



Infonote RANGELANDS

To curfew or not

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A 'curfew' is a generic term used in livestock industries describing the practice of enforced food, water or food and water deprivation, usually prior to transport, sale or slaughter (Fisher et al. 2006). Anecdotal reports from transporters, agents, producers and industry professionals indicate that stock tend to travel better when subjected to a curfew pre-transport, due to the reduced volume of faeces and urine on the truck floor; reducing the risk of slippage and falling. The *Model Code of Practice Land Transport (2002)* discusses 'emptying out time' as the deliberate and variable period of water and/or feed deprivation aimed to minimise faecal and urine spoilage of the transport vehicle and subsequent problems with animals slipping.

It is believed the idea of a curfew was originally implemented for stock loaded directly off a 'wet moist pasture'. Due to the high moisture content, stock faeces was fluid, allowing it to easily spread and stain both stock and truck. This resulted in stock presenting at local saleyards stained in faeces, increased the potential for injury (slipping) during transport and left transporters with soiled stock crates (both sides and floor) requiring cleaning.

Using data from a recent demonstration conducted at Leopold Downs station and Roebuck Export Depot (RED) (looking at *weight change in feeder bulls between yarding and delivery to the exporter*), a comparison was made between two groups (one subjected to a 12-hour food curfew pre-transport and the other not) and on the state, post-trucking, of both the animals and the stock crates used to transport them.

Two pens (60 in each) of Brahman X feeder bulls with an initial average liveweight of 246 kg (range 200–350 kg) were used. Feeder bulls in group one of the trial were fasted off shipper pellets for 12 hours prior to trucking while similar feeder bulls in group four of the trial were not. Both groups remained on water until loading at Leopold. Feeder bulls in group one were off food for 21 hours. This involved a 12-hour food curfew (at Leopold); transport to RED of 5 hours and weighing pre and post-trucking of 4 hours. Feeder bulls in group four were off feed for 9 hours (5 hours trucking – 4 hours weighing).

At their pre-trucking weighing on Leopold Downs feeder bulls in group one (fasted off food) weighed on average 7.70 kg (3.13%) lighter than feeder bulls in the non-fasted group four. On arrival at RED the difference was 9.81 kg (3.98%).

It was expected that more faeces would be observed on the trailer floors of the stock crates carrying stock not subjected to a curfew (group four), as these stock did not have 12 hours in which to empty out prior to trucking as was the case for group one animals. However, there was no visible difference in the amount of faeces covering the trailer floors between each of the respective groups. There was also no difference in the amount of faeces covering animals post-trucking. This was not surprising as pellets used as part of the trial were dry, with a moisture content of 8.5% (similar to grasses in the northern rangelands at the end of the dry) and therefore less likely to exhibit 'fluid-like' tendencies.

Presupposing that imposing a curfew offers no substantiated benefits in helping cattle cope with transport, producers who curfew stock pre-transport are likely to be delivering stock to the point of sale weighing less than if a curfew had not been implemented.



Feeder bulls from Group 1 (pink tags); shipper pellets in poly trough.

References

Fisher, A, Ferguson, D, Lee, C, Colditz, L, Belson, S, Lapworth, J & Petherick, C 2006, *Cataloguing land transport science and practices in Australia*, final project report B.AHW.0126 submitted to MLA.

Model Code of Practice Land Transport, 2002, CSIRO publishing.