



Fact sheet

Changes to MSA beef saleyard pathway

MSA-registered cattle producers, MSA licenced saleyards or livestock exchanges and processors should be aware of a change to the MSA beef saleyard pathway.

The time from farm to slaughter is now extended from 36hrs to 48hrs, via a MSA licenced saleyard or livestock exchange.

Key requirements to ensure cattle are MSA eligible:

- Producers need to be MSA registered.
- Saleyards or livestock exchanges need to be MSA licenced and have completed the requirements outlined in the MSA Standards.
- An MSA vendor declaration needs to accompany eligible cattle to slaughter.
- Cattle need to be processed at a MSA licensed processor within 48hrs of dispatch from property.

Background

Recent completed research shows that the MSA saleyard pathway for beef can be extended from 36hrs to 48hrs from farm dispatch to slaughter, via a MSA licenced saleyard or livestock exchange.

The initial MSA saleyard pathway required that cattle being sold through a saleyard needed to be processed within 36hrs of property dispatch. This requirement has been a limitation in the consignment of MSA cattle through the saleyard pathway due to commercial practicality.

The MSA program has had the long-term goal of enabling all cattle to be eligible for MSA grading. This was a catalyst to progress further research and development (R&D) to investigate several supply chain pathways including further R&D into the saleyard pathway. The objective was to understand the impact of extended timeframes to slaughter and whether re-feeding could mitigate any of this impact.

The research suggests the MSA saleyard pathway could be increased up to 48 hours from farm dispatch to slaughter while maintaining all other existing pathway requirements. This includes no mixing or drafting through the saleyards, transport or lairage and an MSA Index adjustment (-5 points) or -5 MSA eating quality (MQ4) points across all cuts in the carcass, accounting for the negative impact on eating quality over and above other measurements such as ultimate pH.

Process to follow for selling cattle through an MSA saleyard

The MSA program is a valuable asset for the Australian beef industry as it provides opportunities to differentiate product in the market.

The MSA Standards include the saleyard pathway for eligible cattle. More detail on the Standards can be found in the MSA Standards Manual for Saleyards, which is available at [MSA Standards | Meat & Livestock Australia \(mla.com.au\)](https://www.mla.com.au/MSA-Standards-Manual-for-Saleyards).

Preparing cattle for sale

Cattle can be exposed to stress during the selling process. This is often caused by movement from the farm to the saleyards and then the abattoir, unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells, and the actual auction process itself. These factors cause the animals to use up their energy stores to deal with the surrounding stress, so it is important that cattle have sufficient energy stores to cope with these stressors. (see *MSA Tips & Tools: The effect of pH on beef eating quality*, [MSA Tips & Tools – The-effect-of-ph-on-beef-eating-quality.pdf \(mla.com.au\)](https://www.mla.com.au/MSA-Tips-Tools-The-effect-of-ph-on-beef-eating-quality.pdf))

Cattle carrying a lot of fat or in finished condition can still be energy deficient and can be draining their energy reserves well before they appear to be losing condition. The only way to ensure cattle have high energy reserves is to feed high energy feed for a period of at least 30 days prior to consignment.

Low energy feed such as poor quality feed or pastures are not adequate to maintain the energy reserves of cattle. Low energy levels in cattle will result in a high pH carcase, dark meat colour and reduced eating quality.

Cattle are not to be drafted or mixed with new mobs. When cattle are mixed with new mobs they go through a period of adjustment of the social group hierarchy. While this period of adjustment is occurring the mob is subjected to increased stress, which includes the saleyard or the abattoir (see *MSA Tips & Tools: MSA requirements for handling cattle*, [MSA Tips & Tools – MSA-requirements-for-handling-cattle.pdf](#)).

At the sale

Upon arrival of consignments at the saleyard:

- MSA vendor declarations are verified as being correct and eligible in accordance with the Standards.
- Cattle are penned in appropriate yards -a reduction in size of the eligible consignment mob (or splitting) for purposes of yarding is permitted. If split, these animals may remain as separate mobs or re-joined as the original mob.
- Pens of eligible cattle are labelled with their eligibility under the Standards, dispatch time from farm and maximum time until slaughter.
- No mixing of different groups of cattle is permitted.

On farm responsibilities: all cattle production systems

- Producers must be registered with MSA to supply cattle for grading.
- No cattle with secondary sexual characteristics can be supplied.
- No cattle that have been severely sick or injured can be supplied.
- No cattle of poor temperament can be supplied.
- All cattle must reside on the property of dispatch for a minimum of 30 days prior to dispatch.
- It is recommended that cattle are managed as a single mob for a minimum of 14 days prior to dispatch for slaughter.
- MSA vendor declarations must be delivered with the cattle (as supplementation to other state-based requirements).

After the sale

The MSA vendor declaration (or a copy) must continue with the consignments where they are destined for MSA grading. The licenced saleyard will monitor the adherence to the Standards at each sale and ensure ineligible cattle are prevented from unintended use or dispatch. The saleyard will maintain documentation to ensure the Standards are controlled.

Saleyard responsibilities

- Livestock exchange or saleyard is to be licenced and have completed training as outlined in the Standards.
- The livestock exchange or saleyard is subject to audit under the MSA program and must have systems in place that will be monitored to verify compliance against the MSA Standards.
- An MSA vendor declaration to accompany cattle to and from livestock exchange or saleyard.
- MSA eligible cattle to be clearly identified at all times.
- Cattle groups are not to be mixed at any point from farm to slaughter, excluding split mobs.
- No cattle that have been severely sick or injured at the time of sale are to be accepted.
- Cattle shall be held on soft standing surfaces, within the livestock exchange or saleyard facility other than the minimum period of time required for the actual sale.
- Cattle within the livestock exchange or saleyard will have access to water at all times.


Agents responsibilities

- Agents must be registered and have completed the required training.
- Adhere to the MSA Standards, including the section for saleyards.

Processor responsibilities

- Cattle shall be slaughtered within 48hrs after dispatch from the farm or property.
- A five MQ4 points penalty will be applied for consignment groups across all cuts via the MSA grading model.

For more information

 1800 111 672

 msaenquiries@mla.com.au

 mla.com.au

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