This animal welfare policy paper provides a clear articulation of Egg Farmers of Australia’s position on animal welfare in relation to: farming practices, animal welfare science, community consultation and education, animal protection legislation, enforcement and compliance, and consumer choice.

1. Background

1.1 EFA was established in 2016 to provide a unified voice for state-based egg farmer groups.

1.2 It is a member-based organisation which advocates on behalf of farmers.

1.3 In its role as an advocate it engages with governments, stakeholders and consumers to promote policies and practices that drive improvement, success and sustainability in egg farming.

2. Farming Context

2.1 Australia consumes 15 million eggs every day.

2.2 Ninety eight percent of those eggs are farmed in family owned and operated farms.

2.3 Egg farmers are members of Australian cities and regions. They are employees and employers. They are part of the Australian community.

2.4 Like all farmers, egg farmers accept their responsibility to care for the welfare and health of their animals and to adopt best practice in support of that outcome.

2.5 Egg farmers recognise the community’s concern for animal welfare and their interest in farming practices; they welcome the opportunity to engage with the community.

3. Definition

Animal welfare refers to the protection of the health and well-being of animals. It concerns how an animal is coping in its living environment in terms of housing, freedom from: hunger and thirst, fear and distress, discomfort, pain, injury or disease, and the freedom to express natural behaviours.

Egg farmers meet consumer demands by employing a range of varying production systems, all of which have limitations and challenges in addressing a range of animal welfare outcomes. We are open with the public that this involves managing aspects of behaviour. We acknowledge that hens in conventional cages do not have access to a full range of natural behaviour. Equally, we acknowledge that confinement decreases mortality rates and the spread of disease. Egg farmers view animal welfare in context and believe a more prescriptive definition which provides for the expression of natural behaviour is appropriate for domestic pets.

4. Principles

4.1 Egg farmers value the welfare of their hens. Our belief in welfare is based on our commitment to both productivity and stewardship.

4.1.1 We keep our animals healthy so they can be productive.

4.1.2 We value our animals as living creatures and accept our pastoral duty in managing their wellbeing.

4.2 We recognise that animal welfare is a core responsibility for all egg farmers and believe that the proper care of hens is a daily duty.
4.3 We uphold the proper standards for ensuring the welfare of our hens set out in the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals - Domestic Poultry - 4th Edition.

4.4 We are committed to continuous improvement in animal welfare practices.

4.5 We accept that upholding the welfare of hens may involve managing some aspects of behaviour in order to achieve a greater good.

4.6 In caged systems and controlled settings we create an environment with some restrictions on the expression of behaviour in order to limit deaths and the spread of disease.

4.7 In free range systems we create an environment which can expose hens to predation and disease but which allows for a broader expression of natural behaviour.

4.8 We believe that proper attention to animal welfare improves productivity and contributes significantly to commercial success.

4.9 We acknowledge the importance of meeting the reasonable expectations of consumers and the wider community without compromising the capacity to sustain the industry and meet market demand.

4.10 We are committed to sustainable, efficient, productive egg farming which caters for the welfare of the hen and the needs of the market.

5. Science

5.1 We welcome peer reviewed scientific research that supports enhanced welfare outcomes that may be adopted and accepted under standards reviews.

5.2 We welcome the contribution that science makes in demonstrating how to improve the physical wellbeing of hens.

5.3 We support additional research into the emotional capacity of animals and will work with scientists to better understand the affective states of hens.

5.4 We acknowledge that defining animal welfare is both science-based and values-based.

6. Consultation and Education

6.1 We believe in providing the community with information about how we farm and showing our practices to the public through farm visits.

6.2 We welcome public consultation processes and the opportunity to engage with the community.

7. Legislation

7.1 We support legally enforceable animal welfare standards.

7.2 We support those standards being codified in state-based animal care and protection acts.

7.3 We believe these acts should establish a legally binding benchmark focused on eradicating any cruelty to animals.

8. Production Systems and Consumer Choice

8.1 We produce eggs using three production systems: free-range, barn and cages.

8.2 We offer consumers a choice to source eggs from a production system that they choose.

8.3 We are committed to enforceable animal welfare in each farming method.

8.4 We support third party audited on farm Quality Assurance systems that address legislated welfare compliance.