

Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare 2010 Background information Q&As

Why does the code phase out sow stalls by 2015 instead of banning them now?

Phasing out sow stalls over a five year period will improve the welfare of pigs and help protect the long term sustainability of the pork industry.

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. Science also supports the need for change.

The five year phase out period enables farmers to plan the necessary changes to their production systems, secure finance and resource consents, and train staff in the management techniques needed to successfully manage pigs in group housed systems.

What impact will the phase out of sow stalls have on the pork industry?

NAWAC and MAF have considered the economic impact of a ban on dry sow stalls on New Zealand pork producers and consumers.

The phase out of dry sow stalls will have a financial impact on the approximately 40% of pork producers who still use them, however, it is not believed that it will have a major, long term effect on the industry.

Along with capital investment requirements, the phase out of dry sow stalls may increase feed and labour costs for producers and reduce productivity. These costs could result in a small increase in the price of pork and a small reduction in the quantity of New Zealand pork produced.

Farmers have been provided with a five year timeframe to plan changes to their systems, secure resource consents and financing, and train staff in new management techniques so that the sustainability of the NZ industry is not put at risk.

What do other countries do?

In most countries, including USA and Canada, dry sow stalls are still permitted.

From 1 January 2013, the European Union (EU) will only allow confinement in dry sow stalls for a maximum of four weeks after mating.

Some individual EU countries no longer use dry sow stalls, namely the UK, Sweden and Finland. The Netherlands allows stalls to be used for a very short period of four days (for mating), and Switzerland for 10 days after mating.

Australia's standards set a maximum of six weeks in dry sow stalls during any gestation period from 2017. However, the Australian pork industry recently voted to pursue the voluntary phasing out of dry sow stalls after mating by 2017.

Both the EU and Australia will continue to allow the use of stalls for mating, the same as our code, though in both cases for longer than the one week maximum our code permits.

Farrowing crates are still permitted in all countries, except Switzerland.

Why are farrowing crates still allowed?

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 believes that the use of farrowing crates should be eventually phased out, but only when alternative management systems and technologies are available that deliver better overall animal welfare outcomes for both sows and piglets, and at a cost that allows New Zealand producers to remain competitive with producers of imported product.

The code includes a new requirement for manipulable material such as straw to be provided in all farrowing systems built from now on. This is to enable sows to perform nesting behaviour before they give birth. Many existing systems cannot cope with straw, but it is not acceptable for this to be allowed to continue in the future.

Why aren't all pigs kept in free range systems?

Free-range systems are not an option in many parts of New Zealand because the climate and soil types don't allow it. Even where environmental conditions are suitable, pigs need sufficient shelter to enable them to cope with adverse weather. The code includes requirements for shade and shelter for pigs outdoors.

Who was involved in the review?

NAWAC led the review of the code in consultation with the New Zealand Pork Industry Board, the RNZSPCA and the New Zealand Veterinary Association. The code underwent a thorough public consultation process earlier this year.

An international pig welfare expert also peer reviewed the code for NAWAC before it was recommended to the Minister of Agriculture for issue.

How does this code address the concerns raised in Sue Kedgley's Animal Welfare Bill?

Sue Kedgley's recently defeated Member's Bill wanted to see an end to individual animal confinement systems, such as dry sow stalls, within five years of its introduction. It also wanted animals to be provided with sufficient space to enable them to express normal patterns of behaviour.

This code will see an end to the use of dry sow stalls after mating in five years' time, which is a significant step towards improving sow welfare. It will also result in sows spending the majority of their time in systems that provide more space and enable them to display a wide range of normal behaviours. This is also a positive animal welfare outcome.

Unlike the Bill, the code recognises that there are occasions where it is necessary to confine animals to maintain an acceptable level of animal welfare. This is why farrowing crates and mating stalls have been permitted for short periods until practical alternatives are available.