



Naracoorte Regional Livestock Exchange

Stock handling manual

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OVERVIEW

Introduction

Working in livestock handling facilities such as the Naracoorte Regional Livestock Exchange (NRLE) requires livestock personnel to handle unfamiliar livestock. It is essential that staff follow procedures that will eliminate the risk of injury and serious accidents in the livestock handling situations we operate in. It is also important to ensure the welfare of the animals we handle.

The purpose of this manual is to provide all users of the NRLE with an introduction to basic stock handling techniques. These techniques will minimise the risk of injury or incident and ensures that welfare standards for stock are met. These techniques are part of the NRLE's Work Health and Safety Program and it is a requirement that all livestock handlers at the NRLE follow them.

MANDATORY GOOD PRACTISE

- It is important that at all times you take responsibility for the safety of yourself and those working with you
- It is important at all times to be professional, careful and alert to potential risks and hazards
- Prior to commencing work familiarise yourself with your surroundings, be aware of the general layout, surface you are walking on, gates & latches and potential escape routes
- Assess the animal's temperament/excitability
- Be clear and understand the task you have been given
- Always maintain a quiet/low profile
- Avoid loud noises or aggressive/sharp movements
- Always stand outside the 'flight zone' of the livestock in the pen unless movement is required



- Always maintain the safety of a fence at your back as a means of escape
 - Never overuse the flapper/rattle on livestock.
 - Minimise the use of electric prodders
 - Always use Protective Equipment provided and ensure you are dressed appropriately for the task being undertaken.
 - If working outside ensure you wear a hat, use sunscreen and have water readily available.
 - After handling stock always clean arms, hands and face with soap and water.
 - Treat any cuts and abrasions immediately and ensure existing cuts and abrasions are covered.
 - Report all incidents that result in an injury to the NRLE Manager

LOW STRESS STOCK HANDLING

When handling livestock, it is important to maintain low livestock stress levels, to reduce the risk of accident to all people involved in handling and to ensure the welfare of the animals being handled. This is especially important when handling animals in confined spaces.

Livestock will naturally become alert and agitated in confined spaces. The inclusion of humans to this situation adds to the levels of stress.

The NRLE endorses the use of low stress animal handling. Livestock handlers are required to understand and follow the following handling principles:

- Calm livestock are easier to move than excited or stressed animals
- Livestock with little exposure to handling will be more stressed and aggressive in confined spaces
- If livestock have been stressed prior to entering yards, they are more likely to exhibit aggressive and agitated behaviour
- If stressed, livestock will demonstrate:



- o darker cutting (i.e. produce low quality meat)
 - o more bruising; and
 - o lower weight gains resulting in lower returns for vendors
- Once excited, livestock can take 20-30 minutes to calm down. If this happens time should be given to allow the stock to calm down prior to further handling.

Stock handlers who use an animal's 'flight zone' and 'point of balance' to their advantage will move stock more calmly and easily.

FLIGHT ZONES

'The Flight zone' is an animal's personal space. An animal will tend to move to maintain its flight zone. The size of the flight zone will vary depending on how 'tame' (calm) or 'wild' an individual animal is. Flight zones get bigger when an animal is excited, isolated, or when they are approached head-on or from behind. Flight zones are also influenced by the body language of the handler. Direct eye contact and approaching front-on will increase an animal's flight zone.

The 'point of balance' is at the animal's shoulder. An animal will move forward if the handler approaches from behind the point of balance. Conversely, they will back-up if approached from in-front of the point of balance.

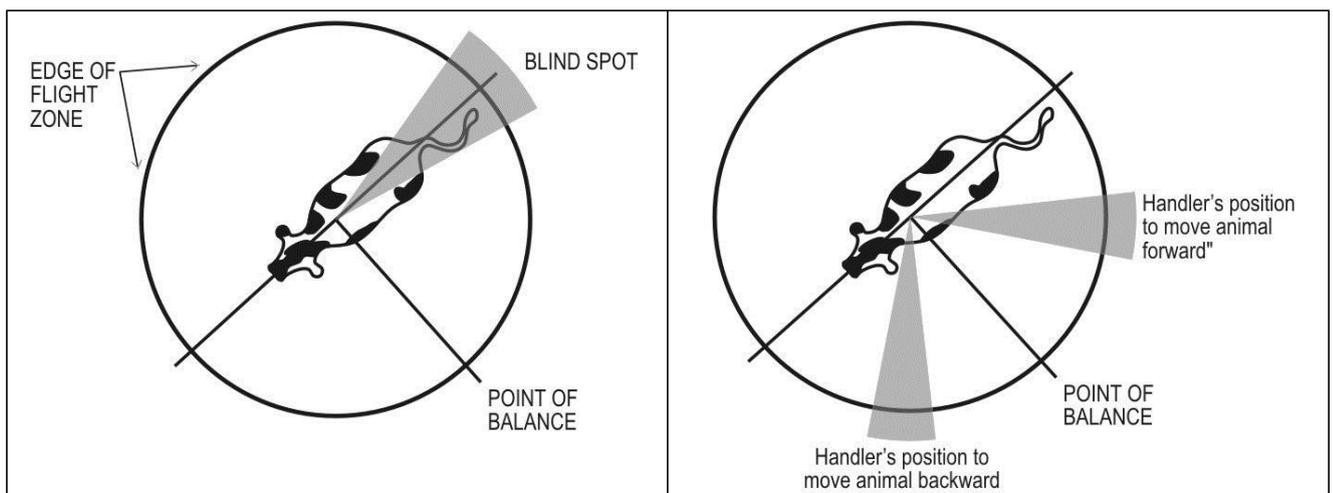


Figure 1: Flight zone, point of balance and blind spot

Figure 2: Moving an animal forward



Moving Stock

Good stock handling is based around the concept of 'exert appropriate pressure and then relief'. When pressure is applied, an animal will seek relief. Animal stress levels will increase dramatically when no escape or pressure relief is offered by the handler. Some basic principles for moving livestock are as follows.

Individual Animals

- When an operator is outside an animal's flight zone, the animal will stand and face the handler
- Do not approach an animal head-on or from behind (blind spot in figure. A head on approach is confrontational. Approaching from behind is threatening.
- Entering its flight zone will cause the animal to turn to a path of relief or conversely take attacking stance ("flight or fight ")
- To manoeuvre an animal, enter its flight zone from either in front of or behind their point of balance, depending on the direction the animal is required to move

To move an animal forward (for example into a race or crush):

- enter the animal's flight zone from in front of the point of balance; □
- move past the point of balance (i.e. from head to rear).
- stop when the point of balance of the animal has been crossed.

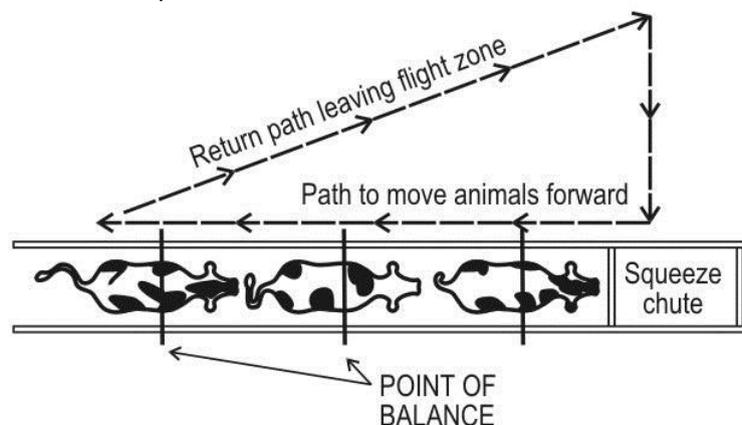


Figure 3: Moving an animal forwards



To move an animal backwards:

- enter the animal's flight zone from behind the point of balance
- move past the point of balance (i.e. from rear to head)
- stop when the point of balance of the animal has been crossed.

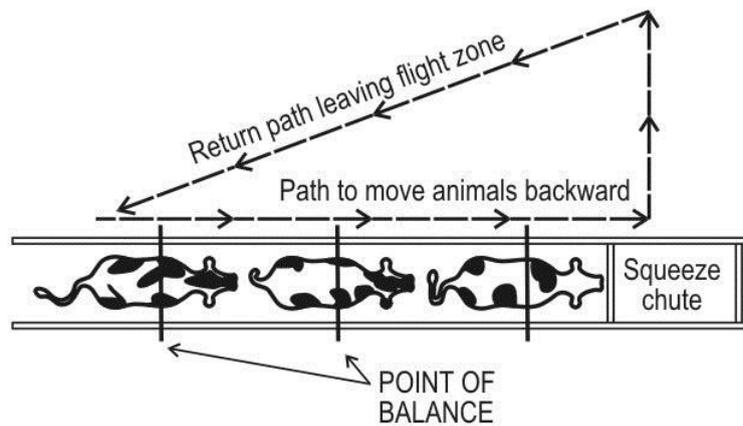


Figure 4: Moving an animal backwards

To move a herd/flock in an orderly manner, alternate between penetrating and withdrawing from the collective flight zone. Alternating pressure is more effective than continuous pressure.

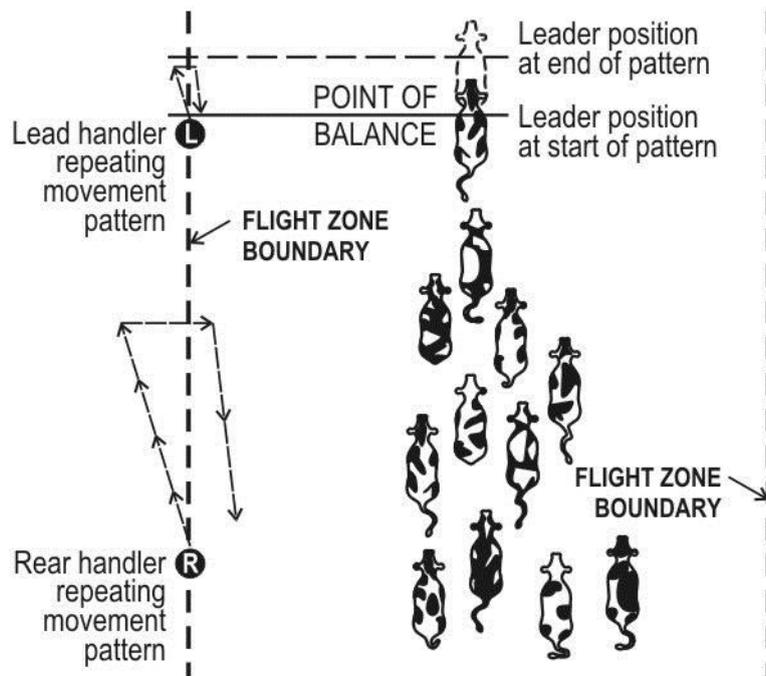


Figure 5: Moving a herd / flock using the collective flight zone



Good handling practices ensure livestock have time to identify and move into the desired escape from pressure exerted by the handler.

- To speed-up movement, walk in the opposite direction to the desired direction of movement
- To slow movement down, walk in the same direction as the desired direction of movement
- If an animal turns back in an attempt to break-away, the handler should move to increase the distance from the animal
- If animals rear up or turn in an attempt to baulk at a single chute or race, the handler should back away from them. DO NOT touch them or hit them. They are attempting to increase the distance between themselves and the handler and will usually settle down if left to stand
- If a herd / flock baulk at a smell, shadow or object, be patient and wait for the leader to cross the 'obstacle' and move forward. **Do not rush.**

ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

Breed differences

Many breeds and combinations of breeds exist across Australia. The NRLE will process a large range of these livestock types. Behaviour varies significantly both between and within breeds. This variation is a function breeding (genetics) and the way the stock have been handled in the past and the interaction between these two factors.

Cattle

In general terms, Northern Cattle (i.e. *Bos indicus* breeds including Brahman and Drought-master breeds) will be more aggressive than southern cattle (ie. *Bos taurus* breeds including Angus and Hereford). *Bos indicus* are generally more alert, more mobile and have had less exposure to human interaction and handling.



Sheep

Sheep behaviour is less varied between breed types. Behaviour is more a function of the temperament of individual flocks, how they have been managed and the extent of handling they have been exposed to. Sheep will tend to move in tight flocks and follow the lead animal. Sheep are not usually aggressive but big wethers and rams are very strong and may charge, especially during breeding season.

In very general terms however, Dorset and imported breeds will be more active and adventurous, and can be stronger than merinos. Rams can weigh up to 100 kilograms and should be handled with respect. Handlers should try to prevent gaps in race situations, as rams have a tendency to charge in confined spaces. Ewes and young sheep are less likely to charge.

Other differences

- Entire males are more aggressive, physically stronger and more confrontational than females
- Horned animals are more likely to cause serious injury
- Cows with calves tend to be more aggressive in their protection of their young
- Young stock (i.e. less than 2 years) will tend to be more 'flighty' and anxious than older stock
- Young stock that have not been 'yard weaned' have less exposure to confined spaces. As a result they:
 - don't always 'follow' as well as older stock;
 - don't understand what is required when handling pressure is applied;
 - are at risk of pushing into corners causing smothering and; ◦ are more likely to jump and run at fences.
- Pets need to be treated with caution, as they are likely to be more comfortable (and less stressed) with human interaction.

The table below summarise typical behavioural traits observed within cattle breeds.



Southern Cattle	Behavioural Traits
Angus, Hereford, Simmental, Charolais, Limousin, Murray Grey, Shorthorn, Wagyu	<p>Less intense and narrower flight zone.</p> <p>More influence from past handling i.e. yard weaning etc. on subsequent behaviour.</p>
Northern Cattle	Behavioural Traits
Brahman, Droughtmaster, Santa Gertrudis	<p>Intelligent and suspicious of unknown situations. Less likely to “block up” if handler tries to block progress.</p> <p>More inclined to kick high and laterally with hind leg when passing handler.</p> <p>More inclined to press home a charge at a human.</p> <p>Higher herd instinct and have increased security with others.</p>
Dairy Cattle	Behavioural Traits
Holstein, Jersey	<p>Generally quiet and accustomed to human intervention. However, beware of Jersey bulls.</p>

Identifying troublesome animals

In confined spaces, and when preparing to work sheep and cattle, you need to make an assessment of each of the following:

- Breed;
- Sex;
- Age;
- Temperament; and
- Stress level.



Where possible, seek information on the amount and type of handling the livestock have been exposed to. This will help establish how comfortable livestock will be being handled in confined spaces. The practice of 'yard weaning' is becoming commonplace. This practice increases handling ease and livestock performance throughout an animal's lifetime.

Behavioural Indicators

There are a number of signs a handler can observe when sheep, cows or other livestock are stressed. These need to be considered as part of your assessment of the risks associated with handling stock. They include:

- Deep breathing/panting /frothing at the mouth;
- Ears up and alert;
- Eyes wide;
- Lowering of the head and scratching the ground can indicate impending aggression;
- Kicking hind legs;
- Charging;
- Baulking;
- Jumping;
- Turning back;
- Breaking away.

Animals displaying high levels of stress should not be handled until they have calmed down. Animals showing agitated behaviour are branded on the head to advise drovers of the risk (Refer to Rogue Beast Policy).

USE OF CATTLE PRODDERS

The NRLE has strict conditions on the use of electric cattle prodders they must only to be used as a last resort.

Electric prodders must be used in accordance with Section 14 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985*:

- Not be used on animals under 6 months of age and those in an advanced state of pregnancy.



- Not be applied to the genital, anal, udder or facial areas of any animal.
- Not be used excessively on any animal or animals that are unable to move away.

Any tool used to move stock must be made of material unable to physically damage an animal. "Flappers" (leather straps attached to a cane) are the preferred option.

All dogs must be muzzled while on site and are not permitted to be used on cattle.

USE OF GATES

One of the most common injury causes in saleyards is incorrect use of gates.

- Never throw gates
- While moving gates, keep two hands on the rail that is nearest to shoulder height (cattle) or top rail (sheep)
- When securing gates, always keep one hand firmly on the rail at shoulder height and one foot firmly on the bottom rail of the gate when securing the gate
- Check the gate is securely closed
- Do not stand behind an unsecured gate with stock in front of it.

Never throw gates





Always keep two hands on the rail that is nearest to shoulder height



When securing gates, always keep one hand firmly on the rail at shoulder height and one foot firmly on the bottom rail of the gate





Always make sure the gate is securely latched



ANIMAL WELFARE

THE NRLE has a zero tolerance for animal cruelty. All stock under our control must be treated at all times in accordance with the requirements of relevant animal welfare legislation and the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Saleyards.

When working with livestock, handlers should:

- Treat and handle the stock humanly;
- Observe the general health of the animal and refer to a supervisor any stock that may require treatment or is unfit for sale;
- Refer instances of animal cruelty that are observed by other stock handlers to a NRLE staff member.