

# finalreport

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## The Northern Livestock Transporters Course: A training course to improve the quality of road transport

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## **Abstract**

In consultation with the pastoral and transport industry and stock handling and animal welfare experts a one day course for new cattle transporters in northern Australia has been developed. It focuses on the skills and knowledge needed to maximise welfare during long distance cattle transport and provides drivers with information relating to animal care during transit and their legal responsibilities to the cattle that they carry. The course was developed due to the lack of available formal instruction and the dearth of experienced drivers who typically provide the on the job training. This was occurring at a time of increasing pressure and scrutiny on long distance transport from animal welfare groups, and hence when it is imperative to demonstrate a commitment to animal welfare in transport through training and best practice. The course was developed, piloted and evaluated. It has received strong support from the pastoral and transport industries

## **Executive Summary**

A course has been developed, piloted and evaluated for new drivers in the northern livestock transport industry. It focuses on the skills and knowledge needed to maximise welfare during long distance cattle transport and provides drivers with information relating to animal care during transit and their legal responsibilities to the cattle that they carry. Practical activities, guest speakers and a tailored stock handling DVD are used to give participants an understanding of how they can minimise the negative impacts of transport such as stress, weight loss and reduced meat quality.

Long distance road transport is essential to the functioning of the northern beef cattle industry. The quality of this transport can have a significant impact on the welfare of the animals being moved, the quality of final product, and the return that the producer receives. The chief role of the transporter is to efficiently move animals while maximising their welfare. However they have the added responsibility of being the visible face of the industry as the public can easily observe the conditions that transported cattle are placed under. Therefore, it is critical that a high standard of transport is upheld.

The course aims to improve animal welfare and production outcomes during transport in the northern pastoral industry through best practice training. The objective of the project was to design a course which would educate drivers about what they can do practically to ensure a high standard of care during transport. This can potentially benefit all northern Australia producers who rely on long distance transport of their stock.

Participant evaluation of the course revealed that it was very well received. 100% of the drivers who have attended the course so far believed that maximising animal welfare was important part of their job and that they played an important role as the visible face of the industry. All participants were proud to be part of the industry. Greater than 85% strongly agreed that they knew what their animal welfare responsibilities were, that it was essential to minimise stress and that good communication was important between transporters and producers. All participants believed that the course had reinforced their beliefs mentioned above, with >75% strongly agreeing. The large majority of drivers (>80%) believed that their knowledge of how the negative impacts of transport can occur and what could be done to minimise them had increased from attending the course. All participants felt that what they had learnt would help them to more efficiently carry out their job (>80% strongly believed this). Greater than 80% of drivers believed that they felt more confident to carry out tasks such as setting up the truck, assessing whether stock were fit to load, estimating loading densities, loading cattle efficiently, stopping and checking, deal with downers and carry out humane destruction.

One hundred percent of participants said that they would recommend this course to other drivers. They believed that the presenters' knowledge of the subject matter was good to very good.

The development of this course has allowed the knowledge held by experienced drivers to be captured in a repeatable format for younger drivers which is both easily understood and disseminated. It has the potential to open up communication lines between producers and drivers contributing to a better understanding of each others perspectives which will lead to improved transport outcomes.

Developing the course has led to a greater understanding of the importance of pre-transport management through the discussion between drivers and producers. Pre-transport management has the potential to impact on a producer's total income in the form of reduced shrinkage and other impacts of transport. Even 1-2% improvements can have substantial effects on a producer's bottom line with relatively little investment, compared to other technology required to improve other productivity parameters such as branding percentage or liveweight gain.

Publicity from this course has promoted the seriousness the industry regards animal welfare and will continue to do so as more drivers participate in the training and potentially become accredited in relevant competencies.

Developing and running these courses has made the visible face of the industry, the drivers, more aware how their actions can impact on the public perception of the beef industry. This understanding will lead to an increased incidence of responsible behaviour and potentially prevent miscommunications with the public.

The stockhandling DVD produced as a part of the course materials has been used by others in the industry such as producers, stockhandling trainers, and deliverers of a stevedores course to demonstrate best practice stockhandling techniques and lead to improved animal production and welfare outcomes.

This project has provided proof of concept that truck drivers are interested in formal accreditation and if the training can be delivered in the right format, are very keen to gain qualifications. It would not be an unreasonable goal to have all drivers transporting livestock in northern Australia with formal accreditation in the area of cattle transport in five years time. It is recommended that further work is carried out in using this course as a basis of further formal accreditation.

Course materials are available from MLA to qualified presenters to hold future courses.

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# 1 Background

## 1.1 Background

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Transport is recognised as one of the most stressful events that cattle will experience during their lives (Swanson and Morrow-Tesch 2001). Long distance road transport is essential to the functioning of the northern beef cattle industry. The quality of this transport can have a significant impact on the welfare of the animals being moved, the quality of final product, and the return that the producer receives. The chief role of the transporter is to efficiently move animals while maximising their welfare. However they have the added responsibility of being the visible face of the industry as the public can easily observe the conditions that transported cattle are placed under. Therefore, it is critical that a high standard of transport is upheld.

Consumers worldwide are becoming increasingly aware of and interested in the welfare of the livestock which provide the products they consume. This is placing growing pressure on the beef industry to demonstrate a commitment to animal welfare at all stages of the supply chain. At the same time transport companies are reporting a loss of experienced drivers and a growing difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled staff, providing increasing challenges for transporters to continue to deliver a high quality service. The shortage of experienced drivers is also a concern as they typically provide on the job training to less experienced staff. Little formal training exists that is relevant to the northern livestock transport industry. Personal communication with the Quality Assurance manager of Road Trains of Australia (RTA) indicated that a two day course held in conjunction with the Charles Darwin University Rural Campus in the late 90s had a very positive effect on the performance and motivation of drivers. The course included loading densities, animal behaviour and involved a tour of the Katherine meat works to show the effects of bruising. RTA provided strong support for the development of such a course for future delivery.

There has been a rising emphasis placed on training staff on property to improve their handling of livestock. It seems just as imperative to ensure that drivers are educated to take the best possible care of the livestock when the animals are under increased stress. As noted by Jennifer Wythes in her Handling and Transport of Beef Cattle Review the training of transporters needs to consider communication, animal handling and people skills. In the Katherine region there has been very low uptake by livestock transporters of courses such as Low Stress Livestock Handling. In many ways the two days spent attending this course is more than required by drivers and the time could be better spent looking at other aspects of their job, with the handling and understanding of animal psychology directly related to loading, unloading and travelling.

## **2 Project Objectives**

### **2.1 Project Objectives**

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#### **2.1.1 Project Objectives**

The objective of the project was to formulate a training course designed to motivate and educate drivers and others involved in the loading, transportation or receipt of livestock about their integral role in the northern cattle industry and what they can do in practical terms to improve the quality of this.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Methodology**

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#### **3.1.1 Determining the technical content**

Experts in animal welfare, stock handling and transport were consulted along with transporters from across northern Australia to determine what topics should be included. Involving the transport industry was vital in creating positive communication channels, building ownership in and in later recruiting participants. Support from producer groups (Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association, Beef Research Committees) was also sought and gained. Collaboration with MLA assisted in providing access to the most up to date information and research on animal welfare and husbandry recommendation to ensure the industry maintains best practice standards all the way through the supply chain.

#### **3.1.2 Developing course content**

Continued collaboration with experts and the transport industry ensured that the course content reflected best practice. Lesson plans were drawn up for each module and sent to experts for comment before facilitators notes and powerpoints were developed. These were also sent for comment to relevant authorities on the subjects. A stock handling DVD was developed tailored to cattle transporters. This involved incorporating the experience of a stock handling specialist.

#### **3.1.3 Pilot course**

A pilot course was run on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2008 in Darwin and was attended by 3 truck drivers, 5 operations managers, MLA and the chair of the Barkly Beef Research Committee. The course was run at no cost to participants. The course was delivered as if only drivers were attending. After each module participants were asked to fill out evaluation forms and later that evening an informal feedback session was facilitated over dinner.

#### **3.1.4 Review and revise course materials following pilot course evaluations**

Course materials were revised and sent once again to major contributors and consultants for comment. This involved filming more footage and creating new sections of the DVD. Final course materials were delivered to MLA in June 2009.



### 3.1.5 Final course delivery

It was not possible to run the final courses during the dry season of 2008, as transporters were simply too busy. Hence the delivery of the final courses were delayed until 2009. Two courses were run on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of April in Charters Towers and Cloncurry respectively. Total participants at the courses were 15 truck drivers, 2 operations managers and 3 producers. Course evaluations were filled out after each course and participants were contacted approximately a month later for further feedback.

### 3.1.6 Analysis of feedback from course participants

Participant evaluations were analysed and recommendations were made for future course delivery.

## **4 Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Post Course Evaluation**

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#### 4.1.1 Technical Content

Seventeen participants filled out post course evaluations. Of these most were very experienced drivers, with only 4 having had less than 3 years experience. Most had spent a lifetime in the industry. Of these 100% believed that maximising animal welfare was important part of their job and that they played an important role as the visible face of the industry. All participants were proud to be part of the industry. Greater than 85% strongly agreed that they knew what their animal welfare responsibilities were, that it was essential to minimise stress and that good communication was important between transporters and producers. All participants believed that the course had reinforced their beliefs mentioned above, with >75% strongly agreeing. The large majority of drivers (>80%) believed that their knowledge of how the negative impacts of transport can occur and what could be done to minimise them had increased from attending the course. All participants felt that what they had learnt would help them to more efficiently carry out their job (>80% strongly believed this). Greater than 80% of drivers believed that they felt more confident to carry out tasks such as setting up the truck, assessing whether stock were fit to load, estimating loading densities, loading cattle efficiently, stopping and checking, deal with downers and carry out humane destruction.

#### 4.1.2 Facilitation Overall

One hundred percent of participants said that they would recommend this course to other drivers. They believed that the presenters' knowledge of the subject matter was good to very good (13 out of 17 scored this 9-10 out of 10). Participants overwhelmingly believed that the course was very easy to understand and that their needs had been met very well (16 out of 17 participants). Overall 12 participants felt that the course was very beneficial, while one did not find it beneficial and another 4 thought it was moderately so. This reflected the number of experienced drivers who attended and did not gain too much from a course aimed at beginners. 82% of drivers felt that the course had made them want to learn more, with 4 specifically mentioning animal welfare, 1 stating pre-transport management (producer), 1 naming dark cutting beef and another mentioning cattle handling and understanding the graziers point of view. All drivers were interested in received formal accreditation in livestock transport. Of the experienced drivers none felt that they would change the way that they transported cattle after attending the course, but all younger drivers mentioned at least one thing

that they would change. For example, one driver stated that he would have a better understanding of cattle stress and when he was interviewed a month later stated that he was using the jigger less after attending the course. Another driver mentioned that he would have a better understanding of cattle handling.

Overall the overwhelming comment both immediately after the course and in the one month follow up was that the course would be very beneficial to new drivers. Two drivers and one producer mentioned that they would like to see more producers involved in the courses. Several when asked what they liked about the course mentioned the presentation style, specifically that the presenters did not pretend to know everything, and involved drivers in discussion of topics.

## **5 Success in Achieving Objectives**

### **5.1 Success in Achieving Objectives**

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#### **5.1.1 Success in Achieving Objectives**

Please refer to the evaluation results in the above section. In short, a training course has been developed and the materials delivered to MLA. The course has received overwhelming support from the pastoral and livestock transport industry, with companies already trying to organise another course for the start of 2010.

## **6 Impact on Meat and Livestock Industry – now & in five years time**

### **6.1 Impact on Meat and Livestock Industry – now & in five years time**

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#### **6.1.1 Impact on Meat and Livestock Industry – now & in five years time**

The development of this course has allowed the knowledge held by experienced drivers to be captured in a repeatable format for younger drivers which is both easily understood and disseminated. It has the potential to open up communication lines between producers and drivers contributing to a better understanding of each others perspectives which will lead to improved transport outcomes.

Developing the course has led to a greater understanding of the importance of pre-transport management through the discussion between drivers and producers. Pre-transport management has the potential to impact on a producer's total income in the form of reduced shrinkage and other impacts of transport. Even 1-2% improvements can have substantial effects on a producer's bottom line with relatively little investment, compared to other technology required to improve other productivity parameters such as branding percentage or liveweight gain.

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## **7 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Conclusions and Recommendations**

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#### **7.1.1 Conclusions and Recommendations**

- ☐ It is very important to have the right presenter – participants are a difficult audience group who are not used to classroom situations therefore it is essential to be able to hold their attention, entertain them and teach them. The presentation style is also critical to learning outcomes. Several participants commented that what they liked about the course was the fact that presenters did not claim to know everything and involved drivers in discussion. This is one of the key elements to successfully presenting this course – engaging drivers in discussion and using stories from their experience to illustrate key points.
- ☐ All drivers who attended were interested in obtaining formal accreditation, and would prefer that this be based on practical skills. It is recommended that this course should be mapped against competencies in the National Training program. A model for assessment of relevant units should be explored to allow drivers to obtain qualifications relevant to their work-which will also assist transport companies to meet their requirements in regard to industry quality assurance schemes. It may also assist in any QA schemes producers or end point users of the livestock want to implement.
- ☐ There was a strong feeling from participants and presenters that having producers attend is extremely valuable and it was thought that more producers should be involved. It is extremely important to have at least one producer at the course as really opens up positive communication and provides both parties with a better understanding of all the issues and

realities for each. It is critical that these producers are well prepared and selected carefully to ensure key messages are relayed.

- There is an opportunity to involve the NTCA who are involved in the development of fatigue management legislation to allow industry the opportunity to learn more about the requirements from the fatigue management point of view and how they relate to the critical need to ensure good pre-transport management strategies are in place to maximise the time available to drivers to reach their destination.
- There is potential to build on the practical learnings of livestock drivers with current research findings to produce extension materials suitable for northern Australia which outline best practice pre-transport management techniques.
- Further analysis of the Canadian model of training for drivers which includes a one day course similar to this followed by an assessment on the job by an accredited assessor could be beneficial to future development of this program. Further information can be found at: <http://livestocktransport.ca/training.htm>
- Feedback from RBRC members has indicated they believe that this type of training would be extremely beneficial for others in the livestock transport chain including saleyards, stevedores and feedlot workers. The investment in development of this course could also be value added to by customisation for transporters in southern Australia.
- To prevent a lack of uptake of this course several key issues need to be addressed.
  - Only very small target audience – inexperienced cattle transporters – therefore it is doubtful whether commercial providers will not pick it up. Suggestions to overcome this include promoting the course materials to be provided in house through the larger transport companies.
  - Support a small number of key (2-3) people across northern Australia to continue to champion the course and provide support and training to other delivers. These may be NT DRDPIFR, QLD DPIF or potentially the agricultural colleges.
  - Timing of courses is critical due to the nature of the work of the potential participants.
  - Beef producers, particularly through the role of the RBRC's will need to continue to support and promote the course as being essential to their transport providers.

## 8 Bibliography

Swanson, J.C. & Morrow-Tesch, J. (2001). Cattle transport: Historical, research and future perspectives. *Journal of Animal Science*, 79(E. Suppl.): E102-109.

## 9 Appendices

### 9.1 Appendix 1 – Participant Evaluation Results

In what ways will you change how you do things after attending this course?	Number of responses
Not at all	6
No change, already operate according to the course standard	4
Correct working animals with their flight zones and blind spots	1
A greater understanding of animal handling	1
Better understanding of cattle stress	1
Better understanding of responsibilities of drivers	1

Table 1: How participants stated they would change their practices after attending the course

Overall Comments	Number of responses
Very well presented	4
Would like to see more producers attend	2
Very beneficial for newcomers	5
Should be separated into courses specific to producers and truck drivers, different focus for target audience (drivers - ramp to ramp, producers - prep before ramp)	1
Need representation from industry bodies (LTAQ)	1
Excellent	3
Very informative enjoyable presentation	1
Very good, well worth the effort.	1

Table 2: Overall comments on course

	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree %	Total %
Maximising animal welfare during transport is an important part of my job as a driver	0	0			100	100
I am proud to be part of the livestock transport industry	0	0			100	100
I know what my animal welfare responsibilities as a truck driver are.	0	0		12	88	100
Truck drivers play an important role as the visible face of the industry	0	0		0	100	100
It is essential to minimise stress at all stages of transport	0	0		6	94	100
Open and respectful communication between transporters and producers is important	0	0		12	88	100
What I have learned today has influenced or reinforced my thinking about the above statements	0	0		23.5	76.5	100
I know my rights when the supplier wants me to load stock which I don't consider fit, or at too high a density	0	6		6	88	100
My knowledge of how stress, bruising, weight loss and dark cutting beef can occur during transport has increased from this course	0	6		17.5	76.5	100
I can use the information I have learned today to carry out my job more efficiently	0	0		17.5	82.5	100
I have a better understanding of what I can do practically to reduce the negative impacts of transport, such as bruising and dark cutting beef after attending this course	0	6	12	6	76	100
I feel more confident that I can:						
Set up the truck ready for loading	0	0	17.5	30	52	100
Assess whether stock are fit to load	0	0	17.5	30	52	100
Estimate loading densities	0	6	12	30	52	100
Load cattle efficiently	0	6	12	30	52	100
Stop and check cattle in a timely manner	0	6	12	30	52	100
Deal with a beast that goes down	0	6	12	30	52	100
Humanely destroy a downer	0	0	0	48	52	100

Table 3: Participants ratings of the technical content

Workshop Overall	Poor/Difficult/Not at all				OK/Moderately				Very Good/Very easy/Very well/ Highly	
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5	Rank 6	Rank 7	Rank 8	Rank 9	Rank 10
The presenter's knowledge of the subjects were:						1	1	1	3	11
How easy was it to understand the topics?						1			2	14
How well were your needs met?							1		3	13
Overall, how beneficial did you find the course?			1		3		1		2	10

Table 4: Participant rating of facilitation and workshop overall

Question	Yes	No	Comment
Would you recommend this course to other truck drivers?	17		
Did attending this course make you feel like you want to learn more about any of these topics?	14	3	<input type="checkbox"/> Dark cutting beef <input type="checkbox"/> Welfare ( x 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Cattle handling <input type="checkbox"/> Better understanding of the graziers point of view <input type="checkbox"/> Rights of driver re: unfit cattle/density <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-transport management
Would you be interested in receiving formal accreditation in the field of livestock transport?	16	1	
If yes, would you prefer the accreditation to be based on your practical skills	14		

Table 5: Participant responses to various questions