



MSA Beef long duration road and/or rail transport pathway

Guidelines for producers

MSA-registered cattle producers 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 original property of dispatch to slaughter to remain eligible for MSA grading when specific requirements are met. This pathway is designed to improve access to MSA grading for northern and extensive 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.



Key requirements to ensure cattle are MSA eligible

- Producers must be MSA registered.
- Cattle must comply with all existing MSA on-farm requirements.
- It is recommended that cattle are not mixed with unfamiliar mobs prior to consignment.
- Cattle must reside on the property of dispatch for a minimum of 30 days before dispatch.
- An MSA vendor declaration must accompany eligible cattle.

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](#).

Cattle preparation

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 and guidance on MSA and continual improvement. In particular, refer to the following sections:

- MSA Requirements for handling cattle
- How to supply beef in the MSA system
- The effect of pH on beef eating quality

Key requirements to prepare cattle for long distance transport

To maximise MSA compliance and eating quality outcomes:

- 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.
- Provide good quality hay or dry feed and water whenever cattle are rested, prior to and during transport.
- Plan the journey with the transporters and processors.

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.

Evidence of adherence to the MSA Pathway requirements, including feed and water, **must be captured and recorded**. Please ensure a process to collect this information is in place with your processor prior to the journey.

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.

Cattle which have travelled long distances require a period of time in lairage at the processing plant. Please ensure this requirement is accounted for this in the journey planning and in discussion with your processor.

For further information please discuss with your processor or contact MSA Enquiries.

Understanding company and brand specifications

It is important to note that MSA-eligible carcasses that are graded, do not necessarily attract a premium payment. Processors and/or brandowners use the MSA System to set minimum eating quality specifications for their brands. Please discuss these specifications with your processor and/or brandowner to understand their requirements prior to consigning cattle and ensure to review your carcass feedback.

For more information



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