

# DEVELOPING A CONSISTENT APPROACH TO NLIS PRACTICES IN MEAT PROCESSING – STAGE 1

## THE PROJECT

During 2012, AMPC and MLA funded a project to develop accredited training programs to assist meat processing plants to meet their National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) requirements. The project was driven by an increasing desire on the part of regulators and industry to achieve a higher level of compliance with NLIS requirements.

The importance of the NLIS for the biosecurity of the Australian livestock industry and meeting importing country requirements is well established and an accepted prerequisite for having a sustainable and viable red meat industry.

However, ensuring the compliance of all the players in the red meat supply chain is the ongoing challenge for industry and regulators. In undertaking this project, MINTRAC focused on equipping the red meat processing sector with the QA and training resources necessary to achieve compliance with the NLIS requirements and provide a means for addressing the challenge of staff competency in the face of ongoing staff turnover.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project was to develop training programs that will improve the overall competency of meat industry personnel in complying with NLIS requirements. The courses and training materials will allow processors to enhance the consistency of their reporting for the NLIS on cattle, sheep and goat processing activities.

Throughout the project, MINTRAC worked with a technical reference group consisting of representatives of industry and regulators to develop:

- task descriptions for plant personnel interacting with the NLIS from stock buying through to NLIS data uploads
- model work instructions and SOPs to address these tasks
- accredited Units of competency to cover these tasks
- training and assessment materials to support the delivery of the Units.

## Developing work instructions and SOPs

The initial task was to identify the NLIS-related tasks undertaken by meat processing plant staff. The identified tasks varied according to the species and identification system employed i.e. RFID in cattle versus visual tags in sheep. The NLIS tasks included the work undertaken by stock buyers, lairage managers, livestock clerks, slaughter floor NLIS data station operators, QA managers or those responsible for NLIS data uploads. Effectively this covered all personnel who interacted with the NLIS.

Having identified these tasks model work instructions and SOPs were developed to describe the procedures followed. These model work instructions and SOPs will obviously need customizing for each plant but they do provide QA managers with a starting point and a check list of activities normally undertaken. This will assist processors in documenting their own NLIS procedures for inclusion in their Approved Arrangements if they choose or if at some point regulators mandate the inclusion of NLIS activities in the scope of the Approved Arrangement.

Formally documenting NLIS related procedures will also facilitate the routine internal auditing of NLIS procedures and enable more structured assessment of NLIS compliance by regulators and or third party auditors.

## New accredited Units of Competency

Once the discrete NLIS tasks and activities had been identified it was possible to define the individual Units of Competency. After that with the assistance of industry and technical experts it was possible to identify the required skills and knowledge necessary to competently undertake the NLIS related tasks. There were fifteen individual Units of Competency developed and submitted for national accreditation. These Units were approved and added to the MTM11 *Australian Meat Industry Training Package* (v3) released

in November 2012. The Units form electives for the *Certificate III in Meat Processing (General)* and can be undertaken as lone Units or as part of a qualification.

The accrediting of the Units has also enabled the industry to access government funding in some States and this will further reduce the impost on processors and encourage the uptake of the training.

## Training and assessment materials

With the assistance of Ken Evers (Vic DPI), training and assessment materials have been developed for each of the Units and these formed the basis of the subsequent train the trainer and pilot courses.

These training and assessment materials are now available to users as Word documents so that they can be easily customised to the particular requirements of each State jurisdiction. Likewise as the NLIS requirements change, are amended or are clarified training materials can be modified immediately by RTOs. The materials will also be kept up to date via MINTRAC's annual review and update process.

## E-learning practice CD

The e-learning component of the training materials creates a virtual NLIS database on which students can practice interrogating the database for such things as 'beast enquiries', PIC statuses and current holdings. In addition, students can practice uploading slaughter data and analysing error messages. The e-learning activities are available on a CD and students will be directed to these activities as they work through the written material for each Unit.



## Pilot training sessions

Following the accreditation of the Units and the development of draft materials, pilot training sessions were run in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. These sessions enabled the piloting of the materials and the training of trainers.

Because of the overwhelming demand for train the trainer courses it was decided to combine the pilot and train the trainer courses in each state to maximise industry and RTO capacity to deliver this program.

This means there are now RTO and company NLIS trainers in Victoria, NSW and Queensland with courses having been run in Melbourne, Wagga and Brisbane. The courses were well attended with over 75 participants having enrolled either in the Units relevant to their plants operations or to their duties. Out of the 75 enrolled 37 of the students were either company or RTO trainers.

## RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

The industry is now in a position to ensure that staff can be trained and their competency assessed in a systematic way against accredited standards.

As a result of this project industry can now roll out a comprehensive NLIS training program and where appropriate underachieving companies can be assisted to up-skill workers and improve compliance rates. A second AMPC/MLA funded project already commenced will underpin this roll out of NLIS training.

The availability of the training and the model NLIS work instructions and SOPs will also make it easier for companies to integrate NLIS procedures into their Approved Arrangement should this become a mandated requirement for their Approved Arrangement. Equally important, these resources will enable the NLIS training of regulatory officers which will be consistent with that provided to the industry.

The benefits to industry of having a well functioning NLIS are significant because without a well operating NLIS system it is impossible to respond effectively to livestock biosecurity emergencies. The red meat processing industry is currently revisiting its biosecurity procedures and protocols through the development of industry biosecurity standards. A corner stone of these standards will be competent staff at abattoirs routinely meeting the company's NLIS obligations.