



Assessing beef cattle body condition for transport or sale at a saleyard

Current as of March 2023.

This factsheet assists a person responsible for beef cattle in meeting their animal welfare obligations when assessing whether beef cattle in poor body condition are fit for transport or sale at a saleyard.

Beef cattle in poor body condition

Under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, it is a cruelty offence for a person in charge of an animal to fail to provide the animal with proper and sufficient food and water. It is not acceptable to leave animals in poor condition, and they must never be allowed to starve to death. Before an animal reaches a body condition score (BCS) of 1, the person in charge of the animal must provide one or more of the following:

- supplementary feed (with a ration with sufficient energy density/nutrient balance for the class of livestock)
- sell, agist, feedlot or send to abattoir (only if the animal's body condition is fit-to-load and transport)
- humane destruction (euthanasia).

Body condition score assessment in beef cattle (1 to 5 scale)

Body condition can be easily assessed using the BCS system. Key reference body sites (Image 1) are assessed visually **and** by touch. This assessment gives an overall score of between 1 and 5, where BCS 1 is extremely poor condition (emaciated) and 5 is over-fat. Table 1 on page 5 provides more detail on how to assess beef cattle. **For the purposes of the Animal Welfare (Transport Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020 (Transport Regulations), beef cattle with a BCS of 1 or less are emaciated, and immediate intervention is necessary to protect their welfare.**

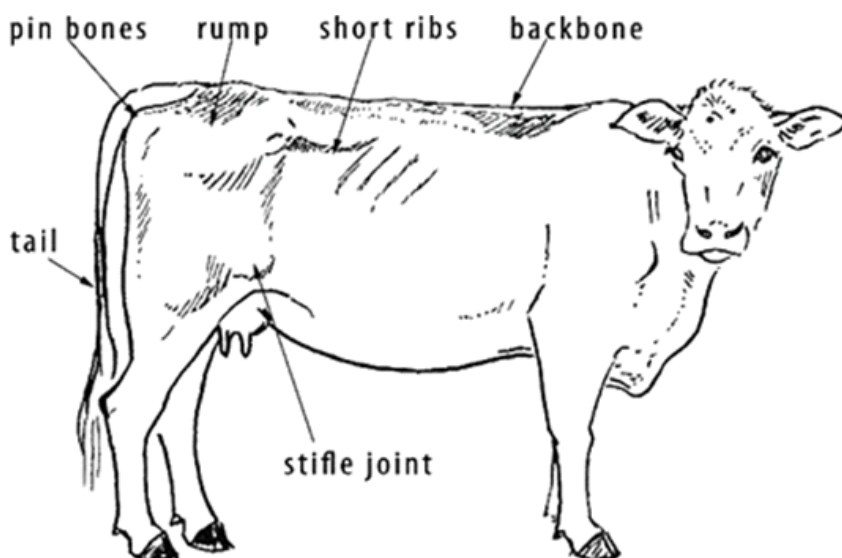


Image 1 – Key reference sites for assessing BCS in beef cattle

Emaciated beef cattle must not be transported or offered for sale at saleyard

Under the Transport Regulations emaciated (BCS 1 or less) beef cattle must not be supplied for transport, loaded on a transport vehicle or offered for sale at saleyard.

Where cattle could become emaciated, the person responsible for the animal must make decisions early to move, sell, agist, feedlot, export or send to saleyards, private sale for restockers or sell to abattoir **before** they become emaciated, and options are limited.

Appropriate arrangements for emaciated cattle should be made at the first reasonable opportunity.

Appropriate arrangements for beef cattle that are not fit for transport or sale

Appropriate arrangements means one or more of the following, depending on the condition of the cattle:

- separating the animal from any other animal and resting it until it has recovered
- treating the animal as appropriate to its condition, including seeking veterinary advice
- destroying the animal using a method of humane destruction.

At the first reasonable opportunity

At the first reasonable opportunity means that the appropriate arrangements for the animal are undertaken without delay except where a reasonable delay is caused by a significant reason relating to resources, skills, safety or the immediate welfare of other livestock.

Livestock must be fit for the journey

Under the Transport Regulations, it is an offence for all persons involved in the process to consign or load beef cattle for transport, that are unfit to undertake the journey, whether from the property of origin, saleyard or other place.

Beef cattle that have been assessed as not fit for transport cannot be sold at a saleyard. If an animal is considered borderline for its fitness to undertake the journey, consider whether the animal's condition will deteriorate during the journey and/or at the saleyard rendering them unfit for sale or further transportation. Animals will be assessed at a saleyard prior to sale and again prior to consigning and loading on the transport vehicle for the outward journey.

Exemption

An animal that is unfit to undertake a journey may be loaded and transported only under the following conditions:

- the consignor and/or transporter has advice from a veterinarian that the animal can undertake the intended journey
- the transporter ensures that the animal is loaded and transported in accordance with the veterinarian's advice
- the transporter ensures the animal is transported the shortest distance necessary either to another property or abattoir.

A copy of the veterinary advice should accompany the animal to the final destination.

It is strongly recommended the veterinary advice is provided in writing. It is up to the consignor and/or the transporter to prove the veterinarian advised the animal could undertake the journey and was loaded and transported in accordance with the advice of the veterinarian.

Animals transported under veterinary advice must not be sent to a saleyard as they cannot be offered for sale or sold.

More information

- *Animal Welfare Act 2002*
- Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock; Livestock at Saleyards and Depots; Cattle
- A National Guide to Describing and Managing Beef Cattle in Low Body Condition (<https://publications.mla.com.au/login/redirectFrame>)
- Animal Welfare Factsheets
 - Are your livestock fit to load?
 - Are sheep and cattle fit to be sold at a saleyard?
 - Assessing dairy cattle body condition for transport or sale at a saleyard
 - Humane destruction of sheep and cattle
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Consignors and Transporters
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Saleyards
- agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare



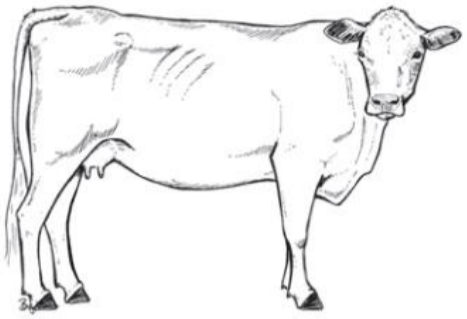
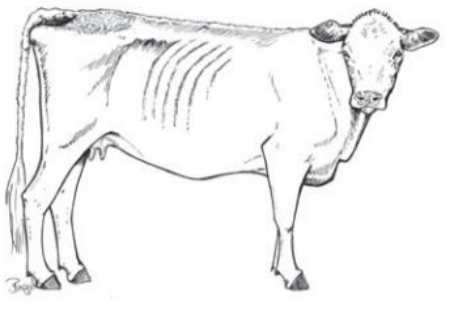
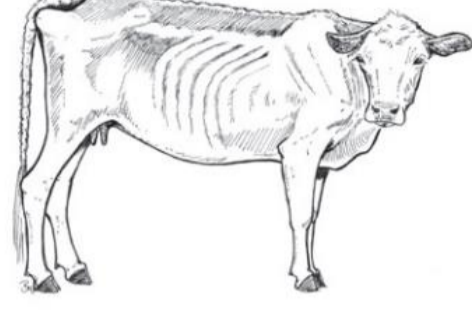
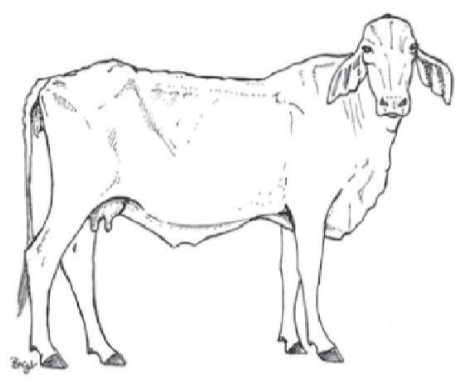
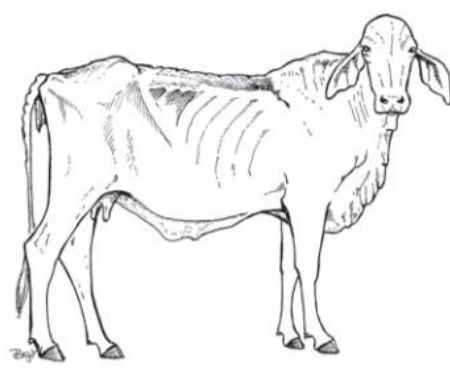
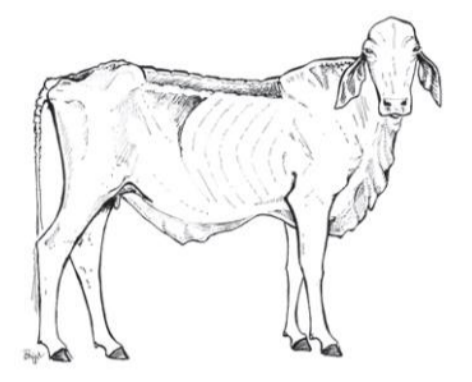
For more information and to view the suite of animal welfare factsheets, scan the QR code, or visit: <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/resources-and-publications>.

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Table 1 – Welfare decisions for beef cattle based on animal condition

	BCS 2	BCS 1	BCS 0
<i>Bos taurus</i> animals			
<i>Bos indicus</i> animals			
Backbone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easily seen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spines of backbone identifiable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spines of backbone individually identifiable
Short ribs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visible but not individually Fairly sharp to touch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prominent and very sharp to touch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very prominent and easy to see individually
Inside pin bones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slightly sunken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deeply sunken to the bone
Muscle wastage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rump muscle concave (between hooks and pins) and leg muscle beginning to waste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rump muscle concave. Muscle wastage in loin and leg muscle evident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Muscle wastage over whole body Rump and leg muscles deeply concave
Stifle joint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not identifiable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not identifiable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifiable
Tail bones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual bones not identifiable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual bones just able to be felt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual bones easily felt
Skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pliable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less pliable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tight
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bright, alert 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alert 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacking energy or dull
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal gait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobile, able to lie down/rise with ease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsteady gait May drag or cross over hind feet Difficulty lying down/standing up
Hump (<i>Bos indicus</i> only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firm with no slack skin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slack skin over hump 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level of assistance required
Health risks and prognosis for recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced reproductive performance likely At risk of death from cold, wet weather and other stress Should recover with adequate feed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlikely to conceive, if pregnant, may need assistance during calving At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress Able to recover in time if adequately fed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress If pregnant, may need assistance during calving Slow recovery reliant on high-quality care
Fitness for transport and sale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitable for transport but with minimum time off feed to manage the risk to welfare Suitable for sale but must not be kept off feed for extended periods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfit for transport except in accordance with veterinary advice Unfit for sale at saleyards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfit for transport except in accordance with veterinary advice Unfit for sale at saleyards
Actions required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May remain on farm, be transported to another farm, saleyard or to slaughter, or humanely destroyed on farm Must be provided with proper and sufficient feed and water to prevent further loss of condition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be provided with proper and sufficient feed and water or humanely destroyed on farm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be provided with proper and sufficient feed and water or humanely destroyed on farm Very high level of care and nutrition required

Adapted from *A National Guide to Describing and Managing Beef Cattle in Low Body Condition* published by Meat & Livestock Australia