

# Animal welfare

Ensuring all animals receive appropriate care



July 2017

## Welfare decisions for beef cattle

In circumstances such as drought, cattle may be subject to dramatic loss in body condition due to reduced feed intake. As cattle lose condition, they become progressively less fertile, milk will dry up and commercial beef value will decline. If they lose condition further, body reserves can become insufficient to withstand mustering, yarding, transport or sale.

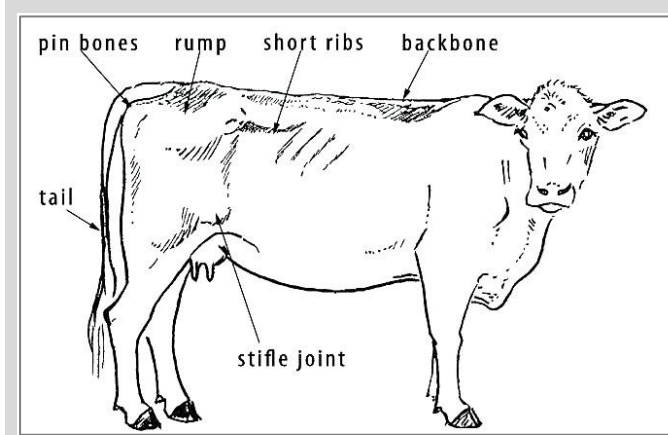
If they become very weak, they are at risk of death during wet or cold weather, or if placed under any form of stress. **Weakened animals cannot be transported.**

It is not acceptable to leave stock in poor condition. Decisions must be made on future feeding, suitability for transport or sale, or in extreme cases whether humane destruction is required.

Making decisions on what to do next can be difficult and stressful. These guidelines can help assess the condition of affected cows, and decide what action to take.

### Assessing animals

The diagram below shows the key sites for assessing an animal's condition. Use Table 1 over the page to decide which category the animal fits into and what action needs to be taken.



### Criteria for destruction on property

If not fit for transport or sale, some cattle may require humane destruction on property.

Humanely destroy cattle if they are in poor or very poor condition as described in Table 1 (see over page) and meet any of the following conditions:

- falling down or knocked over easily
- cannot stand without assistance
- very unsteady gait, staggering, or crossing over of hind legs.

Humane destruction should be considered if:

- adequate good quality feed and water cannot be provided, and
- the cattle cannot be transported to agistment or sold.

Cattle must not be allowed to starve to death.

### More information

This information sheet is based on Animal Welfare Codes of Practice and applicable Standards and Guidelines. For up-to-date Codes of Practice, and Standards and Guidelines, visit:

- [agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare](http://agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare)
- [animalwelfarestandards.net.au](http://animalwelfarestandards.net.au)

### References




*Welfare scoring nutritionally deprived beef cattle, dairy cattle and their crosses, sheep and horses* - NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2013 ([dpi.nsw.gov.au](http://dpi.nsw.gov.au))

### Important disclaimer

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Table 1. Welfare decisions for cattle based on animal condition

	Fat score 1	Poor	Very poor
<b>Cow condition</b>	 <p>Lean but strong and healthy and with no significant muscle wastage. Likely reduced reproductive performance</p>	 <p>Healthy but with significant muscle wastage. Unlikely to conceive. Able to recover if adequately fed</p>	 <p>Weak, with very low body reserves. At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress. Slow recovery reliant on high-quality care</p>
<b>Backbone</b>	Easily seen	Spines of backbone identifiable	Spines of backbone individually identifiable
<b>Short ribs</b>	Visible. Fairly sharp to touch	Prominent and very sharp to touch	Very prominent and easy to see individually
<b>Inside pin bones</b>	Slightly sunken	Sunken	Deeply sunken to the bone
<b>Muscle wastage</b>	Rump muscle concave (between hooks and pins)	Rump muscle concave. Muscle wastage in loin and leg muscle evident	Muscle wastage over whole body. Rump and leg muscles deeply concave
<b>Stifle joint</b>	Not identifiable	Not identifiable	Identifiable
<b>Tail bones</b>	Individual bones not identifiable	Individual bones just able to be felt	Individual bones easily felt
<b>Skin</b>	Pliable	Less pliable	Tight
<b>Appearance</b>	Bright, alert	Healthy	Lacking energy or dull
<b>Mobility</b>	Normal gait	Mobile, able to lie down/rise with ease	Unsteady gait, may drag or cross over hind feet. Difficulty lying down/standing up
<b>Ability to calve</b>	Some assistance required	Moderate assistance required	High level of assistance required
<b>Transport, sale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable for transport but with minimum time off feed</li> <li>• Suitable for sale but must not be kept off feed for extended periods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuitable for transport over long distances</li> <li>• Unsuitable for sale at saleyards</li> <li>• Suitable for sale only direct to farm or abattoir</li> <li>• Suitable for transport direct to agistment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not fit for transport</li> </ul>
<b>Actions required</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be fed adequately to prevent further weight loss</li> <li>• Supervise and be ready to assist during calving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be fed adequately to prevent weight loss</li> <li>• Supervise closely and be ready to assist during calving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be given high-quality feed, water and care or carry out humane destruction</li> <li>• Supervise closely and be ready to assist during calving</li> </ul>