

# A Practical Guide Safe Handling of Cattle

Having a basic understanding of, and healthy respect for, the natural behaviours and instincts of cattle will help to keep you safe when handling them. Cattle are prey animals, and their best form of defense is to run away from threats. When escape routes are blocked, they can become scared, their movements can be unpredictable and any pressure may be met with charging, kicking or crushing. Stock-yard design is also a critical component for safety.

The **biggest risks** attributed to cattle is their size and swiftness. Most realise that bulls can be dangerous, but so are cows, especially with young calves to protect. Cattle may view humans as a threat and react accordingly.

## Toolbox Talks

### MANAGER'S INSTRUCTIONS

- Ensure all participants have a copy to refer to and make notes
- Ensure you write the name of your farm, record the date and have all participants sign the master copy (*which should be kept as part of your farm's WH&S records*)
- Ensure your *Toolbox Talk* is done in a location suitable for the topic
- **Engage** with each other, ask questions and give everyday examples.



### WE ALL NEED TO REMEMBER

- If you are **unsure of anything** or feel that something you have been asked to do is dangerous, **DO NOT begin the task**. **ASK for assistance** or more information and we will work together to find a safe way to do the job or solve the problem.
- Ensure you are aware of the location of the nearest First Aid Kit.
- Make sure everyone is fit for work, free from signs of fatigue, drugs or alcohol. If in doubt, **ask** or talk to your manager.
- This farm is a workplace, but may also be a place of residence for the owner, their managers and employees. Be **vigilant** for children and bystanders at all times. Refer to [Child Safety on Farms](#)
- **The safety, health and wellbeing of all who live on, work on and visit this farm is the most important responsibility we all share.**

Even if we are busy and under time or financial pressures, **safety MUST come first.**



A MUST

## Risk Management Tools

[DOWNLOAD ONLINE MATRIX](#)

Use this simple and effective tool to assess and manage the risk of your farming activities prior to commencing. All team members can join in and contribute, developing different ways to manage risks on your farm. Doing a risk assessment helps determine hazards and develop appropriate control measures to lessen the risks.

### BEFORE WORKING WITH CATTLE

- **DO NOT** work with cattle if you haven't been properly trained – this includes mustering, working in yards or even checking calving cows. For more information, refer to [Safe Cattle Handling Guide](#).
- **DO NOT** wear high vis clothing, especially with reflective tape, as it can make cattle agitated.
- **Always** have an escape route planned in case you are charged at suddenly.
- **Double check gate** closing and latching prior to working with cattle.
- Be mindful of your body position in relation to gates and fences, especially when drafting – workers can be pinned, trapped or hit by gates with enough force to seriously injure or kill them.
- Good quality stockyard design and frequent maintenance of yards and facilities are important to the safety of both humans and animals. Make sure holding yards, race and crush are clean and tidy and in good working order **prior** to yarding the animals.
- To reduce the risk of dust inhalation and the transmission of zoonotic diseases, yards may be sprayed with water to slightly dampen the ground.
- Covered yards and concrete flooring in the race, crush and forcing yards will allow for work to be completed in multiple weather conditions – if this isn't possible, be mindful of the ground condition. Working in wet and muddy yards is extremely dangerous and should be avoided.

### WORKING WITH CATTLE

- Use **low stress stock handling** methods. **Give cattle time to settle** after transport or mustering and before attempting yard work.
- Avoid the **kick-zone**, understand the **flight zone** and have escape routes planned.
- Ensure appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is used such as gloves, masks, aprons for AI work. Steel capped boots may not always be appropriate as cattle can stand on your foot, causing significant damage if the steel cap isn't able to bear the weight of the cow.
- It may help to keep perimeter yards closed in case an animal escapes the yards or the crush.
- Be very careful around cows with new-born calves at foot. If needing to attend to a calf, make sure there is a barrier between the cow and the worker. **Never turn your back** on a cow.



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**Disclaimer:** This *Toolbox Talk* is intended as a *general* guide only and is designed to be used to increase risk awareness and safe work practices - it is not legal advice and does not take the place of proper individualised on-farm workplace inductions, work, health and safety training, or any other tailored steps which may be necessary to protect health and safety at specific worksites.



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### EMERGENCY CONTACTS

In case of emergency, **CALL 000** or your local emergency service provider, then call your manager or supervisor.

**POLICE** .....

**AMBULANCE** .....

**FIRE** .....

**POISONS 13 11 26**  
Poisons Information Centre

Some people might have worked on a farm before, but...

- Have they worked on your farm?
- Do they know how you run your business?

### OTHER RESOURCES

- Are you aware of your legislative responsibilities? Legislation may differ from state to state and it is your responsibility to be aware of what is required by law.
- **Cattle Crushes** and **Animal Handling** - MLA
- **Handling Cattle** - DPI NSW
- **Cattle Handling** - Farmsafe Australia

- Do not keep cattle isolated for longer than absolutely necessary – allow them to get back to their herd as soon as is practicable.
- Take extra precautions when handling bulls. **Only** work with a bull when other bulls are not around.
- Keep dogs away when working with cows and calves. **Only** use dogs that have been trained to work with cattle.

### THE RACE

- Make sure cattle can easily enter the race. A funnel race is ideal, without any tight turns, forcing the animals towards the crush.
- Make sure the race is secured to the ground and an appropriate height to prevent cattle from jumping over.
- Solid sheeting on both sides helps keep cattle moving through the race and reduces any potential visual disturbances, including other cattle or people.
- Segregating the race into sections with sliding doors can be helpful to bring forward cattle before they enter the crush. Make sure they are operated from the working side of the race.

### THE CRUSH

- **Ensure** the crush is secure and is positioned to allow workers to complete tasks safely without risk of injury and contact with cattle. If using a mobile crush, ensure it is appropriately secured.

- Make sure the crush has a self-locking front gate with a yoke to allow the animal's head to be firmly secured. If required for smaller animals add additional head bars, to reduce risks and prevent animals tossing their head and making contact with workers.
- Slip resistant flooring will make completion of tasks and cleaning easier.
- Gates should open and close smoothly with a minimum of noise and effort.

### OTHER RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH CATTLE

- Children should not be around cattle unsupervised, especially during calving.
- If using **horses** to muster cattle, wear the appropriate PPE.
- Not all horses are suitable for working cattle – ensure that your horse has been properly trained for cattle work.
- Workers must have the necessary training / skills to undertake injecting / vaccinating, drenching, branding, dehorning and marking.
- Zoonotic diseases such as Leptospirosis, Brucellosis and Q-Fever can be transmitted from animals to humans and they can have serious long-term health implications.
- Zoonotic diseases can be transferred through air, dust or by direct contact from skin infections and wounds, which can have serious long-term health implications.
- Workers and animals should be vaccinated for zoonotic diseases. If you observe any signs or symptoms, seek urgent medical or veterinary attention

## Comments / Suggestions

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## Toolbox Talks

OPERATION NAME: ..... MEETING LEADER: .....

LOCATION: ..... DATE: .....

### PARTICIPANTS

1. NAME: ..... 4. NAME: .....

SIGNATURE: ..... SIGNATURE: .....

2. NAME: ..... 5. NAME: .....

SIGNATURE: ..... SIGNATURE: .....

3. NAME: ..... 6. NAME: .....

SIGNATURE: ..... SIGNATURE: .....



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