

Penning density for sheep and cattle in saleyards

Current as of March 2023.

This factsheet assists a person responsible for sheep and cattle in meeting their animal welfare obligations when determining the penning density for sheep and cattle at saleyards.

Legislation

The Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020 (Transport Regulations) set minimum standards of care for livestock animals that must be met by persons responsible for them during the transport process or at saleyards and depots. In contrast with an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* (the Act), an offence against the Transport Regulations does not necessarily involve harm to an animal.

Space allowances for cattle and sheep penned at saleyards

Livestock in saleyards may be kept in yards or pens. The Transport Regulations define a pen as a stall or any other kind of enclosure for confining livestock as individuals or groups and divides them into two categories:

- **Non-selling pen** – any pen other than a selling pen.
- **Selling pen** – a pen used to hold a livestock animal when it is presented for sale.

Different welfare requirements apply to each category, in particular reasonable access to drinking water and space to lie down.

Note: an animal is deemed to be 'presented for sale' when it is made available for purchase or when offered for sale (e.g. the morning of the sale).

Penning density – non-selling pens

Before an animal is presented for sale and after the animal has been sold, the animal is considered to be in a non-selling pen. Penning densities must allow animals in a non-selling pen to move freely, to easily access water and space for each animal to lie down and rest at the same time.

A person responsible for cattle and sheep at a saleyard must ensure that animals in a non-selling pen have sufficient space to move freely, to easily access water and for all animals to lie down and rest at the same time.

Penning density – selling pens

A person responsible for sheep and cattle at the saleyard must ensure that each animal is assessed immediately before being presented for sale to determine if it is fit to be sold.

Once the animal has been assessed as fit for sale it can be placed in a selling pen and be presented for sale. If an animal is not available for purchase, for example overnight, then the pen at that time is in a non-sale pen, for the purposes of the Transport Regulations, with lower penning densities.

The maximum penning densities for a selling pen are set out in Tables 1 and 2 to allow for animal to be freely inspected in the pen. These should be used as a guide together with any other relevant animal welfare requirements.

Table 1 – Maximum selling pen density for cattle (2.25m² per adult animal)

Average weight of cattle (in selling pen of 18m ²)	Maximum number of cattle (in selling pen of 18m ²)
250kg	16
312kg	14
375kg	12
438kg	10
500-600kg	8

Adapted from Code of Practice for Animals in Saleyards in Western Australia – Saleyards (March 2003)

Table 2 – Maximum selling pen density for sheep

Sheep	<p>0.47m² to 0.8m² per sheep in selling pens #</p> <p>(Range depending on size and amount of wool)[#]</p> <p>A simple rule of thumb is to provide at least 25% free space in the pen when sheep are pushed up</p>
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Adapted from Code of Practice for Animals in Saleyards in Western Australia – Saleyards (March 2003)

A person responsible for livestock animals at a saleyard must ensure that each animal held in a selling pen at the saleyard has sufficient space to rise from a lying position and stand so that it can be freely inspected.

Other factors relevant to penning density

The Transport Regulations establish a suite of animal welfare requirements which are interrelated and **must be looked at in the context of the regulations as a whole** and not looked at in isolation.

When estimating the appropriate penning density, a person responsible for livestock animals at a saleyard must ensure compliance with specific pen types (sale pen and non-sale pens) and any other factors that have the potential to cause the animals pain, injury or distress are minimised.

Additional factors that need to be considered in determining densities for selling and non-selling pens include but are not limited to:

- species and class of livestock
- size/weight and body condition
- wool or hair length
- whether any of the livestock have horns and the risk horns may pose to other livestock
- weather conditions predicted for the period the livestock are to be held in the pen
- time the livestock are to be held in the pen
- type, design, and capacity of the pen
- protection from extreme weather conditions (i.e. minimise the impact of temperature or weather conditions that individually or in combination are likely to predispose the livestock animal to heat and cold stress).

These additional factors are likely to reduce the penning densities, including those recommended in Tables 1 and 2.

Summary of the penning density obligations at a saleyard

A summary of the penning density obligations at a saleyard is as follows:

- On arrival, a livestock transporter must assess the yard to determine if it is able to reasonably hold the number of livestock animals to be unloaded. In doing so, the livestock transporter must meet the requirements of the other regulations relating to penning density. The relevance of the other regulations may depend on how long they are held in the arrival pen.
- Animals placed in a non-sale pen must have sufficient space to all lie down at the same time.
- When animals are offered for sale, they can be placed in a sale pen following an inspection to determine if they are fit for sale, at a penning density set out in Tables 1 and 2.
- However, the penning density in non-sale and sale pens may not be appropriate for the circumstances, and may need to be reduced further. This will minimise the potential for the welfare of each animal in the pen to be affected in a way that causes pain, injury or distress, while having regard to the following factors:
 - species and class of livestock
 - size/weight and body condition
 - wool or hair length
 - whether any of the livestock have horns, and the risk that horns may pose to other livestock
 - weather conditions predicted for the period the livestock will be held in the pen
 - time the livestock are to be held in the pen
 - type, design, and capacity of the pen.
- Penning densities in non-sale and sale pens may need to be reduced further, if lower penning densities is a reasonable step to minimise the impact of temperature or climatic conditions that individually, or in combination, are likely to predispose livestock to heat stress.
- Penning densities may need to be reduced further still, even to the point of a single animal in a pen, if segregation is required to minimise the potential for the welfare of livestock to be affected in a way that causes pain, injury, or distress to the livestock. For example, cow calf units, a bull, an aggressive animal, or an animal that is sick, injured or distressed.

More information

- Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020
- The following Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock; Livestock at Saleyards and Depots
- Animal Welfare Factsheets:
 - Managing heat load and heat stress in sheep and cattle at saleyards
 - Assessing sheep and cattle for dehydration for transport or sale
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Consignors and Transporters
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Saleyard
- [agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare](https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare)



For more information and to view the suite of animal welfare factsheets, scan the QR code, or visit: <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/resources-and-publications>.

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