

Operational and Welfare Considerations – Feilding Saleyards



Briefing for the Executive Board of National Saleyards Ltd prepared by the National Livestock Transport & Safety Council

Purpose

To outline operational, compliance, and animal welfare challenges currently associated with livestock movements through Feilding Saleyards, and to highlight considerations for improving efficiency, compliance, and livestock outcomes, meeting the requirements set out under Health and Safety at Work (PCBU) and Land Transport Acts (chain of responsibility).

Background

We acknowledge that the Feilding Saleyards is one of New Zealand's largest livestock markets and attracts vendors and purchasers from across the country. While the scale and reach of the saleyards provide significant commercial value to the industry, the volume of livestock and the current sale-day structure are creating increasing operational pressures for livestock transport operators and raising potential concerns relating to driver compliance, health & safety, and livestock welfare.

Recent developments in regulatory monitoring and compliance enforcement are amplifying these challenges.

Key issues identified

1. Driver Hours Compliance and Increased Enforcement

Compliance with [regulated driving hours](#) is becoming increasingly difficult for livestock transport operators servicing the Feilding sale.

Sale-day logistics typically require:

- very early driver start times
- long working days
- late afternoon or evening livestock deliveries to destination farms

Over the past three years, a number of livestock transport operators have undergone NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) compliance audits. These audits have identified instances of non-compliance, and in several cases operators have been required to implement electronic logbooks as a condition of the [Alternative Fatigue Management System](#) (AFMS) they engaged in to ensure they retained their Transport Service Licence.

In addition, NZTA has opened Commercial Vehicle Safety Centres at locations such as Ohakea, with others planned for Taupō, Napier and Wellington.

These sites utilise vehicle Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems allowing route tracking and 'time on the road' data by vehicle, and weigh-in-motion technology, to identify non-compliant heavy vehicles. As a result, livestock carriers operating to and from major saleyards are subject to increasing regulatory scrutiny.

2. Driver Recruitment and Retention

The livestock transport sector is experiencing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining drivers and the key contributing factors include:

- long and irregular working hours
- increasing regulatory pressure around compliance
- delays and inefficiencies within the supply chain
- substandard livestock handling facilities at farms, processing plants, and saleyards

The industry also faces an aging workforce, with relatively few younger drivers entering the sector.

Unlike other heavy vehicle sectors such as freight or forestry, livestock transport has not been able to rely on overseas driver recruitment due to the specialised nature of the work, which requires high levels of stockmanship and experience handling livestock that immigrant drivers do not possess along with the skills and local knowledge required to navigate rural areas and the difficult terrain often found on farm access ways.

3. Livestock Welfare – Extended Transit and Holding Times

Livestock transiting through Feilding Saleyards can often experience extended periods without access to water or feed.

Typical livestock movements may involve:

1. **Pre-transport standing time** on farm (up to 4 hours recommended under the [*Code of Welfare – Transport within New Zealand*](#))
2. **Transport from farm to saleyard**
3. **Holding in saleyard pens**, typically on hard surfaces with limited access to water
4. **Sale process delays**
5. **Transport from saleyard to destination farm**

Given that Feilding sales can regularly yard over **1,200 cattle and more than 15,000 sheep** the availability of watering facilities is limited. Current yard infrastructure includes only a small number of pens where water is available. This makes it difficult to effectively hydrate stock before, during, or after the sale process. By late afternoon, stock can become:

- sluggish
- foot sore
- dehydrated

Purchasers frequently raise concerns with transport operators about the condition of livestock upon arrival at destination farms.

4. Sale Size, Start Times, and Completion Times

Large sale yardings place significant pressure on transport operators both prior to the sale, when livestock must arrive on time, and after the sale when purchased livestock must be transported to their new destination

Large yardings often result in:

- delayed sale start times
- late afternoon completion
- extended loading-out periods

This significantly increases driver working hours and can push operators beyond compliance limits. Under section 79T of the [Land Transport Act 1998](#) it is an offence **to cause or require driver to breach speed limits, maximum work time, or rest time requirements**. It is also an offence to cause or require driver to breach maximum gross weight limits. Liable parties may be subject to fines up to \$25,000.

There is a practical limit to the volume of livestock that can be transported safely in and out of Feilding in a single day and still allow transport operators to remain compliant.

Earlier sale start times and earlier finishing times, along with potential **caps on sale numbers**, would help alleviate many of these current pressures.

5. Livestock Tallying and Stock Marshalling

Tallying procedures at the saleyards are frequently a source of frustration and create operational delays.

Current issues include:

- livestock often not being tallied directly off the transport vehicle
- delivery dockets not consistently being signed by receiving agents
- changes to tallies not always being communicated back to transport operators
- drivers having to tally out of pens and marshal stock to loading banks with little or no support from NSL staff
- no clear verification of the responsibility of the livestock being collected

In some cases, carriers arrive to collect livestock and must request a **total recount**, which can delay loading. Also, when agents are unavailable after the sale has finished, resolving tally discrepancies becomes particularly difficult and these issues can further create:

- delays
- frustration between farmers, agents, and carriers
- additional driving/on duty time pressure on drivers

Suggested Operational Improvements

Loading In

We ask that National Saleyards Ltd consider implementing the following procedures:

- livestock is tallied directly from the transport vehicle by agents or NSL staff
- any recount is performed and confirmed immediately
- consignment notes are signed by the receiving agent or NSL staff
- vendors are notified by the agent of any tally discrepancies immediately after unloading

Loading Out

Recommended improvements include:

- selling agents remaining on site until all livestock are tallied out and marshalled
- selling agents or NSL staff are responsible for tallying stock out to loading areas
- purchaser or purchaser's agent sign the sale docket
- any tally adjustments are confirmed with the transport operator
- vendors and purchasers are notified of any tally changes immediately by the agent.

These measures would help reduce delays and remove uncertainty around responsibility.

Sale-day structure

Changes to the traditional Friday sale day are generally **not considered a practical solution** by the industry. Friday sales work well because meat processors are not typically receiving livestock that day, allowing transport resources to be focused on the saleyards.

However, consideration should be given to **additional sale days during peak periods**. Historical patterns clearly identify peak yarding periods, although drought or other climate events can also rapidly increase livestock numbers.

Planning additional sale days during these periods would help:

- maintain driver compliance
- improve livestock welfare outcomes
- reduce operational pressure on transport operators

Conclusion

The livestock transport industry recognises that the Feilding Saleyards play a vital role in New Zealand's national livestock buying and selling system. However, increasing sale volumes, combined with stricter compliance monitoring and infrastructure limitations, are continuing to create operational challenges for livestock transport operators.

The National Livestock Transport & Safety Council is committed to working collaboratively with industry stakeholders to ensure compliance, resilience, and efficiency across the livestock supply chain. Achieving this will require all participants involved in the buying, selling, and management of livestock movements to play their part in supporting practical and sustainable transport operations.

Derek Foley

Chairman - National Livestock Transport & Safety Council (NLT&SC)

Mob: 027570 8470

Email: chair@nltsc.nz

Jim Crouchley

Advisor - National Livestock Transport & Safety Council (NLT&SC)

Mob: 0272610953

Email: admin@nltsc.nz