

CHAPTER 13

OFF-FARM HANDLING

Transport and Handling Stresses

13.1 Aspects of the welfare of the pig from farm gate to slaughter were discussed during this inquiry. The Australian Veterinary Association submitted that during this period the pig can be subject to great stress and that many transporters and abattoir workers are unaware of the effects of their practices on pigs.

13.2 Specific recommendations made by the Australian Veterinary Association are:

- (i) that welfare of the pig would be improved, both in transport to and in handling at an abattoir, if workers involved were made more aware of the effects of stress on the pig;
- (ii) that handling would be greatly improved and thus stress reduced, by capital expenditure on suitable truck crate design and on loading/unloading facilities and abattoir race designs;
- (iii) that improved killing facilities are required in some abattoirs;
- (iv) that electrical stunning is considered to be the best and most humane form of rendering the pig unconscious prior to the actual slaughter process, but there is need for continuous vigilance by abattoir management to ensure that equipment is used correctly by operators.¹

13.3 Animals being transported by road are subjected to a number of stresses which may have cumulative effects. Stressful influences may include:

- yarding and handling;
- deprivation of food and water;

- changes in climatic conditions;
- overcrowding or isolation, unfamiliar surroundings, noises and sensations;
- insufficient care during road transportation; and
- physiological responses associated with pregnancy.²

Australian Agreed Standards

13.4 The Model Code of Practice makes the following observations and recommendations concerning loading, stocking densities, waiting periods during loading, transit, rest periods and unloading at the point of destination.

Loading of pigs for transport presents special problems, particularly if they are not accustomed to being herded. Patience is essential and proper design of yards, loading ramp and other associated services will facilitate loading with minimum distress and bruising.

A canvas slapper is the best tool for moving pigs. Electric prods should be used sparingly.

It is recommended that the following classes be transported or penned separately:

- young piglets;
- sows with piglets;
- adult boars;
- unfamiliar groups with pigs (where possible); and
- sows in advanced pregnancy.

Packing of animals either too loosely or too tightly in stock crates predisposes them to injury; partitions should be used to reduce the likelihood of injury.

The density of loading of animals in stock crates should be determined by the need to minimise injury but allow cast animals to rise with assistance.

The driver is responsible for ensuring that the loading density and penning arrangements are compatible with the welfare of the animals and the capacity of the vehicle.

Recommended Loading Density During Road Transport

Use the following table when the temperature is below 25°C. Pigs need about 10 per cent more floor area in a truck when the temperature is over 25°C.

Average Weight (kg)	Floor Area (m ² /head)	Number of Head Per 12.2 m (40 ft) Deck
50	0.22	132
75	0.29	100
100	0.35	83
125	0.42	69
150	0.48	60
175	0.55	53
200	0.61	48

(Conversion factor: 1.0 m² = 10.8 ft²)

Pigs are susceptible to extremes of heat and cold. In very hot weather (38°C or more) it is undesirable to transport pigs. If transport is undertaken during hot weather, shade should be provided and the vehicle should be well ventilated. When the vehicle is stationary shade should be provided or pigs should be unloaded promptly as heat will build up rapidly within an enclosed stock crate.

Consideration should be given to the need for, and effectiveness of, roofing or shade cloth over vehicles operating in tropical areas to reduce heat stress in animals. In cold weather straw or other dry bedding is desirable, and pigs should be protected from wind and rain.

Pigs should be unloaded as soon as possible after arrival at the destination. All pigs should be given access to water when unloaded including those consigned directly for slaughter. Pigs to be held in yards for 24 hours or longer should also be provided with feed.³

Discussion of Issues

13.5 The AVA contends that stresses likely to be involved during the handling of pigs at abattoirs, may be exacerbated because the pigs are likely to be in the control of workers even more remote from the concepts of good husbandry practice and animal welfare than are truck drivers. Lairage, that is, the practice of holding pigs prior to slaughter for up to 24 hours, is an extremely stressful period for pigs and should be reduced to as short a time as is practicable.⁴

13.6 All participants to this inquiry agree that because of the inevitable suffering associated with the transport of pigs the slaughter of these food animals should be as near as possible to the point of production and that handling and slaughtering at abattoirs should be carried out in a humane and considerate manner.

13.7 The Australian Pig Industry Policy Council submitted that the pig industry has been concerned to improve transport and handling of pigs and in both NSW and Queensland producers have initiated action to produce recommendations for improved transport and handling of pigs. Codes of Practice for abattoirs and sale yards are currently being finalised. The Pig Research Council has sponsored:

- research into the pre-slaughter treatment of pigs;
- visits to Australia by acknowledged experts in the design of animal handling and lairage facilities; and
- a session of the 'World Meat Science Congress' in Brisbane in late 1988 dealing specifically with the stunning of pigs.⁵

13.8 Mr Hassab, NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, reported in evidence that most transport carriers and most farmers who cart their own pigs are very aware of providing pigs with good transport because they realise the problems that can occur, such as deaths in transport. Deaths during transport of pigs can occur if they are not handled correctly. Most farmers and most stock transporters carry pigs carefully and efficiently because they realise that there is an economic involvement in that the correct handling procedures will give a better dressing-out percentage. He reported that pigs are generally loaded and transported during the very early morning, at night or late evening because of the adverse effects that extreme summer temperatures can have on pigs in transit. In terms of the lairage pens in abattoirs, there has been a concerted effort by most abattoirs throughout New South Wales to improve the lairage conditions. These improvements have been provided by better unloading facilities, better movement lanes, better drainage and better flooring within the lairage pens.⁶

13.9 Mr Hassab stated that bruising does not appear to be a serious problem in the pig industry. Providing the transport - the trucks that the pigs are carried on - and the laneways and the unloading races and the holding lairage pens are sound and do not have any protrusions, it is generally rare to find pigs being bruised. Most abattoirs throughout New South Wales are very conscious of providing very good lairage pens and holding facilities.⁷

13.10 The Committee sought to clarify whether intensively housed pigs exhibit greater signs of stress during mixing and loading for transport to sale yards or abattoirs. Dr Blackshaw stated that the view that pigs are stressed due to being moved from a dimly lit environment is not applicable in Australia. Australian piggeries are in full daylight and many of them have natural ventilation. Transference to the outside is not significantly different:

... Certainly pigs are stressed when you mix them. Usually, you load a group of pigs which have lived together as growers in groups of 12 or maybe 16 - they go on the truck together. If you do load them like that you tend not to get as much fighting as you would if they were just taken at random from different parts of the piggery, which does not usually happen in the pig industry.⁸

13.11 She referred to the code of practice for the movement of domestic animals which recommends that animals are mixed several days before transport.⁹

13.12 Doctors Johnston and Holder representing AVA expressed the view in evidence that the arrangements and the Acts governing transport of pigs are probably adequate. They argued that the problem in the area really relates to people who do not have an understanding of how to handle the animals and are probably not really trained suitably in what they are doing. In most cases transport is adequate but it gets back to the individual. There are very good individual transport drivers who have a very great concern for the animals they are transporting, and there are others who do not. Many of the transporters of livestock are self-employed people. They know that their livelihood depends on delivering stock to their destination in good condition.¹⁰

13.13 Dr Holder underlined this point and highlighted AVA's general view of handling of pigs off-farm:

... Certainly any clients of mine who knew that the transport person was not looking after their animals after they, the owners, had put six months into looking after them very adequately would very quickly show that particular transporter the door. I think, however, that there is a very small proportion of transporters who are not directly relating to owners and who may convey stock under less than adequate conditions. This is why the point is made in our submission that, firstly, there should be a greater awareness of the requirements being more generally known - and this can only be by education - and, secondly, I believe there is a case to be made for, say, a disinterested party like a government veterinarian at the receiving point, the abattoir, to be given greater rights and responsibilities in terms of directing what

should be done with animals rather than just advising on what should be done with animals.¹¹

13.14 The Australian Veterinary Association believes that deficiencies in the transport of pigs to abattoirs and their handling at abattoirs impact directly on the pigs, placing them very often under undue stress. AVA stresses the need for better education of transporters and abattoir workers so that stress levels might be reduced. Handling facilities, both on transports and at abattoirs, often are less than adequate. Government veterinarians employed at abattoirs should be given more power to direct that handling methods and facilities be improved when found to be deficient.¹²

Conclusion

13.15 The Committee did not investigate off-farm handling of pigs in detail nor undertake inspections of loading, transport, lairage, and abattoir arrangements and facilities. Obviously many sectors of the industry have an interest in the proper marketing of pigs and there are economic as well as welfare advantages to minimising stress during all of these stages.

13.16 The Committee, noting the importance of a multi-sector approach to strategies to minimise stress, deaths, and decrease yield and quality losses during post-farm handling of pigs, recommends a State and Territory wide multi-sectoral review of off-farm handling of pigs with a view to upgrading existing codes of practice and disseminating information to service providers, producers, transporters, abattoirs and other interested parties. The review process should take account of the views of animal welfare organisations and specialist ethologists.

13.17 The Committee recommends that in addition to ensuring that information is widely disseminated on the proper handling of pigs from farm loading to slaughter, adequate monitoring should also be undertaken to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Codes of Practice associated with the transport and slaughter of livestock.

ENDNOTES

1. Evidence, Australian Veterinary Association, pp. S9028-9029.
2. Standing Committee on Agriculture, Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals No. 3 Road Transport of Livestock, 1983, p. 16.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 10-11, p. 16.
4. Evidence, Australian Veterinary Association, p. S9028.
5. Evidence, Australian Pig Industry Policy Council, p. S8809.
6. Evidence, NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, pp. 9263-9264.
7. *ibid.*, p. 9264.
8. Evidence, Dr J. Blackshaw, University of Queensland, p. 6859.
9. *ibid.*
10. Evidence, Australian Veterinary Association, pp. 9567-9568.
11. *ibid.*, p. 9568.
12. *ibid.*, p. 9561.