HOW THE NSW EGG INDUSTRY WAS HATCHED

122 FOWL, INCLUDING 87 CHICKENS ARRIVED ON THE FIRST FLEET

New South Wales is by far the oldest egg producing state in Australia with a history dating back to the arrival of the first laying hens on the First Fleet from England over 230 years ago.

The index from the fleet of ships bound for Botany Bay, documented a total of 122 fowls, including 87 chickens.

Today, NSW is the nation's largest egg producing state – providing 30% of Australia's fresh eggs.

Aussies have developed a huge appetite for eggs with every citizen on average consuming 249 (or about 16kg) of eggs each year.

Collectively, egg farmers across Australia produce about 19 million eggs daily. That's about 6.22 billion eggs a year.

As the first state to produce eggs, NSW has recorded a bumpy history of commercial egg farming, involving systems of regulation, de-

Images: Early egg production.
Below: First Fleet 1788 (NSW state collection)

regulation and the introduction of new animal welfare and food production laws.

It's hard to believe, but the free trade of eggs between Australian states was once outlawed and egg sales were confined within each state border.

The NSW Egg Marketing Board was established in 1928.

Under the state board, the practcie called 'vesting' occured - meaning that all commercial eggs were the property of the board from the time the egg was laid.

Retail prices were controlled by the board an- which impacted the free trade of of eggs.

An egg quota system (stipulating the number of eggs a commercial farmer could produce or sell) was put in place in 1971. The administration of these quotas was controlled by the Poultry Farmers Licencing Committee.

There was once a large surplus of eggs in NSW as a direct result of these systems and some farmers chose to exit the industry

and sell their quotas to others.

After almost 70 years of various trade restrictions, the industry was deregulated and the NSW Egg Marketing Board ceased in 1983.

It was replaced in 1989 by the NSW Egg Corporation and by the 1990's, allprevious regulations that controlled the egg trade, were abolished.

At this time an industry body to represent the interests of commercial egg farmers was born, known as the Australian Egg Industry Association (AEIA).

But deregulation came at a price to NSW taxpayers. NSW farmers who had traded hen quotas at $18 per hen, soon found that under deregulation, the quotas had no trade value.

The NSW state government provided $15 per hen as a form of compensation to affected licenced egg farmers. Eventually, the state agreed to buy out egg farmers who faced losses, due to the abolition of the quota system.

Other more modern significant developments in the egg industry impacting on NSW farmers included: the introduction of

Image: Early NSW Egg Marketing Board packing crete.
Below: NSW egg farmer Bede Burke (Tamworth - Northern Daily Leader)

a Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals in 2002, the abolition of so-called 'battery hens' in 2008, and new national regulations placed on use of conventional cages.

In 2012, a National Primary Production and

Processing Standard for Eggs and egg products was adopted, after being developed by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (ANZFA).

In 2017, the state's stocking density definition for free range became 10,000 hens (or fewer) per hectare.

In 2022, updated Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the egg industry are expected to be adopted, following nearly eight years of consultation and revision. These guidelines govern the way hens are looked after on commercial farms.

Historically, as Australia's oldest state and first European colony, there are many families who have been farming eggs for up to four generations.

Prominent NSW egg families include names such as: Pace, Pirovic, Burke, Peffer, Langfield, Fenech and Moncrieff.

These days it's estimated that NSW commercial egg farmers produce at least 1.86 billion eggs annually.