



Consultation on livestock branding and earmarking in Queensland

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. The AVA consists of over 8500 members who come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Summary

The AVA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the consultation on livestock branding and ear-marking in Queensland.

The AVA is of the position that current branding, ear-marking or ear-notching methods are no longer fit for today's biosecurity needs or indeed animal identification and traceability requirements, and as such believes that radiofrequency identification (RFID) is the preferred method of permanently identifying individual animals

If RFID identification methods are not deemed possible to be adopted at this time, the AVA would support 2A of the options made available.

Option 2A – Giving owners the option of an exemption from mandatory branding cattle or pigs (choice to opt-out).

This allows for cattle and pigs to be managed in the same manner as horses, sheep, goats, and camels where branding is voluntary.

Discussion

Animal welfare is potentially compromised when carrying out branding and ear-marking identification methods, specifically that the provision of suitable anaesthesia or analgesia is often impracticable or impossible when branding.

For these reasons, the AVA believes that radiofrequency identification (RFID) is the preferred method of permanently identifying individual animals.

In accordance with the AVA policies: [Identification of cattle](#) and [Electronic Identification of animals](#), we recommend that the following be adopted with the regards to livestock identification in Queensland.

Radiofrequency identification (RFID)

With regards to cattle, a national system enabling individual identification and traceability is strongly supported as it is a critical tool for effective farm management, food safety, disease control and international trade.

RFID ear tags and rumen implants are the most humane methods of accurately identifying cattle.

Where branding is necessary in many situations, the use of freeze branding is recommended in preference to hot-iron branding for permanent identification.



Branding guidelines

- Recommended procedures for freeze branding
 - Liquid nitrogen and dry ice are satisfactory sources of freezing medium for freeze branding.
 - It is advisable to freeze brand when cattle are over 6 months of age, in order to minimise distortion of the brand.
 - Because the application of the irons is for a limited time (less than 20 seconds) and the procedure involves limited pain, no anaesthetic is required.
 - Suitable facilities should be provided to comfortably restrain cattle so that only minimal body movement is possible during application of branding irons. The area to be branded should be clipped free of hair to provide close contact between the branding iron and the skin. The branding iron should be clean and free from organic material and oxidation.
- Recommended procedures for hot-iron branding
 - Cattle may be branded at the same time as ear marking, dehorning, castration or application of prophylactic or production-aimed medication, including vaccines. Only healthy and fit animals should be branded.
 - Provision of suitable anaesthesia or analgesia is often impracticable or impossible for hot-iron branding under extensive pastoral management systems, where large numbers of cattle are handled. In such cases, hot-iron branding should be performed as efficiently and as humanely as possible to minimise pain in the cattle.
 - Cattle should not be branded if their hair is wet. Branding should not be conducted if animals are expected to get wet within 24 hours.
 - Animals to be branded must be comfortably restrained to allow minimal body movement so that the site to be branded is stationary and easily accessible. The animal should be released into an open yard immediately after branding and then within 6 hours to a normal grazing environment.
 - The branding site should be dry and clean skin, preferably pre-clipped if the hair is long. The branding area should have minimal dust. Sites posterior to a perpendicular line through the tubal coxa, and above the hock, but not within 100 mm of the knee or hock joint, of the anus or vagina, or of the midline, are recommended. Alternatively, sites posterior to the shoulder, above the elbow, and anterior to a perpendicular line through the posterior edge of the scapula, but not within 100 mm of the midline or shoulder or elbow joints, are acceptable.
 - The branding iron should provide contact surface all in one plane with a width of contact surface of at least 2.5 mm. The iron must be free of organic matter and oxidised metal.
 - Branding should be performed by, or under the direct supervision of, an experienced competent operator. Cattle of any age can be hot-iron branded. Hot irons should be heated to, and not beyond, a dull-red colour immediately prior to application. The iron's flat surface should be held firmly against the skin until the hair and superficial skin under the contact surfaces are burnt, and not longer than three seconds, whichever is shorter.

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