



THE VOICE OF AUSTRALIA'S LEADING FREE RANGE, CAGE & BARN LAID EGG FARMERS

## BACKGROUND: AUSTRALIAN ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

In July 2023 a joint meeting of the federal and all state agriculture ministers is expected to endorse an updated version of the ***Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry***.

This document applies to all industries that work with poultry – including Australian egg farmers and poultry meat producers.

The revised document follows recommendations from a recent review into such standards by a three-member panel, appointed by the government.

The process is referred to as the “S&G”.

The work to update a new S&G for the nation’s poultry and egg industries has taken over 11 years to reach this point.

## WHAT IS S&G?

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry govern the way hens should be cared for on egg and poultry-meat farms.

Similar *Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines* apply to other intensive livestock industries in Australia such as cattle and sheep.

According to the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: “*The poultry standards aim to harmonise national animal welfare legislation, providing clarity and consistency to industry, consumers and trading partners*” on the welfare of hens.

This [link](#) takes you to the official S&G website:

## HOW HAVE EGG FARMERS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE REVIEW PROCESS?

Initial consultation about the need to update the Standards and Guidelines (S&G) for the poultry sector started 11 years ago.

From the first meetings in 2012, Australia's commercial egg farmers have continued to work through this process at a national level.

After a 10 year delay, the current proposed S&G guidelines were released for consideration in August 2022.

This followed a review by a three-member panel appointed by the government, which conducted a series of public and industry hearings around the country.

The panel included:

- **Renata Brooks** (Chair) - a former vet and animal welfare manager with the NSW state government.
- **Professor Andrew Fisher** - a vet and Director of the Animal Welfare Science Centre at the University of Melbourne.
- **Mark Townend AM** - former Chief Executive Officer of RSPCA, Queensland.

This [link](#) takes you to the review panel's recommendations and proposed updated S&G document that has been presented to the federal and state agriculture ministers for sign-off.

## IMPORTANT NOTE FOR JOURNALISTS REPORTING ON THIS ISSUE

It should be noted that the term "battery hen" or battery cages" is incorrect and misleading.

Australian egg farmers **no longer** use single cages for hens .

This practice was stamped out in 2008. The ABC, and its national consumer reporters, senior editors and investigative reporters in particular, continue to incorrectly report this term – despite repeatedly being corrected.

Australian poultry vet and researcher, Dr Rod Jenner, said Australia's cage egg production was far more ethical today (than 15 years ago) and modern hens were healthy and thriving.

This [link](#) gives more information on this outdated term.

Currently, there are three forms of commercial egg production in Australia: free range, barn laid and *conventional* cage eggs.

## EGG FARMERS POSITION ON CONVENTIONAL CAGE EGGS

Egg Farmers of Australia (EFA) is the national body that represents the nation's commercial free range, barn laid and conventional cage egg farmers.

In its submission to the S&G review, EFA took the view, that over time, conventional cages should be phased out in Australia – but not before 2046.

The year 2046 is based on the amount of time that it takes to 'pay off' bank debts that were used to previously finance such conventional cage facilities, equipment and other requirements linked to this form of egg business.

## WHY COMMERCIAL CAGE EGG FARMERS WOULD SEEK COMPENSATION

In difference to this, the updated proposed S&G document suggests conventional cages should be phased out 10 years earlier, by 2036.

Commercial egg farmers warn that if the federal or state governments want conventional cages phased out early (by 2036), then egg farmers will need structural adjustment packages paid to them (by their relevant state government) to compensate either for their exit from the industry or to allow them to make an early transition into other egg production methods (such a free range or barn laid).

EFA has previously warned the review panel, that if conventional egg farmers are forced out of the egg industry prior to 2046, Australian consumers could experience a shortage of egg supplies on store shelves. This is because, currently, conventional cage eggs make up the highest volume of overall eggs sales in Australia and account for 33% of egg sold in supermarkets.

## WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF AG MINISTERS PHASED OUT CONVENTIONAL CAGE EGGS EARLIER THAN 2046?

Such a decision would result in future egg shortages, impacting on Australian consumers.

If one method of egg production was prematurely removed from the market, there would be less eggs available to Aussie families. The cost of eggs (which are currently one of the most affordable sources of protein) would rise dramatically.

Further, conventional cage eggs have the least risk of being impacted by disease, such as Avian Influenza (A.I), when compared to free range or barn laid hens - that can be left exposed to wild birds/or potential A.I carriers. The UK, USA and New Zealand all experienced eggs shortages and higher prices when disease outbreaks impacted their laying flocks.

That's why commercial eggs farmers urge the federal and state agriculture ministers to take make a sensible decision on the S&G conventional caged egg clause. By leaving conventional cages in place until 2046, they would ensure long term egg industry employment and food security for all Aussie families. Egg farmers would then have time to pay off their conventional cage debts and transition into other egg production methods.