

Assessing dairy cattle body condition for transport or sale at a saleyard

Current as of March 2023.

This factsheet assists a person responsible for dairy cattle in meeting their animal welfare obligations when assessing whether animals in poor body condition are fit for transport or sale at a saleyard.

Dairy cattle in poor body condition

Under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, it is a cruelty offence for a person in charge of an animal to fail to provide the animal with proper and sufficient food and water. It is not acceptable to leave animals in poor condition, and they must never be allowed to starve to death. Before an animal reaches a body condition score (BCS) of 3, the person in charge of the animal must provide one or more of the following:

- supplementary feed (with a ration with sufficient energy density/nutrient balance for the class of stock)
- sell, agist, feedlot or send to abattoir (only if the animal's body condition is fit-to-load and transport)
- humane destruction.

Body condition score (BCS) assessment in dairy cattle (1 to 8 scale)

Body condition can be easily assessed using *Dairy Australia's* BCS system. BCS system uses a 1 to 8 scale which is different to the beef cattle BCS system of 1 to 5. Key reference body sites (Image 1) are assessed visually **and** by touch. This assessment gives an overall score of between 1 and 8, where BCS 1 is extremely poor condition (emaciated) and 8 is over-fat. Visit [Dairy Australia's Body Condition Scoring](#) webpage for more information.

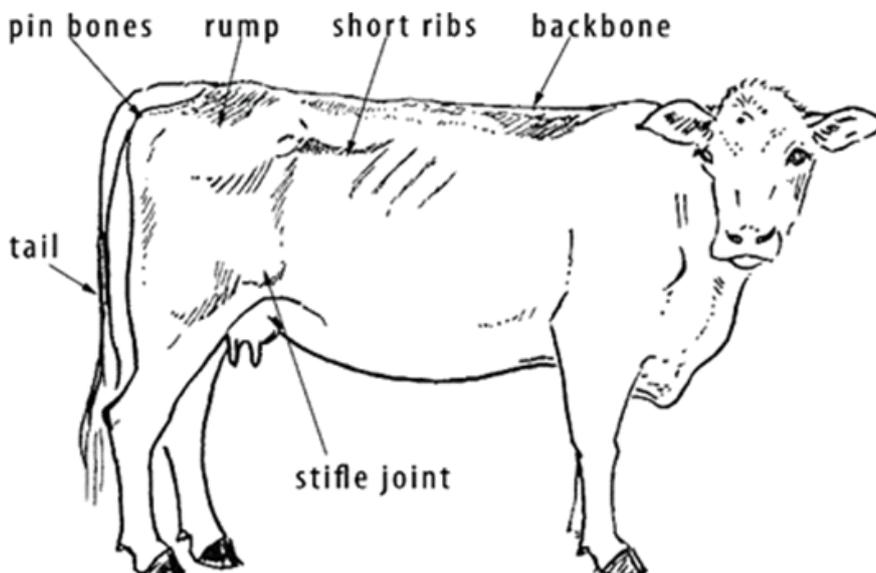


Image 1 – Key reference sites for assessing Body Condition Score (BCS) in dairy cattle.

For the purposes of the Animal Welfare (Transport Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020 (Transport Regulations), dairy cattle with a BCS of less than 3 are emaciated, and immediate intervention is necessary to protect their welfare.

Emaciated (BCS less than 3) dairy cattle must not be transported or offered for sale at saleyard

Under the Transport Regulations emaciated (BCS less than 3) dairy cattle must not be supplied for transport, loaded on a transport vehicle or offered for sale at saleyard.

Where cattle could become emaciated, the person responsible must make decisions early to move, sell, agist, feedlot, export or send to saleyards, private sale for restockers or sell to abattoir **before** dairy cattle become emaciated, and options are limited.

Appropriate arrangements for emaciated cattle should be made at the first reasonable opportunity.

Appropriate arrangements for dairy cattle that are not fit for transport or sale

Appropriate arrangements means one or more of the following, depending on the condition of the cattle:

- separating the animal from any other animal and resting it until it has recovered
- treating the animal as appropriate to its condition, including seeking veterinary advice
- destroying the animal using a method of humane destruction.

At the first reasonable opportunity

At the first reasonable opportunity means appropriate arrangements for the animal are undertaken without delay except where a reasonable delay is caused by a significant reason relating to resources, skills, safety, or the immediate welfare of other livestock.

Livestock must be fit for the journey

Under the Transport Regulations, it is an offence for all persons involved in the process to consign or load dairy cattle for transport, that are unfit to undertake the journey, whether from the property of origin, saleyard or other place.

Dairy cattle that have been assessed as not fit for transport cannot be sold at a saleyard. If an animal is considered borderline for its fitness to undertake the journey, consider whether the animal's condition will deteriorate during the journey and/or at the saleyard rendering them unfit for sale or further transportation. Animals will be assessed at a saleyard before sale and again before consigning and loading on the transport vehicle for the outward journey.

Exemption

An animal that is unfit to undertake a journey may be loaded and transported only under the following conditions:

- the consignor and/or transporter has advice from a veterinarian that the animal can undertake the intended journey
- the transporter ensures that the animal is loaded and transported in accordance with the veterinarian's advice
- the transporter ensures the animal is transported the shortest distance necessary either to another property or abattoir.

A copy of the veterinary advice should accompany the animal to its final destination.

It is strongly recommended the veterinary advice is provided in writing. It is up to the consignor and/or the transporter to prove the veterinarian advised the animal could undertake the journey and was loaded and transported in accordance with the advice of the veterinarian.

Animals transported under veterinary advice must not be sent to a saleyard as they cannot be offered for sale or sold.

More information

- *Animal Welfare Act 2002*
- Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock; Livestock at Saleyards and Depots and Cattle
- Animal Welfare Factsheets
 - Are your livestock fit to load?
 - Are sheep and cattle fit to be sold at a saleyard?
 - Assessing beef cattle body condition for transport or sale at a saleyard
 - Humane destruction of sheep and cattle
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Consignors and Transporters
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Saleyards
- <https://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/animal-management-and-milk-quality/fertility/body-condition-scoring>
- <https://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/feed-and-nutrition/feeding-the-herd>
- 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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