Cattle industry update

March Quarter 2026

A quarterly newsletter outlining cattle numbers sold via domestic slaughter, live export and interstate transfers.

Total cattle turn-off

- During the first quarter of 2026 (January-March) Western Australia (WA) turned off a total of 165,500 cattle, a 2% decrease year on year (YOY), but 2% higher than the 10-year average of 161,800 head.
- Cattle slaughter totalled 112,200 head and was 16% higher than the 10-year average of 96,900 while calf slaughter was 76% higher than the longer-term average of 200.
- Live exports reached 42,300 head, down 8% YOY and 22% below the 10-year average of 53,900 head, while interstate transfers rose 42% YOY to 10,700 similar to the longer-term average.

Table 1 Total WA cattle turnoff between January and March (based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Primary Industries and Regions South Australia (PIRSA) data, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) analysis)

	2023	2024	2025	2026	YOY change	10 yr avg	% change
Cattle slaughter	93,400	106,700	115,000	112,200	-2%	96,900	16%
Calf slaughter	100	100	300	300	0%	200	76%
Live export	29,800	34,700	46,000	42,300	-8%	53,900	-22%
Interstate transfer	2,600	24,600	7,500	10,700	42%	10,800	-1%
Total	**125,900**	**166,100**	**168,800**	**165,500**	**-2%**	**161,800**	**2%**

- Domestic slaughter remains the most utilised sale avenue accounting for 68% of cattle turned off in the first 3 months of 2026.
- Live export made up 26% of cattle turn-off.
- Interstate transfers accounted for the remaining 6%.

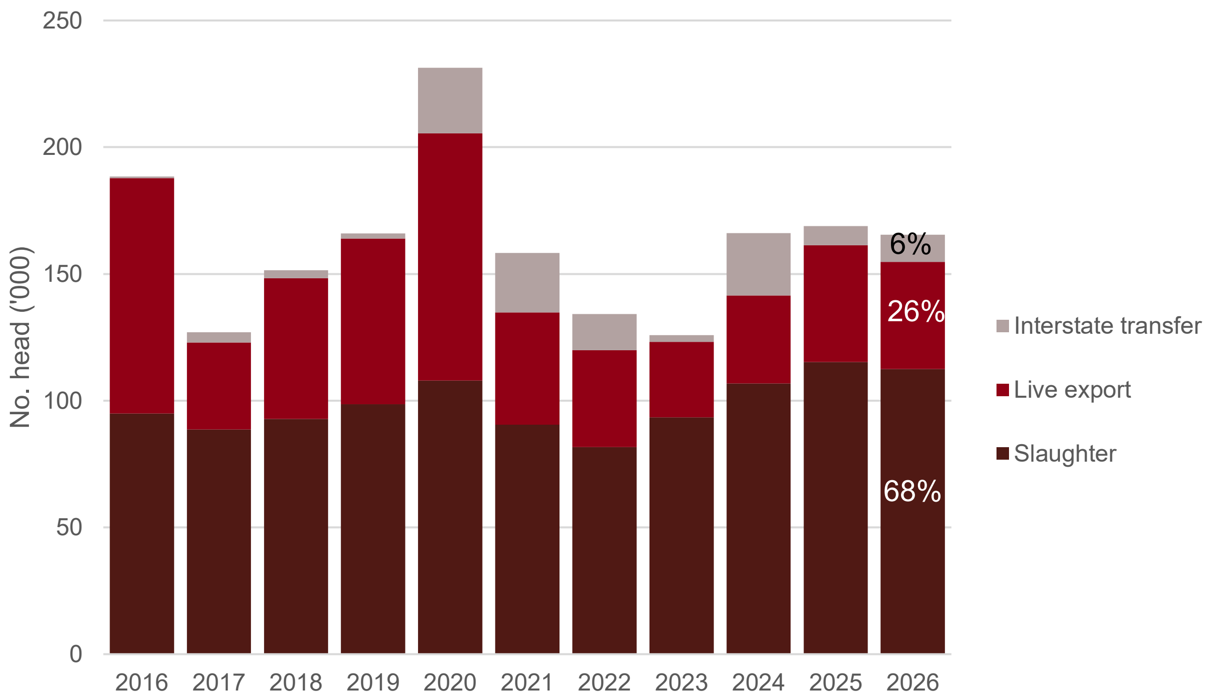

Figure 1 Total turn-off by sale avenue between January and March by year (Based on ABS and PIRSA data, DPIRD analysis)

Domestic slaughter

- So far in 2026 cattle slaughter has reached a total of 112,500, down marginally on the 115,300 processed during this time in 2025.
- Female cattle slaughter remains the largest component but declined 6% from 69,400 to 65,000 head YOY.
- Male slaughter increased 4% from 45,600 to 47,200 head while calf slaughter remained constant at 300 head in both 2025 and 2026.

Table 2 Number of cattle slaughtered in WA between January and March (Based on ABS data, DPIRD analysis)

	2024	2025	2026	YOY change
Male slaughter	47,200	45,600	47,200	4%
Female slaughter	59,500	69,400	65,000	-6%
Calf slaughter	100	300	300	0%
Total	**106,800**	**115,300**	**112,500**	**-2%**

- For the last 3 years, male cattle slaughter has been consistent with between 188,000 and 192,000 head processed each year as illustrated in Figure 2.
- In the first quarter of 2026 this trend seems to be continuing with 47,200 processed so far. Whilst this is a 4% increase on this time last year it has equalled the number processed in the first quarter of 2024.

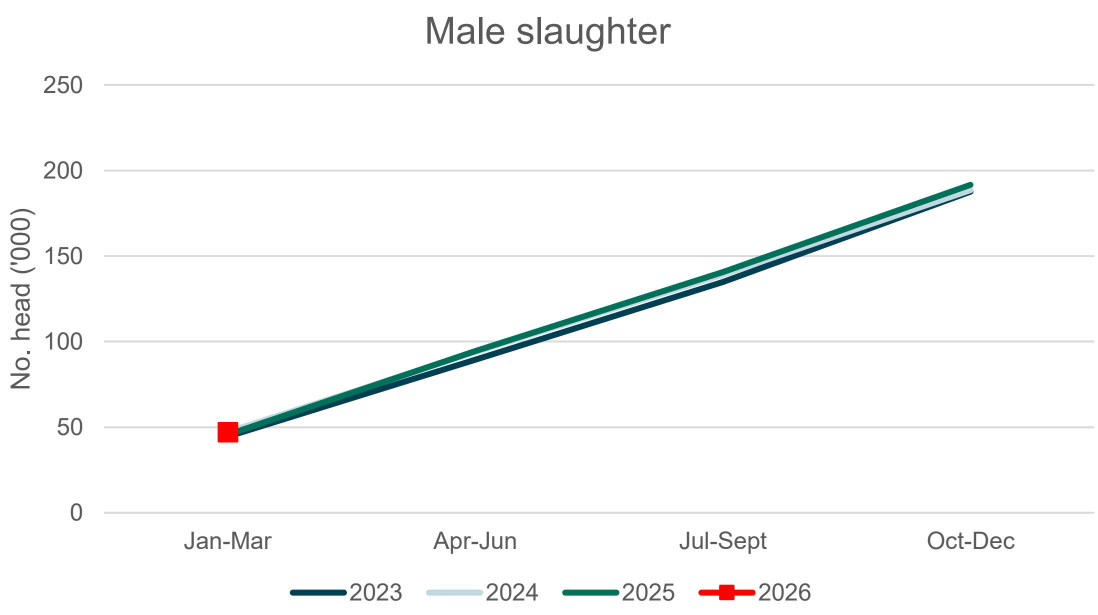

Figure 2 Cumulative male cattle slaughter in WA (thousand head) (Based on ABS data, DPIRD analysis)

- Female cattle slaughter has been more variable than male cattle slaughter over the last 3 years ranging from 220,000 to 290,000 head.
- Whilst declining 6% YOY from 69,400 to 65,000 in the first quarter, this is still a strong start being the second highest first quarter since the dry year of 2020.

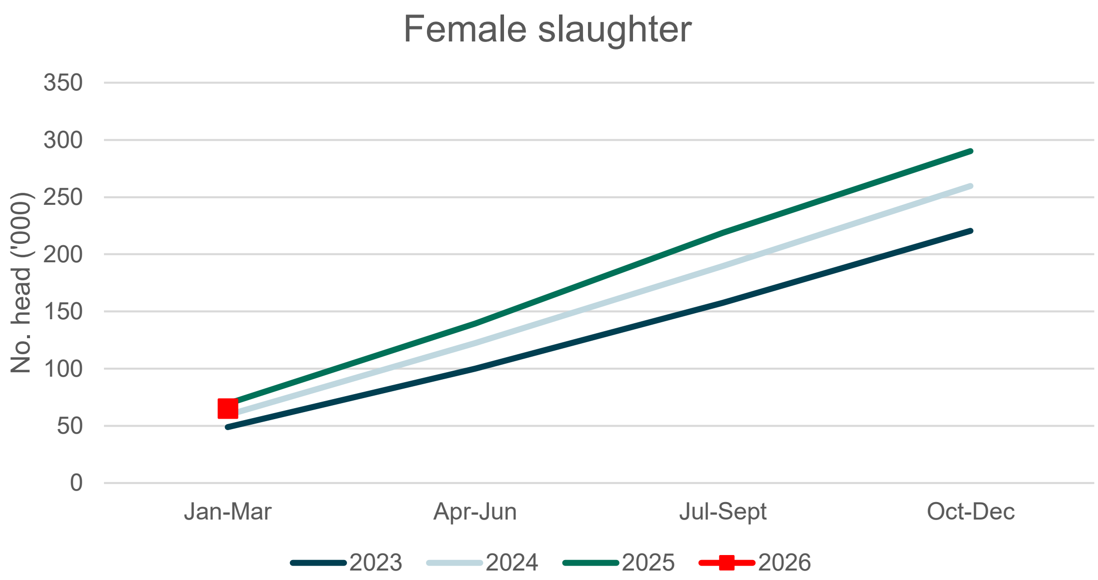

Figure 3 Cumulative female cattle slaughter in WA (thousand head) (Based on ABS data, DPIRD analysis)

Feedlot turn-off

- The number of cattle turned off from WA feedlots reached 42,700 between January and March 2026, a decline of 17% YOY from 51,200 head.
- Provided all these animals were sold to slaughter, this would make up 38% of slaughter.

Table 3 Number of cattle turned off from WA feedlots between January and March (Based on Australian Lot Feeders Association (ALFA) data, DPIRD analysis)

	2024	2025	2026	YOY change
Feedlot turn-off	46,600	51,200	42,700	-17%

- The number of cattle turned off from WA feedlots has started the year on a softer note compared to the first quarter of 2025 and 2024, down 17% and 8% respectively. It was however 3% stronger than that seen in 2023 as well as the 10-year average of 41,700.

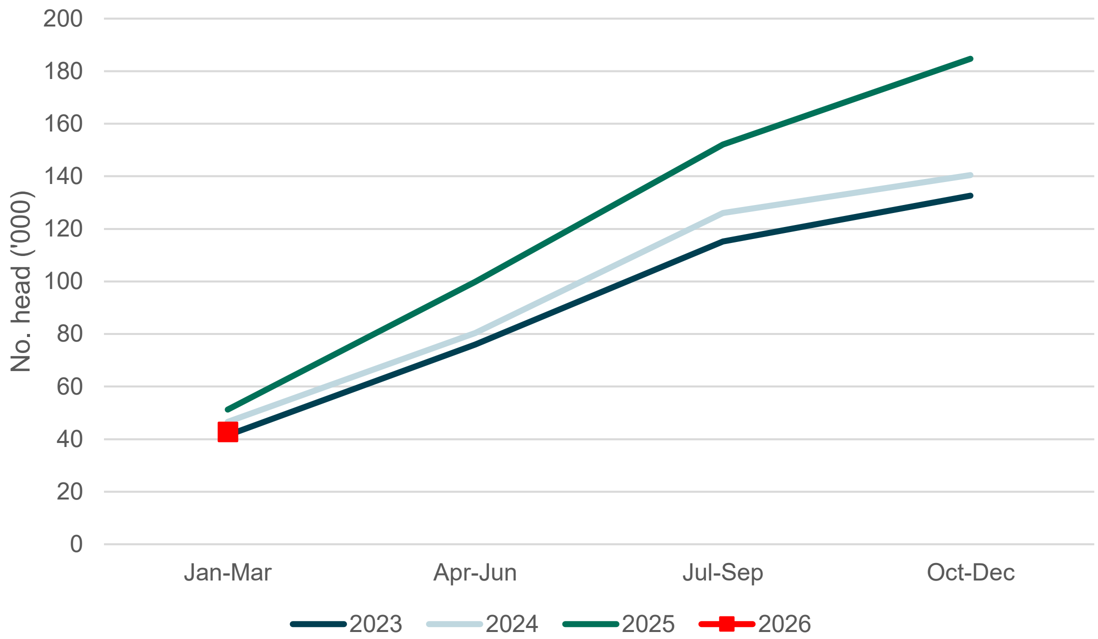

Figure 4 Cumulative cattle turn-off from WA feedlots (thousand head) (Based on ALFA and MLA data, DPIRD analysis)

Live export

- Between January and March, WA has exported 42,300 live cattle, down 8% compared to this time last year, however the northern season is only just getting started.
- Indonesia has been the largest market so far accounting for 57% of exports or 23,900 head, followed by the Philippines with 15% (6,400) of cattle and Jordan with 14% (5,900).

Table 4 Number of cattle exported from WA ports between January and March (Based on ABS data, DPIRD analysis)

	2024	2025	2026	YOY change
Live exports	34,700	46,000	42,300	-8%

- March saw live cattle exports lift with 21,000 exported compared to 8,000 in February.
- So far, most animals have been exported from Fremantle, however this isn't unusual due to the northern wet season limiting exports from northern ports between December and March.

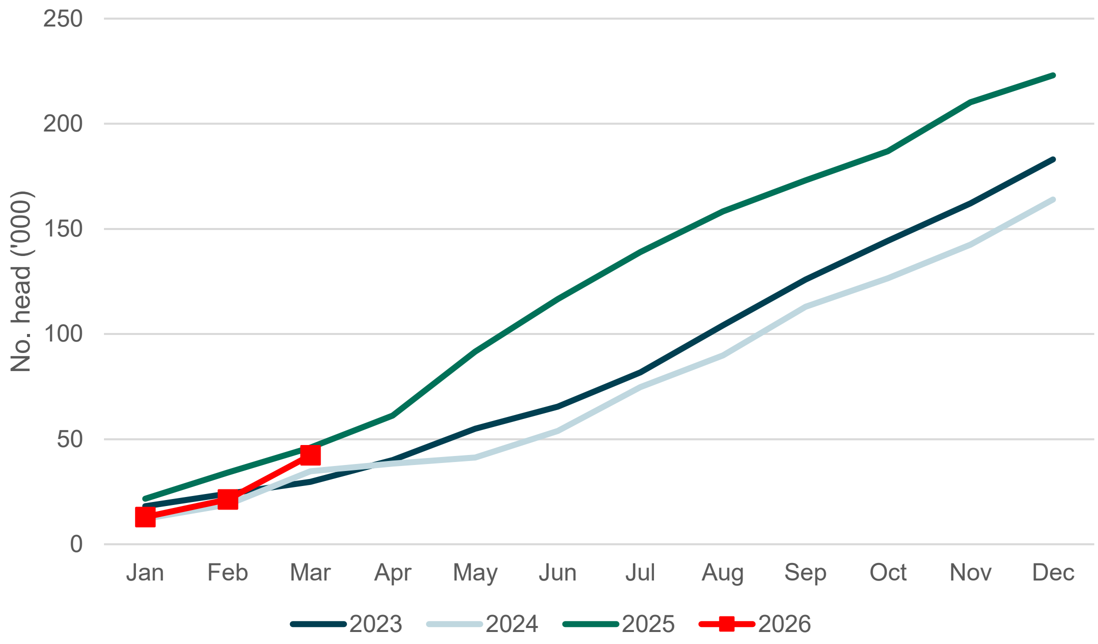

Figure 5 Cumulative number of cattle exported from WA (thousand head) (Based on ABS data, DPIRD analysis)

Interstate transfers (southern only)

- Interstate transfers of cattle across the southern WA border reached 10,700 in the first 3 months of 2026, an increase of 42% YOY. Despite this increase it is considerably lower than the 24,600 trucked east in early 2024.

Table 5 Number of cattle sold east via Ceduna between January and March (Based on PIRSA data, DPIRD analysis)

	2024	2025	2026	YOY change
Interstate transfers	24,600	7,500	10,700	42%

- After a quiet start in January and February, each totalling around 1,800 animals, March saw a significant increase with 7,000 animals leaving the state.

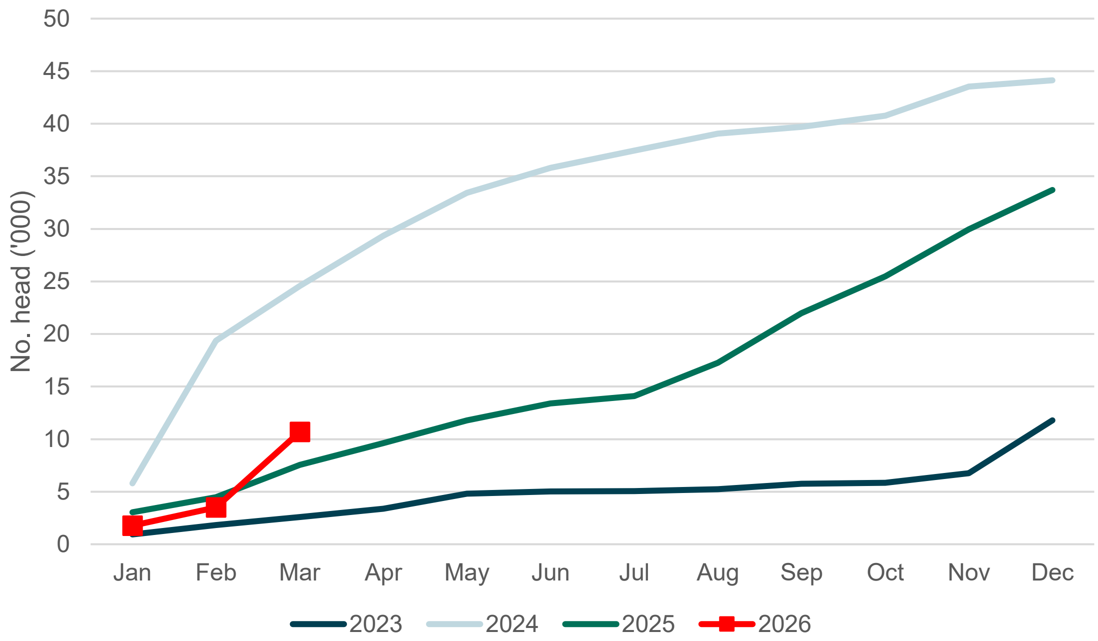

Figure 6 Cumulative number of cattle sold east via Ceduna (thousand head) (Based on PIRSA data, DPIRD analysis)

Saleyard prices

- The Western Young Cattle Indicator (WYCI) and Eastern Young Cattle Indicator (EYCI) followed a similar pattern in 2025 which has continued in early 2026, however as of April the WYCI has overtaken EYCI.
- The WYCI continued to rise in 2026 increasing from an average of 801 c/kg in January to 925 c/kg in April, the highest it has been since November 2022 when it averaged 978 c/kg.
- The EYCI on the other hand has declined in 2026 from 856 c/kg in January to 800 c/kg in April. This is likely due to dry conditions affecting parts of northern NSW and southern QLD resulting in higher numbers being offloaded to manage resources.

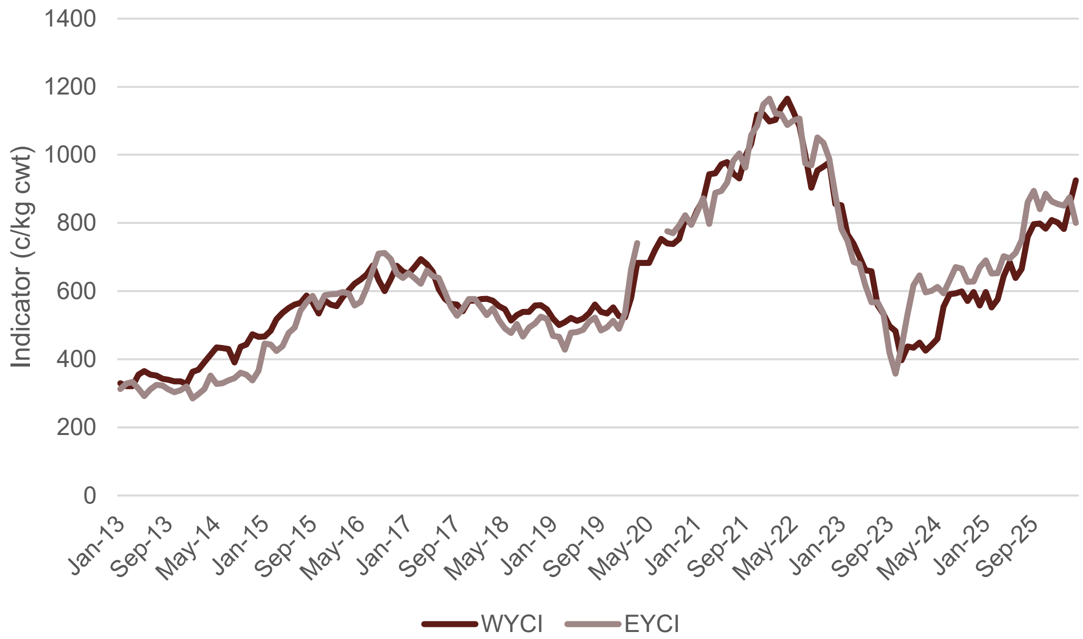

Figure 7 Saleyard indicator comparing the WYCI and the EYCI (Based on MLA data, DPIRD analysis)

Contact: For further information or to be added to the email subscription, please contact Kate Pritchett, DPIRD Senior Livestock Research Scientist at **kate.pritchett@dpird.wa.gov.au**

Important Disclaimer

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.