

final report

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Animal Welfare Auditing

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Abstract

This AMPC funded project was undertaken to develop and pilot an animal welfare auditing course that would ensure the technical competency of those auditing animal welfare in Australian meat processing plants. The principle driver for the project was to ensure that both the industry and its customers had confidence in the competency of those undertaking animal welfare auditing at slaughtering establishments.

The course was designed to address the skills needs of those auditing against the newly certified AMIC Industry Animal Welfare Standards. The course also addresses the skills and knowledge requirements of in-house and regulatory animal welfare auditors. When developing the course content, delivery and assessment strategies the project team worked with the express aim of establishing equivalence with the auditor training delivered in both the US and the EU.

The project has resulted in an AW auditing course that will be nationally accredited, that has been piloted in four locations and is now fully supported with training and assessment materials.

Executive summary

This AMPC funded project was undertaken to develop and pilot an animal welfare (AW) auditing course that would ensure the technical competency of those auditing animal welfare in Australian meat processing plants. The course development formed part of an overall roll out strategy for the Australian Meat Industry Council's (AMIC) Industry Animal Welfare Standard as a certified Standard to be managed by AUSMEAT.

The principle driver for the project was to ensure that both the industry and its customers had confidence in the competency of those undertaking animal welfare auditing at slaughtering establishments. The training program enables animal welfare auditors to be able to acquire through formal training and demonstrate in assessment task the specific technical skills and knowledge required to undertake animal welfare audits.

MINTRAC worked closely with staff of AUSMEAT to design an AW auditing course that would meet the needs of those

- third party auditors auditing against the newly certified AMIC Industry Animal Welfare Standards
- regulatory staff performing AW audits
- industry personnel performing internal AW audits.

When developing the course content and setting the level of competency required for successful course completion the project team worked with an eye to establishing equivalence with the auditor training delivered in both the US and the EU.

The first phase in the project involved the development of the draft Unit of Competency and this was finalised after feedback from AUSMEAT, AMPC and industry personnel. The Unit will be an elective Unit available to students undertaking a range of Certificate III and IV Meat Processing qualifications including Meat Safety (Inspection), QA and general qualifications.

The Unit's elements of competency require the course participant to be able to

- identify relevant animal welfare regulations and standards
- audit the animal welfare component of an Approved Arrangement for compliance with regulatory and relevant standard requirements
- audit transport and unloading arrangements for livestock
- audit management of livestock in lairage prior to slaughter
- audit treatment of sick/injured or uncooperative animals
- audit stunning of livestock
- audit slaughtering and shackling
- audit animal welfare monitoring, internal auditing, corrective and preventative action program
- audit contingency arrangements
- plan for an animal welfare audit
- report on the outcomes of an animal welfare audit.

The next phase of the project involved the development of a delivery strategy for the Unit. Following an initial pilot in Queensland a two day format was settled on. The format involves an initial session on the overall AW regulatory and standards environment followed by a detailed sessions on the theory and auditing practice behind:

- reviewing the company's Approved Arrangement
- transport and unloading of livestock

- the management of livestock in lairage
- livestock handling
- restraint and stunning of livestock
- humane slaughter and shackling
- audit and report procedures.

Each session involved a theory component delivered face to face followed by a mock audit on that aspect at the host establishment. The assessment process involved a theory test, a mock audit at the host site and a full AW audit and report from the participant's plant.

The Unit was delivered at four pilot sites and was well supported by course participants from AUSMEAT, State and Commonwealth Regulators, industry and trainers from Registered Training Organisations. The courses were delivered in Ipswich (Qld), Beenleigh (Qld), Cressy (Tas) and Cowra (NSW). There were a total of 48 course participants and the courses were team delivered by a total of five presenters overall (Michelle Edge, Dr Denis Brett, Andrew Little, Dr Leisha Hewitt and Ben Robinson). The course participants have rated this program highly and indicated that it was well suited to meet the requirements of industry, regulators and auditing bodies.

In addition, MINTRAC has developed a distance education version of the materials and a small cohort has been enrolled in a mixed mode delivery of the AW auditing course which is being delivered by AUSMEAT as a proof of concept exercise.

The project has resulted in an AW auditing course that will be nationally accredited, that has been piloted in four courses and is now fully supported with training and assessment materials. Trainers from RTOs have been trained in the program in NSW, Queensland and Tasmania. Additionally, MINTRAC and AUSMEAT now have the ability to roll out this training in Victoria, SA and WA in the coming financial year as part of AMPC funded Industry Professional Development Project.

For AUSMEAT the project has meant that it now has a significant number of trained auditors to audit client companies against the voluntary AMIC Industry Animal Welfare Standard and provide certification of AW for customers both here and overseas.

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2 Background

The Animal Welfare project was intended to address a growing need for animal welfare auditors to demonstrate specific technical skills to undertake animal welfare audits in terms of practical experience, formal training and technical background.

In the past five years regulators, third party auditors, corporate customers and internal auditors have engaged in ever more rigorous review and audit of animal welfare practices and outcomes in Australian meat processing plants. This auditing has been carried out against the Australian Standard, Codes of Practice, the industry animal welfare standard and the range of corporate standards. This auditing has been undertaken by a disparate group of auditors with a wide range of backgrounds varying from food technologists to veterinary officers. However there has been no requirement to have any specific technical skills to undertake animal welfare audits in terms of practical experience, formal training or technical background.

This has meant that on occasion animal welfare key performance indicators have been misunderstood or misinterpreted by either auditors or processors. In the USA this issue has been addressed by the Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization, Inc. (PAACO) and the American Meat Institute (AMI) by holding auditing training which feature training and lecturers by leading animal welfare experts such as Temple Grandin.

MINTRAC, with the assistance of the AMPC/AMIC National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, was tasked to review the current science and research into animal welfare auditing and then develop an accredited animal welfare auditing training course, supporting training materials and assessment tools. The training was tested with auditing trainers, and then four pilot auditing courses were conducted across the industry.

AMPC will develop the strategy for dissemination – with RABSQA components.

3 Project objectives

This project sought to:

- provide standardised training for animal welfare auditors in the meat industry
- ensure a consistent approach to animal welfare auditing across the industry
- Facilitate a consistent approach and interpretation of animal welfare standards across the industry.

4 Methodology

4.1 Unit development

4.1.1 Consultation

The first phase in the project involved the development of the draft Unit of Competency and this was finalised after feedback from AUSMEAT, AMPC and industry personnel.

4.1.2 Course content

The course content was developed by the course technical advisers group consisting of:

- Michelle Edge (AMPC and author of the industry standards)
- Dr Denis Brett (AUSMEAT AW Standards Manager)
- Andrew Little (AUSMEAT AW Lead Auditor)

- Dr Leisha Hewitt (Murdoch University Lecturer in AW)
- Ben Robinson (AUSMEAT AW Auditor)
- Clive Richardson (MINTRAC).

The draft Unit has been refined during the process of delivering the pilot courses and is now in a final form and undergoing the formal national accreditation process.

The Unit of Competency once accredited will be an elective Unit in a range of Certificate III and IV Meat Processing qualifications including Meat Safety (Inspection), QA and general qualifications.

4.2 Training and Assessment materials development

4.2.1 Initial draft

The initial draft materials developed by MINTRAC against the requirements of the draft Unit were trialled at the first pilot course and these materials were then refined and further developed by AUSMEAT. MINTRAC also supplied the pilot courses with supporting technical materials on livestock handling, restraining and slaughter.

4.2.2 Final draft of training and assessment materials.

MINTRAC has been able, as a result of the project, to develop both training and assessment materials to support the delivery of the Unit of Competency AMPA412 *Conduct an animal welfare audit of a meat processing plant* (at this date yet to be accredited). The materials plus a comprehensive technical information support pack will be available to eligible RTOs to deliver the Unit in either face to face or mixed delivery mode.

4.3 Course delivery

4.3.1 The course delivery strategy

The course delivery strategy was developed and refined as a result of consultation between the five trainers delivering the courses and participant feedback from the initial pilot. The lessons learnt from the first pilot program mainly revolved around incorporating more structured auditing exercises and a tightened delivery program. After these adjustments were made the courses ran more smoothly and participant feedback improved as well.

The mixed mode delivery program has been trialled the once and an enhanced kit of support audio visual materials, which it is recommended should be provided by RTOs, will also improve the course delivered in this fashion in the future.

5 Results and discussion

5.1 Course development

5.1.1 Course content

The elements of competency for the AW Unit involve the course participant to be able to:

- identify relevant animal welfare regulations and standards
- audit the animal welfare component of an Approved Arrangement for compliance with regulatory and relevant standard requirements
- audit transport and unloading arrangements for livestock
- audit management of livestock in lairage prior to slaughter

- audit treatment of sick/injured or uncooperative animals
- audit stunning of livestock
- audit slaughtering and shackling
- audit animal welfare monitoring, internal auditing, corrective and preventative action program
- audit contingency arrangements
- plan for an animal welfare audit
- report on the outcomes of an animal welfare audit.

The course will also require candidates to have a good understanding of:

- the assessment of welfare of livestock at receipt and in lairage
- the assessment of effective restraint, stunning and humane slaughter of livestock
- effective auditing techniques and procedures
- the relevant legislation, regulations, standards and Codes of Practice
- relevant voluntary industry animal welfare standards for processing establishments
- humane destruction and emergency slaughter arrangements
- impact of stress during handling on the ultimate pH and quality of meat
- WHS requirements for handling stock.

The course participant assessment requirements for candidates are also set out in the Unit of competency and the requirements are that assessment must;

- be conducted in the context of current Australian meat industry standards and regulations
- consist of a minimum of three different forms of evidence is required to demonstrate competency
- involve auditing exercises conducted in a slaughtering establishment under real working conditions.

In the pilot courses assessment consisted of

- a mock audit on site and a report on evidence gathered to the group
- a written theory examination
- a full mock AW audit conducted at an operating abattoir and an audit report prepared.

5.2 Materials development

5.2.1 Draft materials development

AUSMEAT developed the pilot course training materials based on the initial materials provided by MINTRAC for the first pilot. MINTRAC also supplied the pilot courses with supporting technical materials on livestock handling, restraining and slaughter.

5.2.2 Final materials development

Subsequent to the pilot courses and participant feedback MINTRAC has now developed a full set of AW auditing course training and assessment materials. These materials parallel the AUSMEAT materials but will be available to any RTO wishing to deliver the AW auditing course given they have the Unit on scope. MINTRAC has also developed a distance education version of the materials to support a mixed mode delivery strategy for the Unit and this too will be available to eligible RTOs.

5.3 Course delivery

5.3.1 Pilot face to face courses

MINTRAC has completed the four contracted face to face AW audit trainer the training programs. The four pilot courses were delivered with the essential and generous assistance of the following plants:

- Churchill Abattoir (Ipswich Qld)
- Teys Abattoir (Beenleigh Qld)
- Tasmanian Quality Meats (Cressy Tasmania)
- Cowra Abattoir (Cowra NSW).

The courses were team delivered by a total of five presenters overall (Michelle Edge, Dr Denis Brett, Andrew Little, Dr Leisha Hewitt and Ben Robinson).

After the lessons learnt from the first pilot program, which mainly revolved around incorporating more structured auditing exercises and the tightened delivery program, the courses ran well with participant feedback indicating a high level of approval of both the content and the delivery strategy.

5.3.2 Mixed mode delivery course

MINTRAC has developed a distance education version of the materials and a small cohort has been enrolled in a mixed mode delivery of the AW auditing course which is being delivered by AUSMEAT as a proof of concept exercise.

The development of this mixed mode delivery program is particularly important in the light of what could be limited demand from industry and regulators for this course. In addition it is likely demand will be spread over both time and geographic location. This mixed mode delivery model will enable RTOs such as AUSMEAT to have flexible enrolment arrangements to meet industry's demand in a timely and cost effective manner.

5.4 Trainer professional development

5.4.1 Train the Trainer

This project has enabled a number of RTO trainers to attend the course and acquire the Unit of Competency as well as be exposed to the delivery and assessment strategies. In all 13 RTOs sent 17 trainers to the 4 courses with an extra trainer undertaking the mixed mode delivery program. In addition the 5 trainers who delivered the pilot courses have been able to workshop content, technical materials, team teach, and observe the effectiveness of a range of delivery strategies and learning activities.

6 Success in achieving objectives

6.1 Standardised training for AW auditors

Objective: Provide standardised training for animal welfare auditors in the meat industry

The meat processing industry now has a standardised animal welfare auditing training course which is supported by a comprehensive set of training and assessment materials. A substantial number of RTOs and trainers have been involved in the pilot programs and the industry now has trainers in every State that can deliver this Unit of Competency.

The industry can be confident the training delivered is at least equivalent to the animal welfare auditing training delivered overseas and the assessment process is rigorous. In addition to supporting the roll out of the voluntary AMIC Industry Animal Welfare Standards the course will also better equip regulators responsible for animal welfare auditors with the skills and knowledge necessary to competently assess company procedures and animal welfare outcomes.

6.2 Consistency in AW auditing

Objective: Ensure a consistent approach to animal welfare auditing across the industry

In addition to supporting the roll out of the voluntary AMIC Industry Animal Welfare Standards the AW auditing course will also better equip AUSMEAT and other third party auditors to consistently interpret the AMIC Industry animal Welfare Standard. This training will result in auditors who will have a good technical understanding and the ability to assess animal handling and slaughter against clearly understood measures of animal welfare.

Likewise the course will be able to equip trained regulatory auditors responsible for animal welfare with the skills and knowledge necessary to competently assess company procedures and animal welfare outcomes.

A shared understanding of what constitutes achievable good /best practice in the area of animal welfare (as defined by the Industry Standard) will also help to create consistency between in-house, regulatory and third party auditors.

6.3 Consistency across the industry

Objective: Facilitate a consistent approach and interpretation of animal welfare standards across the industry.

It is vitally important to the industry to have auditors with a clear and agreed understanding of what constitutes acceptable animal welfare outcomes in both the export and domestic sectors. Without the consistency the industry will have difficulty in meeting the demands of varying interpretations of the Standards.

The development of both the technical and auditing components of the Unit and the supporting training materials will enable AW auditors to not only understand the procedures and processes they are observing but consistently interpret and audit against any prescribed Animal Welfare Standard.

The training pilots have meant that not only will RTOs have available nationally consistent training materials but they will be using the same competency assessment procedures. A large number of trainers have also been exposed to the level of technical understanding that auditors must have to assess the animal welfare outcomes being achieved.

7 Impact on meat and livestock industry – Now and in five years' time

7.1 Immediate impact

The red meat industry is now in a position to implement the auditing of the voluntary AMIC Industry Animal Welfare Standards. Both the certifying body AUSMEAT and the industry are now able to conduct external and internal audits against this Standard. The Unit of Competency is prepared and will be presented for accreditation later in the year. Those who did the pilot courses will be able to gain the Unit via RPL if they have successfully completed all the course work and assessments.

In addition RTOs around the country will, because their trainers have attended to the pilot courses, be able to deliver the auditing unit supported by nationally consistent training and assessment materials.

Australia now has an Animal Welfare Auditing training program for meat processors equal or better than those being delivered to industry personnel overseas in our major markets. Our regulators now also have a training course which should enable their officers to be better informed and be able to more consistently audit animal welfare outcomes.

7.2 Long-term impact

The availability of a high quality accredited animal welfare auditing course will enable the industry to develop a consistent oversight of animal welfare outcomes against both the Industry Standard and the regulatory requirements. The improved oversight of animal welfare will undoubtedly focus processor attention on the investment needed in facilities and staff to achieve these outcomes.

The piloting and development of the course has also improved the proficiency of RTO staff and has given trainers a greater appreciation of the importance of animal welfare not only when delivering the auditing unit but also when delivering the training associated with stock handling and slaughter.

This increased proficiency in RTOs can only have a long term beneficial effect on the level of animal welfare training delivered to the industry. As with hygiene training in the past it takes at least half a generation for improved standards and expectations to be imbedded in the culture of the industry. In the long term the required cultural changes will be hastened if supported by good training and this in turn means that the industry is well equipped to meet societal, customer and importing country requirements.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Outcomes of AMPC investment

The red meat industry is obliged to meet the animal welfare requirements of our overseas customers and importing countries but in addition the industry has the opportunity to be an international exemplar in this area. Animal Welfare in general in processing plants not only underpins the industry's "social licence" to operate but it also makes good economic sense.

AMPC has not only funded the development and piloting of this animal welfare auditing training but also funded the development of the training courses for:

- the Animal Welfare Officer Skill Set

- the low stress livestock handling courses
- the humane slaughter kit
- the effective assessment of stunning
- the use of working animals in lairage.

Not only are these courses accredited but they are supported by nationally available training and assessment materials. This helps equip the industry to meet societal, customer and importing country animal welfare requirements.

This project has added to the industry's ability to demonstrate its commitment to animal welfare which is world class in terms of standards and the training available. What is required now is to generate the enthusiasm on the part of industry to achieve optimal levels of investment in facilities, staff training and verification.

8.2 Recommendations

The red meat industry is obliged to meet its societal, regulatory, customer and importing country animal welfare requirements. The role of training in meeting these obligations is pivotal to achieving the required outcomes. This is for many companies an area of heightened awareness and in some cases still represents a threat to their sustainability. For this reason industry needs to be encouraged to take full advantage of the training opportunities and the animal welfare auditing needs to join the list of courses available via the industry's AMPC funded professional development program.