



MSA Beef long duration road and/or rail transport pathway

Guidelines for processors and transporters (rail and road)

MSA licensed processors and transport operators should be aware of a new MSA pathway for cattle transported long distances by road and/or rail.

This pathway enables cattle transported for more than 48 hours and up to 120 hours from the original property of dispatch to slaughter to remain eligible for MSA grading when specific requirements are met. The pathway is designed to improve access to MSA grading for northern Australian cattle producers while maintaining consumer eating quality outcomes.

Background

Recent MLA-funded research was commissioned to investigate whether current MSA transport requirements could be expanded to accommodate northern Australian and/or extensive production systems, where cattle often travel substantial distances to access processing facilities. The study evaluated a range of commercial transport scenarios, including road and rail journeys extending up to 120 hours from property dispatch to slaughter.

Research was conducted across four commercial-scale replicates, where 920 cattle were evaluated through a range of road and rail transport pathways. The trial involved over 4,600 samples; with each of the samples being assessed by 10 consumers using established MSA consumer sensory protocols, providing an assessment of the impact of transport method and duration on eating quality outcomes.

The results showed that neither transport method (road or rail) nor transport duration (up to 120 hours) resulted in an adverse impact on consumer eating quality providing cattle were appropriately managed throughout the journey, which included access to good quality hay or dry feed, and water. Furthermore, analysis confirmed that the MSA grading model continued to accurately predict eating quality outcomes for cattle transported under these extended-duration conditions.

As a result, a new long-duration road and/or rail transport pathway is now available to provide greater access to MSA grading opportunities for northern Australian producers, while maintaining the integrity and consumer confidence underpinning the MSA eating quality system.



Cattle preparation

Ensure producers are aware of requirements and cattle are finished

Nutrition, management and minimising stress are all critical factors in preparing animals for long duration transport and optimal eating quality. Cattle need to be on a rising plane of nutrition, particularly close to slaughter and handled as one mob for as long as possible. This ensures social hierarchy is established in aid of reducing stress. When stressed, cattle use muscle glycogen (energy), which leads to high pH or dark cutting carcasses following slaughter which are non-compliant to the MSA program (pH>5.70).

Please see the [MSA Tips and Tools](#) for guidance around cattle preparation, MSA and continual improvement.

Planning the journey

Communication between the producer, transporter/s (road and/or rail) and processor is critical to ensure animals are well managed throughout the journey and the MSA Standards requirements are met.

The total time of the journey is not to exceed 120 hours (five days) and the total time on a truck or rail is not to exceed 84 hours.

It is a requirement of the pathway that animals have access to **good quality hay or dry feed** at each stop (longer than two hours), in addition to water, including prior to the journey commencement.

The number of load/unload events can not exceed three in total, which includes cross-loading of trailers. Cattle held on a stationary truck is to be kept to a minimum i.e. standard/routine stock check time.

Evidence of adherence to the MSA Pathway requirements, including feed and water, **must be captured and recorded**.

This is a requirement of the Processor. Please ensure an auditable process is in place and communicated to the supplying producer and transporter/s.

Cattle which have travelled long distances require a period of time in lairage. Please ensure you account for this in the journey planning and in discussion with your supplying producer and transporter/s.

Recommended lairage guidelines

To support adequate recovery prior to slaughter, the following minimum lairage periods are recommended for cattle consigned via the MSA Beef Long Duration Road and/or Rail Transport Pathway.

Time from property to plant (hours)	Recommended minimum lairage (hours)
48	6
64	12
84	24

Cattle should have access to water at all times in lairage. Where lairage exceeds four hours, good quality hay or dry feed should also be available.

Responsibilities across the supply chain

To ensure optimal outcomes, producers, transporter and processors should ensure the journey is well planned and communicated.

Producers

- Ensure cattle are on a rising plane of nutrition throughout their growing period, particularly leading up to slaughter
- Ensure cattle are finished and meet company and MSA specifications.
- Minimise stress and handling events.
- Avoid mixing unfamiliar mobs or drafting, at least 14 days prior to slaughter.
- Maintain MSA registration.
- Meet all existing MSA production requirements.
- Provide accurate MSA vendor declarations.

Transport operators

- Comply with animal welfare requirements.
- Provide good quality hay or dry feed and water at rest points.
- Minimise handling and loading events.
- Keep stationary truck periods to a minimum i.e. standard/routine stock check time.

Processors

- Verify pathway eligibility requirements.
- Ensure slaughter occurs within 120 hours of property dispatch.
- Provide water in lairage and good quality hay or dry feed where cattle remain in lairage for longer than four hours.
- Maintain records demonstrating compliance with pathway requirements which includes a documented process, and may include correspondence, photographs of resting facilities including feed and water.

To ensure optimal supply chain outcomes and eating quality producers must adhere to the requirements of the Long Distance Road and/or Rail MSA Pathway as outlined in the [MSA Standards](#).

For more information

 1800 111 672

 msaenquiries@mla.com.au

 mla.com.au

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