

## **Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare review 2010**

### **What stage is the review at?**

The National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) has completed its review of the 2005 Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare and has released a draft for public consultation.

The review was programmed in the 2005 code so NAWAC could re-examine the issues surrounding the use of confinement systems in pig production (such as dry sow stalls and farrowing crates). The use of dry sow stalls and farrowing crates have been criticised as failing to meet the obligations of the Animal Welfare Act because they prevent sows from having the opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour.

Worldwide, there is growing public and consumer opposition to these forms of confinement of pigs. Some science also supports the need for change.

The review also enabled NAWAC to convert the code to a new style in which minimum standards are now statements of welfare outcomes to be achieved, rather than prescriptions of husbandry practice. The minimum standards are accompanied by example indicators of how the achievement of the minimum standard might be measured.

### **What are the “normal patterns of behaviour” mentioned above?**

New Zealand's Animal Welfare Act defines five physical, health and behavioural needs of animals. The Act qualifies these needs by saying that how they are met depends on the species of animal, their environment and their circumstances. What this means is that the Act recognises that domestication of animals and farming practices can modify the behaviours animals may display.

Pigs are social animals and prefer to live in groups. Sows have a strong urge to build a nest in the days leading up to farrowing (giving birth to piglets) but will chose a separate existence when farrowing or raising a litter.

Pigs of all ages are motivated to show behaviours such as rooting, chewing and other forms of oral and nasal stimulation. These behaviours are positive and should be catered for as far as possible. However, pigs of all ages, in all production systems, are hierarchical and fight to establish dominance when they meet for the first time. The hierarchy is maintained through aggression and this is exploited by dominant pigs to win food, water and space. Injuries from fighting can be severe enough to cause death or removal from the group.

Subordinate pigs can suffer from lack of access to food and water while dominant sows getting more than their fair share may become over-fat to the detriment of their health. Vices such as tail, ear and vulva biting are manifestations of aggression and the level of aggression among sows can be particularly severe in early pregnancy.

### **How do these behavioural issues affect the code review?**

The challenge in modern pig production is to manage aggression while giving pigs the opportunity to express a greater range of behaviours. The draft code of welfare addresses techniques to achieve this, noting that above all, stockmanship is the most important characteristic.

Where the aggressive behaviour is severe, such as in sows, confining them and denying them freedom to express some normal (good and bad) behaviours may be necessary to ensure that all pigs in a group can have their needs met for food, water, shelter and avoiding physical harm.

### **What are NAWAC's recommendations?**

NAWAC has re-affirmed its belief that the use of dry sow stalls and farrowing crates should be eventually phased out, but only when a number of criteria can be met. These criteria include the availability of alternative management systems and technologies that deliver better overall animal welfare outcomes at a cost that allows New Zealand producers to remain competitive with producers of imported product who are using lower welfare standards than those proposed for New Zealand.

For dry sow stalls, this means allowing greater freedom of movement and socialisation while effectively managing aggressive behaviour. For farrowing crates, it means comparable protection of the piglets while allowing the sow greater freedom of movement and fulfilling their desire for nest building and isolation from the herd at the critical period around birth.

NAWAC looked at what has happened or is happening in other countries and noted that while the pressure to change is spawning research into alternative farrowing systems for indoor production, none have yet reached a stage that NAWAC could, with confidence, require the New Zealand industry to adopt now. NAWAC and the New Zealand Pork Industry Board will continue to independently monitor domestic and overseas research and developments for relevant technologies and systems that can be adopted by New Zealand producers and NAWAC will consider a review of the code as and when such developments can lead to better welfare outcomes.

Accordingly, the draft code contains minimum standards that limit the use of farrowing crates to four weeks post-farrowing from the date of issue of the code and limit the use of dry sow stalls to four weeks post-mating after 31 December 2012 (aligns to the European Union directive) after which the sows must be group housed.

The draft code also proposes the use of dry sow stalls be phased out at a date to be determined following the consultation process.

### **How is this different to the code issued in 2005?**

In the 2005 code, NAWAC limited the period that sows are kept in farrowing crates to six weeks and dry sow stalls to four weeks by 2015.

NAWAC stated in that code that it would like to see dry sow stalls phased out but only when viable alternative management systems were found to improve overall animal welfare.

**Is this code final?**

No. The code that has gone out for public consultation is a draft only. There have not been any final decisions made and NAWAC welcomes submissions on whether the minimum standards and recommendations have gone too far, or not far enough and welcomes comments on the content of the code and proposed timing of changes

**Why can't research from other countries be used so that we can copy what they're doing?**

While a lot of research and trialling of alternative systems is going on in Europe and North America, the answers are proving elusive and none have yet reached a stage that NAWAC could, with confidence, require the New Zealand industry to adopt now.

It is clear to NAWAC and the New Zealand Pork Industry that good stockmanship is a key element of managing sows in any system.

**Other countries have banned sow stalls. Why can't New Zealand do it now?**

In some countries, such as Canada and the USA, dry sow stalls are permitted. Australia has recently brought in revised pig standards of six weeks maximum in dry sow stalls of any gestation period from 2017. The European Union will only allow confinement in dry sow stalls for a maximum of four weeks after mating, the same as our Code, from 1 January 2013.

Some individual countries like the UK, Sweden and Finland have banned dry sow stalls. The Netherlands allows a very short period of 4 days, and Switzerland 10 days, after mating. However, these countries all import significant amounts of pork from neighbouring countries with lower welfare standards.

NAWAC believes that the use of dry sow stalls and farrowing crates should be eventually phased out, but only when a number of criteria can be met. These criteria include the availability of alternative management systems and technologies that deliver better overall animal welfare outcomes at a cost that allows New Zealand producers to remain competitive with producers of imported product.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has conducted a draft economic analysis incorporating some data provided by the pork industry. The draft economic analysis can be viewed here: <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/biosec/consult>

**Why has the review taken so long?**

While NAWAC has made the review of the pigs code its top priority, the Animal Welfare Act requires any review to follow the same steps as if it were a new code.

The initial draft has to be discussed with those that are affected, such as the Pork Industry Board, RSPCA and veterinarians. NAWAC then prepares a draft that goes out for public consultation and only after this has been done (and all the submissions considered) is NAWAC in a position to recommend a revised code to the Minister of Agriculture, for issue.

Naturally this is a process that takes time, but it results in a very robust outcome.

This is the same process detailed in the Animal Welfare Act that applies to the development and review of all codes. For more information on developing codes of welfare and the current status of codes of welfare see:

<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/regs/animal-welfare/stds/codes>

### **What happens next?**

There are a number of steps NAWAC goes through when developing and reviewing codes, and dependant on the outcomes from the consultation period, the Committee aims to recommend the code to the Minister of Agriculture by the end of the year.

As above, visit the website for information about codes of welfare and NAWACs processes.

### **Has there been any analysis of the economic impacts on the industry?**

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has conducted a draft economic analysis incorporating some data provided by the pork industry. The draft economic analysis can be viewed here: <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/biosec/consult>

The draft analysis models the estimated impact of proposed changes at future dates for the use of sow stalls to be discontinued.

Submissions are invited on the draft economic analysis and will be considered. If there are any changes made to the analysis after consultation that have implications for the code NAWAC will take these into account before finalising it.

### **Who has been involved in the review?**

The draft code has been reviewed in consultation with representatives of farmers, veterinarians and animal welfare organisations such as the SPCA.

### **How do I make a submission?**

The draft code and draft economic analysis is available at <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/biosec/consult> and the closing date for submissions is 16 April. Anyone wanting to make submissions should do so in writing to:

NAWAC Secretary  
MAF Biosecurity New Zealand  
PO Box 2526  
Wellington 6140

Or by email to: [animalwelfare@maf.govt.nz](mailto:animalwelfare@maf.govt.nz)

### **When will the review of the layer hens code review take place?**

The Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2005 was due to be reviewed this year, however the review of the pigs code has been made a priority by NAWAC and the Minister of Agriculture, and this is where efforts have been focused.

NAWAC expects to complete its review of the layer hens code later in the year and there will be an opportunity for the public to make submissions on any proposed changes when it is released for public consultation.