in brooders.

Enrichment for meat chickens

Birds must have enough space to stand, turn around and flap their wings. There must be sufficient space to allow all birds to be able to sit at the same time.

Chicken breeders over seven days of age, must have access to perches and/or platforms. Chicken breeders must have access to a scratch area and/or claw shortening device.

From 1 July 2032, stocking density in ideal conditions indoors must not exceed 30 kg/m² (measured as bird density in the useable space) for pullets and adult birds (including roosters).

Free-range poultry

Poultry must be adequately feathered before access to an outdoor area. Poultry kept in housing with access to an outdoor area must have ready access to the housing and shaded areas.

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By 1 July 2025, a person in charge of poultry kept in housing with access to an outdoor area must encourage use of the outdoor range by providing:

- Access to appropriately located shade and shelter from predators
- Opportunities to perform foraging and scratching behaviours reasonable number and size of access points

By 1 July 2032, a person in charge must ensure that poultry, other than ratites, are able to be confined to manage welfare risks to birds in the outdoor area. Confinement must comply with housing standards, as well as stocking densities for the relevant species.



i KEY CONTACT

For further information please contact:

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VFF ACTION

Following the announcement of the Standards and Guidelines, the VFF immediately took to national media explaining the concerns of industry toward the proposals. We also hosted an online meeting of VFF poultry farmers to provide further information and our actions to date.

The VFF has requested meetings with the Victorian Minister for Agriculture and Agriculture Victoria to discuss the options available to government and to industry.

The VFF will be keeping members informed through our regular email newsletters and member updates. VFF Members are welcome to contact the VFF Policy and Advocacy Team to discuss any matters related to the proposed Standards and Guidelines.