

Beak Length, Welfare Codes & Australian Industry Practice - History

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The question has been asked how did we end up with a proposed Standard where no more than one third of the upper or lower beak may be removed when beak trimming?

The following is a history of beak trimming requirements in Australia.

Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Domestic Poultry-2nd Edition (1992)

12.2 Beak trimming

12.2.1 When performed as a preventive measure beak trimming should be carried out by a competent operator soon after hatching and preferably within 3 weeks. For chickens, the operator may remove not more than half of the upper beak and one-third of the lower beak.

12.2.2. This means

For day old chickens, not more than 3mm of the upper and 2.5mm of the lower beak.

For 10-day old chickens, not more than 4.5mm of the upper and 4mm of the lower beak.

12.2.3. Further trimming of the beaks of growing birds may be necessary to prevent cannibalism during the laying period but not as a means of restricting or retarding body weight.

Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Domestic Poultry- 3rd Edition (1995)

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For 10-day old chickens, not more than 4.5mm of the upper and 4mm of the lower beak.

13.2.2 Further trimming of the beaks of growing birds may be necessary to prevent cannibalism during the laying period but not as a means of restricting or retarding body weight.

Not more than one-third of the top beak measured from the tip towards the entrance to the nostrils may be removed in turkeys, pheasants and partridge.

Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Domestic Poultry-4th Edition (2002)

Every effort should be made to avoid beak trimming by selecting chickens for reduced feather picking and cannibalism. The use of housing systems and lighting levels which reduce the tendency for these traits to arise should also be used.

Beak trimming must be performed only by an accredited operator or under the direct supervision of an accredited trainer as part of an accreditation training program and must be performed only in accordance with agreed accreditation standards.

There is no mention of beak length except for other species. Not more than one-third of the top beak measured from the tip towards the entrance to the nostrils may be removed in turkeys, pheasants and partridge.

On occasions, however, excessive cannibalism reported in imported brown layers has meant that both beaks are cut more heavily with increased cauterisation. Re-trimming of older birds has become necessary to avoid continuing outbreaks of cannibalism.

Beak Trimming Training Manual (RIRDC) February 2002

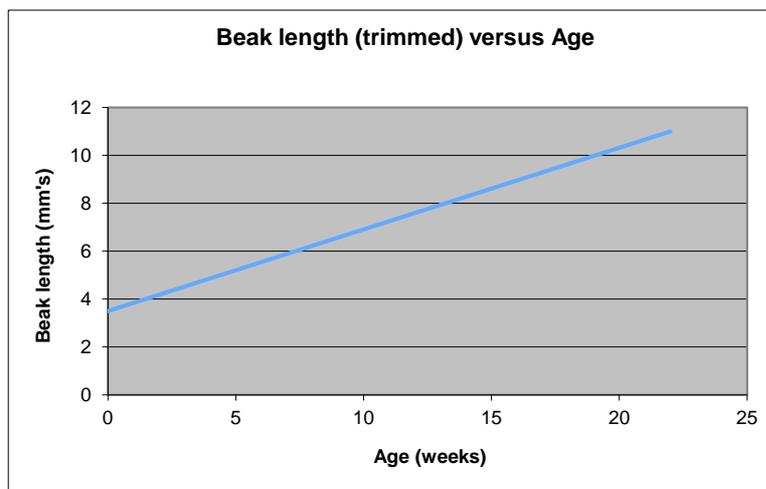
On occasions, however, excessive cannibalism reported in imported brown layers has meant that both beaks are cut more heavily with increased cauterisation. Re-trimming of older birds has become necessary to avoid continuing outbreaks of cannibalism.

6.5 Guide to Beak Length

Farm managers provide the specifications of the trim they want. They should not, however, ask for a trim that will compromise long-term bird welfare. Industry has agreed that this is anything less than a 5 mm beak trim at 8-12 weeks. A 5 mm trim will result in a small percentage of birds with beaks of 3 to 4 mm. No bird of any age should have a beak of less than 3mm. You should not perform beak trims of less than 5 mm except for birds day old to 10 days of age.

In general you should **remove no more than of half of the upper beak and provide a step to the lower beak.** This does not cut into the quick and so results in trimming that meets industry standards and maximises bird welfare.

The graph below of upper beak length provides the target amount of beak to remain for different ages of trimming.



PIX 2002 paper STANDARDS AND TRAINING GUIDELINES FOR ACCREDITING BEAK TRIMMERS IN AUSTRALIA (P Glatz)

Measuring Beak Length

Beak trimmers should be able to measure the upper beak length of all ages of birds being trimmed from the outer tip of the nostril to the tip of the beak using a dressmaker's tape or a calliper. Farm managers provide the specifications of the trim they want. They should not, however, ask for a trim that will compromise long-term bird welfare. Industry has agreed that this is anything less than a 5 mm beak trim at 8-12 weeks. A 5mm trim will result in a small percentage of birds with beaks of 3 to 4mm. No bird of any age should have a beak of less than 3mm. Beak trims of less than 5 mm should not be done except for birds day old to 10 days of age. **In general no more than half of the upper beak should be cut.**

Beak Trimming Handbook for egg producers (Poultry CRC) 2006 (P Glatz)

Guide to beak length

Farm managers provide the specifications of the trim they want, but they shouldn't ask for a trim that will compromise long-term bird welfare. Industry has agreed that this is anything less than a 5-mm beak trim at 8 to 12 weeks. A 5mm trim will result in a small percentage of birds with beaks of 3 or 4mm. No bird of any age should have a beak of less than 3 mm. You must not perform beak trims of less than 5 mm, except in day old and 10 day old birds, where no more than 3mm and 4.5mm, respectively, should be removed.

In general, beak trimmers should **remove no more than half of the upper beak and provide a step to the lower beak. This does not cut into the quick, and so results in trimming that meets industry standards and maximises bird welfare.**

EggCorp Assured & Egg Standards Australia

No mention of a requirement for beak length.

Contract beak trimmers

Currently using the information for beak length in the Beak Trim Training Manual (2002).

- 6mm residual beak at 10-11 weeks age as heavy trim
- or 7mm residual beak for a more conservative trim
- Retrim of older birds remove no more than a third of beak.
- Also use the chart above to estimate the required beak length at other ages.

That is, they are complying with the 1995 welfare code requirements of **'the operator may remove not more than half of the upper beak and one-third of the lower beak.'**

UK Requirements (2002)

When not carried out by a veterinary surgeon beak-trimming must be carried out in accordance with the Veterinary Surgery (Exemptions) Order 1962 (S.I. 1962 No. 2557) i.e.: removal from a bird by means of a suitable instrument of:-

- (i) not more than a one-third part of both its upper and lower beaks, measured from the tip towards the entrance of the nostrils, if carried out as a single operation; or
- (ii) not more than a one-third part of its upper beak only, measured in the same way; and the arrest of any subsequent haemorrhage from the beak by cauterisation.

RSPCA (Australia)

2011

Beak trimming must only occur where all other methods of preventing feather pecking have failed. Where beak trimming is considered necessary:

- It must be performed at the hatchery by a competent operator using an infrared technique.
- It must only take place once.
- It must be limited to tipping of the beak only.

2017

Where beak-trimmed birds are sourced, the procedure must be:

- performed on day-old birds at the hatchery by a competent operator using an infrared technique and appropriately calibrated equipment
- limited to tipping of the beak only
- even, rounded and consistent across the flock.

**Proposed Draft Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry. Version:
Public Consultation Nov 2017**

Glossary (page 67)

beak trimming The removal of the tip of the beak of poultry by specially designed equipment to prevent cannibalism and its associated vices.

Beak trimming standards (page 31)

SA9.14 A person must use appropriate tools and methods to trim the beaks of poultry.

SA9.15 A person must not remove more than **one-third of the upper and lower beaks.**

Beak trimming guidelines (page 32)

GA9.12 New, more humane technologies and methods for performing physical alterations should be adopted as they become available.

GA9.13 Beak trimming, when undertaken, should be done using an infrared beam within 3 days of hatching.

GA9.14 If therapeutic beak trimming is required, it should be carried out by trained and skilled personnel at as early an age as possible and care should be taken to remove the minimum amount of beak necessary using a method which minimises pain and controls bleeding.

GA9.15 Alternative strategies for managing injurious (feather) pecking that minimise the need for beak trimming should be employed.