

# LIVESTOCK LOADING AND UNLOADING INFRASTRUCTURE: DRIVER AND ANIMAL WELFARE MUST REMAIN PARAMOUNT



*By LBRCA President Lynley Miners*

Livestock loading ramps are necessary for transporting livestock in the agricultural supply chain and are present at farms, feedlots, saleyards, transport depots and processors.

The task of loading or unloading livestock into vehicles is a dangerous part of the transport task with occasional major accidents including deaths such as the case of Chad A. Lynch (Victorian Coroners Court Reference: COR 2013 4693).

These events are unfortunate, however can be prevented through responsible infrastructure design, regular maintenance, clear operating procedures, and routine equipment inspections.

When sub-standard loading and unloading ramps or rules regarding their use fail in critical parts of the road transport supply chain, the role of a livestock carrier is made more challenging.

An unfortunate consequence of our current predicament is that economic self-interest usually drives infrastructure owners to provide only the bare minimum to meet their own operational and legislative needs.

Any needs outside the bare minimum 'rule of thumb' are considered 'not my problem' and the responsibility of 'someone else'.

This mindset requires urgent adjustment. Welfare obligations of both the driver and livestock must be paramount, regardless of any commercial or other non-welfare or safety related interests.

And this has been a core focus for the LBRCA in 2017; to collaborate with Councils and private owners to implement safer and more modern facilities across the supply chain to meet animal and driver welfare standards, comply with transport laws, enact safety obligations, and maintain processes that are clear and foolproof.

The transport of livestock is a unique task. We carry live cargo and to do this safely, drivers must complete specific training to comply with animal welfare standards, animal handling practices, driving vehicles up to 4.6m high and working at heights.

These are in addition to other requirements of the role including management of fatigue, vehicle maintenance, driver welfare, load restraint, scheduling, record keeping, route navigation, and workplace health and safety.

We don't have a team of people packing our load to transport; we must do this ourselves. We can't go from point A to point B without stopping regularly to check the welfare of the livestock. We use specialised vehicles to carry out the task, with many retrofitted with an effluent tank to capture animal waste; we are responsible for the safe disposal of this bi-product and can face a fine for not containing this properly during transit. We cannot drive through an automated truck wash for cleaning; we must regularly wash our own vehicles to mitigate against bio-security concerns.

As a livestock transporter, it's clear we carry our fair share of responsibility and we must rely on other parties in the chain to do their bit too.

Responsibility extends to all our supply chain partners, regardless of whether the site is publicly or privately owned and operated. Processes and infrastructure must be provided in a way that minimises risk to the welfare of the livestock and driver.

Responsibility must be shared and should not fall solely on the driver.

It's a simple message. Everyone has a right to carry out their work in a safe environment – so why should transport operators be treated differently.

Our partners in the agricultural supply chain must step up and join the chain – the Chain of Responsibility – with the aim to ensure all parties involved in the transport of livestock do deliver safer and more efficient facilities, including related processes, which do meet industry and community expectations.

**Contact:** Lynley Miners, LBRCA President | 0412 780 673

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