

# Poultry for show and sale

A national guide to the handling,  
transportation and biosecurity of  
poultry for show and sale

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# About this guide

This guide has been developed to assist poultry dealers, agents, vendors, buyers and show societies to better educate people handling and transporting poultry and to alert them to their legal obligations in relation to these activities.

## Animal welfare legislation

*The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines Land Transport of Livestock (LTS)* and the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of The Animals Domestic Poultry 4<sup>th</sup> edition are used as references.

Wherever appropriate, photos have been used to provide an easy reference to the text to better illustrate and convey the intended message.

## Responsibility for poultry welfare

Responsibility for the welfare of birds is with the selling agent. Once the bird has been

sold by the agent, ownership transfers to the new owner and they become responsible for the bird's welfare. This includes handling and transportation to and from markets and shows.

It is essential the owner/transporter understand they must take reasonable action to minimise risks to the welfare of the bird in their care.

## Stressors for poultry

The welfare of poultry is largely influenced by the degree of **stress** the bird is exposed to and the bird's reaction to the stress. The

factors which interfere with the wellbeing of the bird are called stressors. Stress levels can be elevated by a number of events/situations that cause stress. The more stressors or an increasing intensity of stressors, result in an increased stress response in the bird. Stress can have a negative impact on the bird's immune system and health. For example, heat may cause birds to become stressed and can cause death. As a result, always ensure birds are provided with shade and have access to cool water.

For tables outlining the major stressors for poultry see pages 34-41.

# Handling poultry

**Handle birds appropriately, carefully and gently. Wings and legs are easily broken. Birds should not be held tightly as this may affect breathing and can also result in bruising.**

## Chickens

Carry chickens by placing both hands over the wings to prevent flapping. Keep the bird close to your body and support the bird from underneath (Figure 1). Carefully handle birds as their bones may be brittle and prone to breakages. Holding chickens by their legs with their heads hanging towards the ground may cause stress and injury.





Figure 1

Chickens must not be lifted or carried by the feathers, head, neck, tail feathers, or by one leg or wing.

## Ducks and geese

Support the body by holding the duck close with one hand taking the weight of the body and wings in a closed position while the other hand gently holds the base of the neck. Alternately hold both wings at the base and gently hold the base of the neck (Figure 2 and 3).

Figure 2

**Ducks and geese must not be lifted or carried by one wing, the feathers, head, tail feathers, or the legs. Do not catch ducks or geese by their legs.**







Figure 3

Correct way to handle ducks or geese.



## Turkeys

Turkeys should be carried with both legs in one hand while the other arm supports the weight under the breast and the hand keeps the wings against the handler's body (Figure 4).

Figure 4

**Turkeys should not be lifted or carried by one wing, the feathers, head, neck, tail feathers, or the legs.**

# Handling poultry into and from containers

Forcing birds into a small opening, dropping birds head first into a cage or box or dragging birds through the cage or box opening by their necks, legs or wings may cause injury. Rough handling of birds will also cause stress and fear.

Handle birds appropriately, carefully and gently (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Correct way to handle poultry into and from containers.





# Transportation of poultry

The *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines Land Transport of Livestock* (LTS) define specific requirements in relation to the transport of poultry in Australia. In most States and Territories the LTS is legally enforceable by way of regulations.

It is essential transporters understand they must take reasonable action to

minimise the risk to the welfare of poultry.

## Is the bird fit to transport?

To ensure compliance with animal welfare legislation and the LTS, as well as for best animal welfare practice, only birds free of disease and injury can be transported to and sold at a market or show.

Those responsible for the care of poultry should be aware of the signs of stress, ill-health or distress. Signs of ill-health in poultry include reduced food and water intake, reduced production, changes in the nature and level of their activity, and abnormal condition of their feathers or droppings. Yellow foamy droppings or bloody

For more information about the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines Land Transport of Livestock (LTS)* and the regulations [www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au](http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au)

droppings are abnormal. Unwell birds frequently display a 'fluffed up' or 'sick bird' appearance.

Evidence of behavioural changes may indicate stress, ill-health or distress. Knowledge of the normal appearance and behaviour of poultry is essential for them to be treated quickly, effectively, efficiently and with care.

Birds who are injured, diseased, ill, stressed or distressed from conditions that are likely to cause increased pain or distress during transport **must not** be offered for sale, sold, purchased or transported

unless under veterinary advice.

Birds assessed as not fit to transport must not be loaded for transport and the person in charge must make arrangements for the care, treatment or humane killing of the bird without delay. See pages 24-28.

### **Stress in transport**

Handling and transport can be particularly stressful for birds and should be minimised to reduce stress. When birds are deprived of food and water during transport, suffer changes in ambient temperatures and are subjected to unfamiliar

**Poultry with broken legs or poultry that are unable to walk MUST NOT be transported unless under veterinary supervision.**

surroundings, noises and sensations, their level of stress may increase. Stress can be cumulative and increase if birds are handled multiple times during transportation, rehousing and the sale process.

Birds should be handled gently, carefully, and compassionately at all times. This is particularly important when moving birds as their bones may be brittle and prone to breakages.

## Temperature

The LTS recommends the air temperature for transporting live poultry, other than day-old chicks be maintained between 10–30°C. For day old chicks, temperatures should be maintained between 25–35°C.

To maintain the proper temperature for birds, transporters should:

- protect birds from direct sunlight or extremes in temperature or weather conditions
- use suitable covers that enable sufficient natural airflow and protect birds in containers from direct sun, wind, rain, and cold conditions
- use transport containers with adequate ventilation on all sides and at the top of the container. Containers must also be of adequate height and floor area.

## Containers to transport poultry

LTS SB10.4 requires that:

A person transporting poultry in containers must ensure that the containers are:

- i. lifted and placed with care
- ii. properly positioned on the vehicle in an upright position without excessive tilting
- iii. not dropped or thrown
- iv. securely attached to the vehicle
- v. suitable for the purpose of transporting poultry

Birds should be carried in properly designed crates or boxes or 'fit for purpose' transportation containers. They must be free of sharp edges, have an adequate door opening, have a floor that provides support for the three forward facing toes and should be easily stackable. When stacked there must be space between containers.

## Containment of birds and mixing species

A person must not tie the legs of poultry together during the transport process.

Birds of differing species should not be mixed in a single cage or transport crate.

The pictured crate is for chickens, ducks, geese or turkeys and will meet the requirements (Figure 6).

Its height is 43cm.

The crate has ample holes for ventilation, is free of sharp edges, sturdy, easy to clean and the two doors allow easy access to the birds.



Figure 6

**Table 1 - The maximum number of birds and minimum space allowance for bird types:**

<b>Bird type</b>	<b>Maximum per crate 2500cm<sup>2</sup> e.g. 50cm width x 50cm length</b>	<b>Minimum height of crate</b>
<b>Chickens, ducks and geese below 1.5kg</b>	10	25cm
<b>Mature chickens, ducks and geese below 3kg</b>	Approximately 7 depending on body weight	25cm
<b>Turkeys, ducks and geese above 3kg</b>	Approximately 5 depending on body weight	32cm
<b>Adult pigeons or squabs</b>	12	21cm

Reduce number of birds in warmer weather and allow more space for birds above 5kg. Consideration should be given to the age, sex and size of all bird types. Contact a poultry expert or veterinarian for advice.



Photo credit: iStock

A graphic of a clipboard with a grey clip at the top and a blue border on the right side. The text is written on a white sheet of paper.

# CHECKLIST - ACCEPTABLE METHODS OF TRANSPORTING POULTRY

- ✓ Ensure all birds are healthy and fit to be transported and sold.
- ✓ Handle birds appropriately, carefully and gently. Wings and legs are easily broken.
- ✓ Protect birds from direct sunlight or extremes in temperature.

## **The container must:**

- ✓ Allow adequate ventilation. The container should have holes all the way around. The holes should be big
-

enough to allow ample airflow and positioned so that airflow can reach all birds.

✓ Be big enough to provide sufficient room for the birds to move. All birds should be able to sit on the floor at the same time.

✓ Be free of sharp edges, have an adequate door opening so birds can be placed in and removed from them without causing injury or

unnecessary suffering, and be sturdy enough to hold all the birds.

✓ Have a base that prevents toes getting caught and damaged when the container is on a table or in transport.

✓ Be strong enough to prevent the possibility of collapse when stacked.

✓ Have sufficient headroom for birds to stand naturally.





# **CHECKLIST - UNACCEPTABLE METHODS OF TRANSPORTING POULTRY**

- ✘** Birds must not be put in a container without sufficient ventilation.
  - ✘** Birds must not be carried, held or transported in the boot of a sedan car. This is because of the lack of ample airflow. If you put birds in the boot, even with the back seat down, you may endanger the bird and be at risk of prosecution.
  - ✘** Birds must not be transported in an enclosed area without sufficient air flow around the container.
-



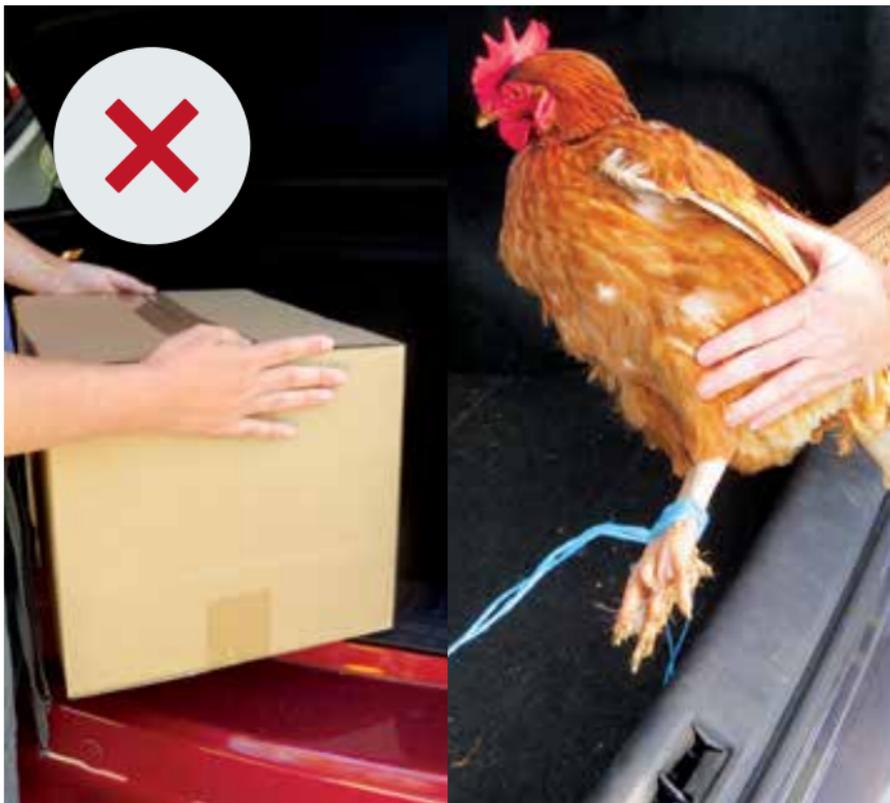
Density of birds in a container should not exceed the numbers specified in Table 1.



Birds must not be transported or held for sale with their legs tied together or restrained in any way. The entire bird should be loose and with full freedom in the container.



Under no circumstances is it acceptable to hold, carry or transport poultry in a bag or by wrapping them in wire.



# Humane killing of poultry

**Regardless of the reason, NEVER attempt to kill a bird if you are not trained to do it humanely. Before you decide to kill a bird you should first seek practical advice and training from a veterinarian or poultry expert.**

You must have the necessary skills and knowledge to complete the killing task quickly, competently and without causing the bird any

avoidable pain or distress. Killing an animal must be humane and therefore the method used should result in rapid death, or loss of consciousness, followed by death while unconscious. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are fully prepared in order to protect the welfare of each individual bird. Poultry which experience severe distress, disease or injury that cannot be reasonably treated or have no prospect of recovery must be humanely killed at the first reasonable

opportunity. In all cases it is critical to ensure the bird remains quiet and calm throughout. Carefully handle birds as their bones may be brittle and prone to breakage.

Failure to kill a bird humanely could expose you to risk of prosecution under the relevant animal welfare legislation in your State/Territory. Three acceptable methods for killing poultry are described below in the event a veterinarian is not available.

## Methods

### Captive bolt device

When performed correctly, this method is considered a humane way of killing poultry because the captive bolt destroys the brain stem and death is immediate. It is vital that you are adequately trained in using a captive bolt prior to killing poultry and are using equipment specifically designed for use on poultry.

If you wish to know more about humane killing methods and welfare for poultry visit:

[www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au](http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au)

### Cervical or neck dislocation of birds less than 6kg

This method is only recommended for birds under 6kgs. Birds over 6kgs **should** be stunned prior to cervical or neck dislocation. Ensure stunning devices are the correct size, maintained to a high standard and checked regularly. Electronic stunners should be applied to either side of the birds' head to allow for

immediate loss of consciousness. Seek advice and training on the correct stunning techniques from a

**If you doubt you can kill the bird on the first attempt or there is a chance the bird will not be successfully killed, DO NOT TAKE THE RISK. Seek practical advice and training from a veterinarian or poultry expert.**

poultry expert or veterinarian. Cervical or neck dislocation of birds should only be performed when competent trained operators can guarantee success at the first attempt and immediate unconsciousness and death is induced without causing pain and suffering.

**Performed incorrectly it will be extremely painful to the bird and is therefore unacceptable.**

Cervical dislocation involves rapid but controlled stretching of the neck to instantly cause internal partial separation of the head/brain from the

spinal cord. The resulting damage to the nervous system leads to cardiac and respiratory arrest and death. The method requires a high degree of skill. Contact a veterinarian or poultry expert for information.

## **Decapitation**

It is suggested decapitation only be performed by a veterinarian or poultry expert. Birds over 6kgs should be stunned prior to decapitation.

Should the decision be made to kill a chicken, duck, goose or turkey by decapitation, those

undertaking the method **must** ensure the head is cut off quickly and cleanly in the first attempt. The bird must be restrained and the neck completely severed close to the head by using an instrument designed specifically for that purpose. Sufficient pressure should be applied to ensure an immediate severance of the neck in the correct position and in one go.

**Immediately check for signs of death following all methods of killing.**

Always check to make sure the bird is dead.

Three or more signs should be observed to determine whether the method used has caused death. Signs of death include:

- loss of consciousness
- absence of a corneal 'blink' reflex when the eyeball is gently touched
- maximum dilation of the pupil
- absence of rhythmic respiratory movements (breathing) for at least five minutes
- with cervical dislocation, manual verification of an internal gap between the skull and the spine only in the neck area.



Photo supplied by Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

After death the bird may begin to flap wings and kick legs violently (if the bird is not showing signs of consciousness this is a normal reflex action, not a sign of life and distress).

**Animal welfare is your responsibility. Birds in your care are your responsibility. Failure to comply with State Animal Welfare legislation, Regulations, Land Transport Standards or Codes of Practice for poultry may result in prosecution and fines.**

## **After death bleeding out**

Bleeding out of a bird must

only be undertaken **after death**. Do not cut the neck to bleed out a conscious bird as this is likely to be extremely painful and is therefore unacceptable. Bleeding out of poultry should be done using a suitable sharp blade.

## **Health regulations when killing birds**

In some states, the keeping and killing of birds for individual use in both residential and semi-rural areas is regulated. Under some health regulations the sale of meat from birds killed at home without a licence may be prohibited. Contact the Health

Department in your State/Territory and the Local Government in your area for more information.

**YOU MUST ENSURE THE BIRD IS HUMANELY KILLED.**

**Aside from using a veterinarian, whatever method you choose to kill a bird, the pain and suffering is totally reliant on your ability to perform the method quickly and humanely.**

**IF YOU ARE UNSURE OF HOW TO HUMANELY KILL A BIRD CONTACT A VETERINARIAN OR POULTRY EXPERT.**

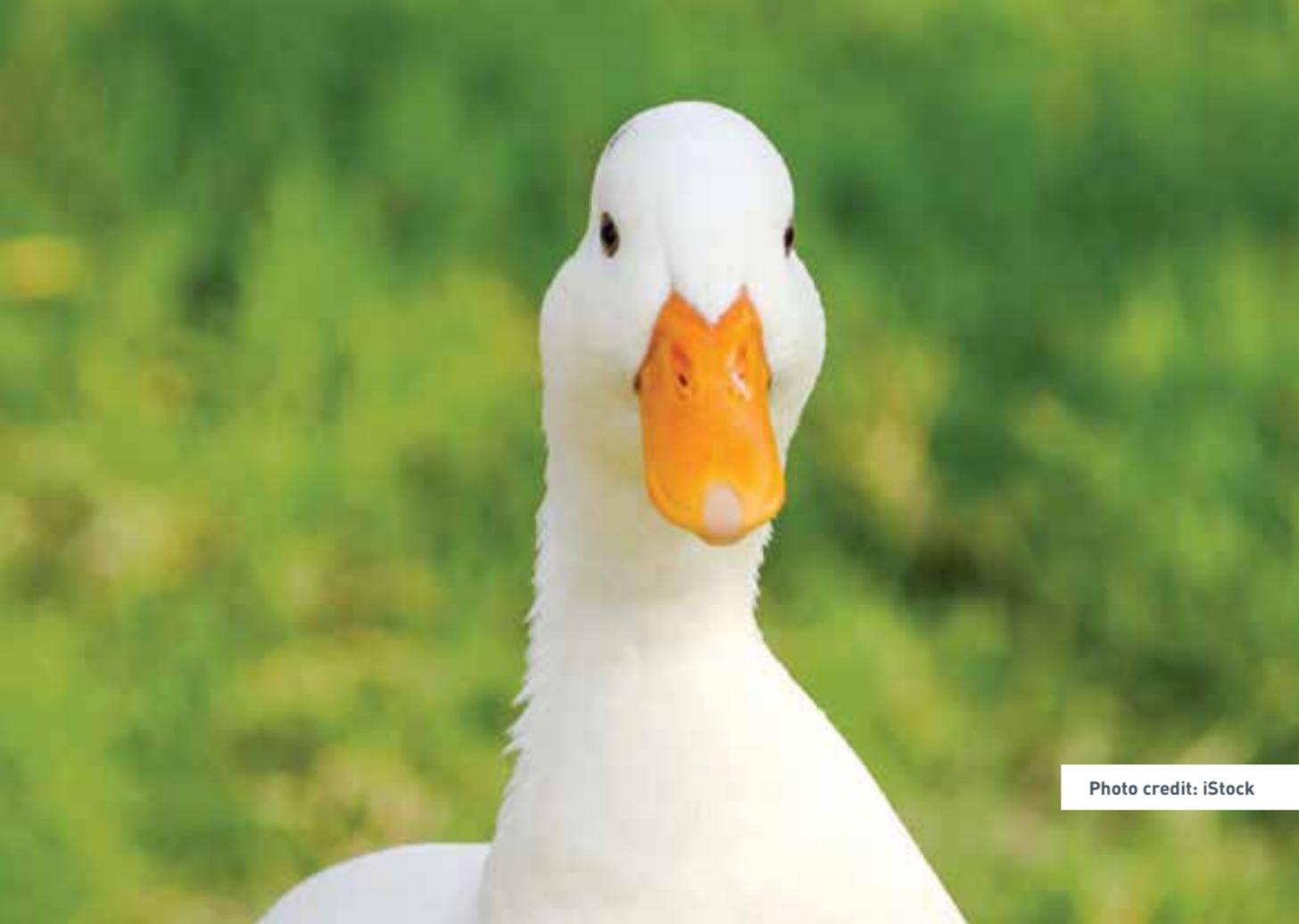


Photo credit: iStock

# Biosecurity

**To help protect the poultry industry from the risk of an emergency animal disease and the spread of endemic diseases, pests and weeds it is critical that all stakeholders play their part in adhering to the maximum degree of biosecurity both on their own properties and in the public**

**spaces in which they may show and sell birds.**

- Buy birds only from reputable sellers.
- Do not sell or buy diseased birds.
- Ensure birds are wormed and vaccinated.
- Ensure birds are treated for external parasites.
- Practice post-arrival quarantine for approximately two weeks of newly purchased and returned birds.
- Do not mix different poultry and animal species together.
- Crates should be cleaned and disinfected before and especially after use to prevent transference of disease organisms, pests, weeds or parasites from other birds.
- To prevent transfer of diseases, pests and weeds ensure the clothing worn is cleaned and footwear disinfected after each show.

For more information see the Exhibition Bird Biosecurity video at [www.youtube.com/user/ChickenMeatAustralia/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/ChickenMeatAustralia/videos) or visit [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au)

## Definitions used in this publication

- **Biosecurity** - managing and maintaining measures to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases, pests and weeds whether by direct contact with other birds or indirectly. Possible pathways for the spread

of diseases, pests or weeds include faeces, dust, feathers, contaminated water and feed or by human spread on the clothes, vehicles or equipment of operators.

- **Endemic disease** - a disease that is already affecting animals in Australia and of which authorities are aware.
- **Emergency animal disease** - is a disease that is (a) not present in Australia or (b) a variant of an endemic disease or (c) a serious infectious disease of unknown or uncertain origin (d) a

severe outbreak of a known endemic disease, and that is considered to be of national significance with serious social or trade implications.

## Additional information on poultry in the backyard:

**Housing:** Poultry need clean, comfortable and secure housing. It should provide protection from weather extremes and other animals including pets and wild predators. Important provisions for permanent housing

include litter (e.g. sawdust or wood shavings), perches, and a nesting area, smooth surfaces without protruding wire or nails and adequate drainage. If your property is suitable, letting poultry range freely during the day and bringing them into their housing at dusk is ideal.

For more information on what to feed poultry please visit:

[http://kb.rspca.org.au/what-should-i-feed-my-backyard-chickens\\_305.html](http://kb.rspca.org.au/what-should-i-feed-my-backyard-chickens_305.html)





Photo credit: iStock

# **Additional information on stress in poultry**

## TABLE A - TEMPERATURE: ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS

The welfare of poultry is largely influenced by the degree of stress a bird is exposed to and the bird's reaction to stressors. The following tables outline major stressors for poultry, their effects on the bird and what actions should be taken.

Stressor	Effect	What to do
<b>Cold stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Huddling together</li><li>• Shivering</li><li>• Feather fluffing</li><li>• Lying down</li><li>• Lethargy</li><li>• Dull eyes</li></ul>	<b>Provide protection from cold and wet.</b>
<b>Dehydration (often with heat stress or hyperthermia)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lethargy</li><li>• Collapse</li></ul>	<b>See heat stress.</b>

*Cont'd*

Stressor	Effect	What to do
<b>Exhaustion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability/reluctance to rise</li> <li>• Unresponsive</li> <li>• Lying down</li> </ul>	<b>See heat stress.</b>
<b>Heat stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panting</li> <li>• Spreading wings</li> <li>• Squatting close to the ground</li> <li>• High respiration rate</li> <li>• Darkened or blackened combs and wattle</li> </ul>	<p><b>Immediately move bird to a cool place and offer cool clean water.</b></p> <p><b>Reduce stocking density in the crate/cage.</b></p> <p><b>Maximise airflow.</b></p> <p><b>Do not transport stressed poultry unless under veterinary advice.</b></p>

**TABLE B - HOUSING CONDITIONS: ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS**

<b>Stressor</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>What to do</b>
<b>High stocking density</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Panting</li><li>• Struggling to breathe</li><li>• Heat stress</li><li>• Smothering causing injury or death</li></ul>	<p><b>Use fit for purpose crates.</b></p> <p><b>Reduce numbers of birds in the crate to ensure the birds have room to lie down.</b></p>
<b>Inappropriate social grouping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bullying that may escalate to feather plucking</li><li>• Physical attacks on other birds</li></ul>	<p><b>Appropriately manage social grouping.</b></p> <p><b>Isolate affected birds.</b></p>
<b>Poor ventilation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Panting</li><li>• Struggling to breathe</li><li>• Heat stress</li><li>• Suffocation</li></ul>	<p><b>Ensure the container has adequate ventilation holes.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure adequate airflow.</b></p>

**TABLE C - NOISE AND VISUAL DISTURBANCE:  
ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS**

Stressor	Effect	What to do
<b>Fear</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocalisation</li> <li>• Bird staying absolutely still</li> <li>• Escape behaviour</li> <li>• Eye fixed and pupil dilated</li> <li>• Defecation (often wet)</li> <li>• Trembling or shivering</li> </ul>	<p>If fear is triggered by a predator provide ongoing adequate physical and visual protection.</p> <p>If fear is caused by human interaction, ensure birds are handled appropriately with care.</p>
<b>Noise and flashing lights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excitability and nervousness</li> </ul>	<p>Relocate birds away from noise/lights.</p> <p>Provide adequate protection from the effects of noise/lights.</p>

## TABLE D - HEALTH CONDITIONS: PHYSIOLOGICAL STRESSORS

Stressor	Effect	What to do
<b>Disease</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lethargy, droopiness, coughing, scouring</li><li>• Lying down</li><li>• Respiratory sounds</li><li>• Discharge from beak, nasal passages or eyes</li><li>• Diarrhoea</li><li>• Blood in faeces or coughing blood</li><li>• Feather fluffing</li><li>• Darkened and blackened comb and wattle</li></ul>	<p><b>Consult a vet or a poultry expert to identify the issue and arrange for appropriate treatment or euthanise the bird.</b></p> <p><b>Do not transport diseased poultry unless under veterinary advice.</b></p>

*Cont'd*

Stressor	Effect	What to do
<b>Inadequate nutrition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egg abnormalities – examples: pimpled, rough or soft shelled, flat sided or double shelled</li> <li>• Bone weakness and fractures</li> <li>• Other illnesses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consult a vet or poultry expert for advice.</b></p> <p><b>Provide suitable and adequate nutrition.</b></p>
<b>Inadequate water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panting</li> <li>• May result in death</li> </ul>	<p><b>Immediately provide ample supply of cool water.</b></p>
<b>Injury</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lameness (immobility and awkward posture)</li> <li>• Dislocation or fractures to wings, hip, legs, keel bone</li> <li>• Skin haemorrhages, cuts, sores</li> <li>• Vent damage</li> <li>• Swollen joints and/or feet</li> <li>• Prolapse (organs protruding)</li> <li>• Egg bound (inability to expel eggs)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consult a vet or a poultry expert to identify the condition and arrange for appropriate treatment or humanely kill the bird.</b></p> <p><b>Do not transport injured poultry unless under veterinary advice.</b></p>

*Cont'd*

Stressor	Effect	What to do
<b>Moulting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shedding of feathers</li> <li>• Ceases egg production</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consult a vet or poultry expert for advice.</b></p> <p><b>Keep poultry on food and water.</b></p> <p><b>Use a calcium supplement to prevent calcium depletion.</b></p>
<b>Pain</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lying or sitting very still</li> <li>• Wing or leg extended and abnormal position relative to body</li> <li>• Little activity/loss of movement</li> <li>• Panting</li> <li>• Trembling</li> <li>• Dilated pupils</li> <li>• Reluctant to move</li> <li>• Limping or lameness</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consult a vet or a poultry expert to identify the issue and arrange for appropriate treatment or euthanase the bird.</b></p> <p><b>Do not transport poultry who are in pain unless under veterinary advice.</b></p>

# Information on the Department of Agriculture/Primary Industries in your state/territory and animal welfare legislation

**ACT:** Environment and Planning [132 281](#)

Animal Welfare Act 1992

**NSW:** Department of Primary Industries [1800 808 095](#)

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 and Regulations 2012

**NT:** Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries [\(08\) 8999 2006](#)

Animal Welfare Act

**QLD:** Department of Agriculture and Fisheries [13 25 23](#)

Animal Care and Protection Act 2001

**SA:** Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) **(08) 8595 9100**  
Animal Welfare Act 1985

**TAS:** Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment **1300 368 550**  
Animal Welfare Act 1993

**VIC:** Agriculture Victoria **136 186**  
Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act - POCTA

**WA:** Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development **(08) 9366 2311**  
Animal Welfare Act 2002

