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# HUMANE CHOICE True Free Range STANDARDS - POULTRY

2013 Version 2.2



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## HUMANE CHOICE STANDARD – POULTRY

The purpose of **Humane Choice True Free Range** (Humane Choice) program is to provide a credible, monitored and verified standard for the humane production of wholesome free range eggs and poultry while caring for the environment in which we farm and offering assurance to consumers that these certified products meet these standards.

The Humane Choice Standards have been developed in conjunction with the free range industry to provide these standards for the rearing, handling, transport and slaughter of Poultry for use in the “Humane Choice” program.

Humane Choice also acknowledges existing state and statutory requirements that are in place for poultry producers in general and where the Humane Choice Standard does not cover a topic or concern, it is expected that the producer will comply with the relevant state and statutory requirements as well as any Standards, Guidelines or Codes of Practice including, but not limited to:

- *Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Poultry*
- *Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals—Land Transport of Livestock*
- *Environmental Guidelines for the Australian Egg Industry*
- *National Farm Biosecurity Manual - Poultry Production*

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Operators should maintain conditions that promote the animals’ physiological and behavioural needs. In particular, livestock are able to forage on the land, move untethered and uncaged.

Animal breed selection should encompass consideration of breeds and genetics which are naturally suited to the farm and district environment.

Fences, yards and housing are constructed in ways which do not lead to injury or bruising as a consequence of poor design.

Farm systems shall ensure that the environment provided for animals will permit safe, wholesome food production.

Care of the environment should be part of a responsible farm management plan.

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## PART1: INTRODUCTION

### THE HUMANE CHOICE LABEL

The Humane Choice program was developed to certify free range animals and the products derived from them. Upon satisfactory application and inspection, farmers who meet the Humane Choice standards will be offered a license to use the “Humane Choice True Free Range” logo. Program participants are inspected and monitored for compliance to the program.

#### GUIDE TO THE USE OF THIS STANDARDS

- The guidelines and objectives of the standards are described at the beginning of each section.
- The Standards are numbered, all of which must be complied with.
- Producers must also comply with any local, state, or statutory requirements for poultry production.
- Producers will need to make themselves familiar with the **Australian Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Domestic Poultry** or the **Layer Hen Code of Welfare 2012** (New Zealand)

**OBJECTIVES:** *Animal health results from a combination of good management practices, a stress free environment and sound nutrition. Energy, protein and roughage supplies should be adequate to maintain good animal health and condition. Feed and water must be made available so that animals can eat and drink without fear of bullying or competition.*

STANDARD 1: FEED

**1. 1: NUTRITION**

- a. The diet must be balanced according to the needs of the animal.
- b. All animals must have access to forage. When pasture is unavailable to birds, an alternative source of forage must be made available e.g. chaff, lucerne hay, fresh chop, fruit and vegetable waste, silage or similar.
- c. If meat by-products are included in the diet, they must be heat treated.
- d. Feeds containing, faeces, urine, urea, food industry by-product treated with solvents, same species materials or other prohibited substances are not permitted.

**1. 3: FEED RECORDS**

- a. Producers must have written records of the feed ingredients, the inclusion rate and ingredients of concentrate feeds, and feed supplements, (bag tags may suffice) including records from the feed mill or supplier; and
- b. These records must be made available to the *Humane Choice* auditor upon request.

**1. 4: SUBSTANCES PROHIBITED IN FEED**

- a. Poultry must not be fed any hormones, growth promoters or be systematically fed antibiotics to increase growth or feed efficiency or as a preventative medicine.
- b. Antibiotics may only be given to individual birds for therapeutic reasons (for disease treatment) and only under the direction of a veterinarian.

**1.5: BODY CONDITION**

- a. Body condition of layer hens and breeding birds must be carefully managed to allow them to maintain good health and condition through all stages of production.

**1.6: AVOIDING COMPETITION FOR FEED**

- a. All poultry must be fed in ways that avoid bullying and competition at feed troughs.

**1.7: FEED STORAGE**

To reduce the risk of contamination, all feed hoppers, bins or silos used for storage must be covered.

**1.9 FEEDING EQUIPMENT**

- a. All feeding equipment must be kept clean and in good repair.
- b. Feeders will be checked daily to ensure functionality and free flow of feed.

## STANDARD 2: WATER

### **2.1: WATER SUPPLY**

- a. All poultry must have access to an adequate supply of clean, fresh drinking water at all times.
- b. Special care must be taken to ensure that drinkers are adjusted (height and flow rate) so that water is accessible for every bird.

### **2.2: WATERING EQUIPMENT**

- a. Drinking troughs and bowls must be kept clean.
- b. Drinkers must be checked daily to be sure they are functional. If nipple drinkers are used they must be regularly checked to see that they are working and not clogged.

### **2.3: EMERGENCY WATER SUPPLY**

Provisions must be made to ensure an emergency supply of suitable drinking water in case of failure of normal supply (e.g., drought or electrical failure)

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## PART3: FARM ENVIRONMENT

**OBJECTIVES:** *Farm housing and paddock management should ensure that the environment provided for the birds will permit humane, safe, wholesome food production. Care of the environment is a part of responsible farm management. Parallel production systems will not be accepted as meeting the requirements of this standard. No other systems of egg production shall be established, maintained, used or managed on any property under the producer's control. All birds must be managed under the requirements of the Humane Choice Standard.*

### STANDARD 3: INFRASTRUCTURE

#### **3.1: HOUSING**

Shelter and shade shall be provided to give all birds protection against the sun, wind and rain. Shelter in paddocks should include windbreaks and shade throughout the day. Shelters should be sufficient in number and size to allow all birds to occupy them and rest at the same time.

#### **3.2: STRUCTURE DESIGN**

- a. Housing, hutches, fences, yards, feeders, waterers and loading facilities are to be constructed in ways which do not lead to injury or bruising as a consequence of poor design.
- b. All forms of shelter, equipment and fencing must be maintained in a condition that will allow it to safely serve its purpose.
- c. Shelters will provide adequate protection from the sun and all weather conditions for all birds.
- d. Yards next to poultry housing should be managed to provide comfortable and secure conditions without excessive mud, dust or hazardous material.
- e. Poultry must be allowed free movement and access to paddocks during each day for a minimum of eight hours each day.
- f. Housing must have sufficient exit areas that allow all birds to have ready access to the outdoors and to enter and leave the building freely without obstruction.
- g. All exits must be open during the day.
- h. Maximum flock numbers for layer hens shall not exceed 2,500 birds per house.

#### **3.3: PERCHES**

- a. Perches are required for laying hens.
- b. Laying hens must be able to roost on perches.
- c. Sufficient perches must be available to allow roosting for all hens at the same time.
- d. Perches must be positioned to prevent fouling on other hens.
- e. Perches may be provided as linear perches and will allow not less than 15cm per hen.
- f. The horizontal distance between the perches should be at least 30cm.

#### **3.4: NEST BOXES**

- a. Nesting boxes must be provided for laying hens at not less than one box per 7 hens or 1 square metre per 120 hens in a communal nesting system.
- b. Nest boxes should be positioned to encourage nesting behavior.
- c. Nesting material should be provided.

#### **3.5: THE USE OF CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES IN HOUSING AND PADDOCKS**

- a. Poultry must not be able to come into contact with toxins from paint, wood preservatives, or disinfectants.

- b. Poisons for control of rodents or feral animals in the field is prohibited unless required by a statutory authority and the statutory authority confirms use in writing. Were baits are laid for rodents and feral animals, they must not be accessible to birds, roaming animals and wildlife and concealed bait stations are recommended. A bait map will be maintained showing location of poisons and their use recorded in the Chemical Treatment Records. Refer to Standard 11.

**4: CLEANING**

Housing, equipment and utensils must be cleaned and disinfected to prevent cross infection and the build-up of disease carrying organisms.

**STANDARD 4: INDOOR HOUSING**

**4.1: HOUSING**

- a. When birds must be housed indoors on a temporary basis, due to inclement weather or illness or for any other reason, the operator will comply with the following:
  - 1. Housing must be cleaned of manure and uneaten or spilled feed as often as is necessary to minimize unpleasant odours and avoid attracting insects.
  - 2. Each bird must have enough space to stand up, turn around, groom and carry out natural behaviour.
  - 3. Be supplied with perches for laying hens or a sleeping area with suitable bedding for meat birds. **Refer to Standard 3.3 Perches.**
  - 4. Supplied with fresh water and feed.
  - 5. Given ample sunlight, fresh air, ventilation and insulation from heat and cold.
  - 6. Where livestock are housed, the minimum “on ground” density shall comply with the following;

Poultry and Squab	Not less than 1 square metre for every 5 birds including the roosting area
Ducks, geese and turkeys	Not less than 1 square metre for every 2 birds on ground

- b. When birds are housed at night only, the operator will comply with the following:
  - 1. Each bird must have enough space to stand up, turn around, groom and carry out natural behaviours including the ability to escape confrontation from other birds.
  - 2. Supplied with fresh water and feed.
  - 3. Given ample fresh air, ventilation and insulation from heat and cold.
  - 4. Layer hens, pullets and breeder hens will be supplied with sufficient perch space to allow roosting for all birds at the same time. **Refer to Standard 3.3 Perches.**
  - 5. Bird housing must be continuously open during daylight hours.
- c. Housing, pens, equipment and utensils must be cleaned and disinfected to prevent cross infection and the build-up of disease carrying organisms.

- d. Litter and bedding must be of good quality and be managed to maintain it in a dry and friable condition; it must be of a sufficient depth for dilution of faeces and be skimmed or topped up as necessary with fresh litter.
- e. Producers and staff must be aware of the welfare issues that may arise due to poor litter management. (hock burn, footpad lesions and breast blisters)
- f. Chicken tractors shall not be permitted where restrictions to free range and movement result.
- g. Natural light may be supplemented by artificial means to provide a maximum of sixteen (16) hours of light per day with a continuous nocturnal rest period without artificial light of at least eight (8) hours.
- h. Birds must not be kept in cages.

## STANDARD 5: REDUCING THE RISK OF HEAT STRESS & FEAR OF PREDATION

### 5.1: SHADE

- a. Producers will provide adequate shade and windbreaks in any paddocks occupied by poultry. Shade must be made available throughout the day and must be sufficient enough to allow all birds to access it without having to crowd together, to prevent further heat stress.
- b. Shelters and trees must be available in the paddock to encourage the birds to go outside without fear of avian predation.
- c. Birds must be protected from predation. Predators may be managed using the following;
  1. Physical barriers (bird netting, trees, shadecloth, shelters)
  2. Physical exclusion, chasing and guard dogs,
  3. Trapping of individuals using live traps with relocation or, where there is no alternative, humane euthanasia,
  4. Poison for control of rodents or feral animals in the field is prohibited unless required by a statutory authority and that authority confirms use in writing.

## STANDARD 6: GRAZING

### 6.1: PASTURE MANAGEMENT

All birds must have free access to paddocks during the day. *Derogation: young birds that are not yet sufficiently feathered.*

- a. Each farm will have in place a management system that considers the impact of grazing birds on the environment. Annual soil testing is advised to monitor for nutrient build up in the soils.
- b. A paddock rotation system shall be in place to help prevent nutrient build up in the soil, to aid in the control of parasite infestations and the over grazing of pasture or vegetation. As a guide pasture cover should not fall below 40%.
- c. The range area must be capable of continued production of vegetation.
- d. Manure and spent bedding will be incorporated into the soil or collected and spread onto land that is not designated for grazing of poultry if kept on farm. Composting of bedding/manure is highly recommended.
- e. Paddocks must be monitored for signs of erosion and steps taken to minimize land degradation.
- f. Poultry must be provided with adequate alternatives to waterlogged paddocks and accommodations.
- g. Run off into waterways must be prevented.
- h. A farm map will be provided and made available upon request of the *Humane Choice* Auditor.

### 6.2: STOCKING DENSITIES ON PASTURE

- a. Stocking rates must be appropriate for the region, taking into consideration the feed production capacity, health, structure and nutrient balance of the soil as well as any possible environmental impact that grazing birds may have on the land.
- b. Producers must maintain conditions that enhance the animals' lives, physiological needs and behavioural needs.
- c. Stocking densities for layer hens and meat chickens shall not exceed 1,500 birds per hectare.

### 6.3: PREVENTING AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Keeping birds active by enriching their environment can minimize aggressive behavior such as feather pecking and cannibalism. Appropriate stocking densities will minimize aggression. Scattering of whole grain on housing floor, perches, straw bales and the supply of green feed is recommended.



**OBJECTIVES:** *Management should be based on the harmonious relationship between land, water, plants and livestock, the respect for physiological and behavioural needs of the birds and the feeding of good, quality feedstuffs. Animal management is based on the principles of balanced nutrition and feeding for prevention of disease and resistance to infection, parasitic attack and metabolic disorders.*

STANDARD 7: ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

**7.1: PHYSIOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL NEEDS**

- a. All birds must be allowed to practice their normal behaviours without interference. This shall include, but not limited to, being able to:
  - Dust bathe
  - Carry out scratching behaviour
  - Stretching and wing flapping
  - Grooming
  - Grazing and Foraging
- b. The following procedures are prohibited:
  - The use of genetically engineered species or breeds
  - Hormonal treatment is not allowed
  - Induced molting is unacceptable

STANDARD 8: STOCKPERSONS

**8.1: UNDERSTANDING THE STANDARDS**

- a. Any person involved in the care, handling and management of the poultry must:
  1. Receive a copy of this Standard;
  2. be familiar with this Standard and,
  3. understand the content of this Standard.
- b. A suitable training program must be in place for all staff and employees to ensure implementation and compliance to this Standard.
- c. Producers will also make themselves familiar with the Australian Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Domestic Poultry.

**8.2: HUMANE TREATMENT OF BIRDS**

- a. Stockperson should be able to demonstrate competence in handling animals in a positive and compassionate manner.
- b. Stockpersons should also be able to demonstrate their proficiency in procedures that have the potential to cause suffering (e.g. culling)

STANDARD 9: HANDLING

**9.1: FREQUENT HANDLING**

All birds must be frequently monitored physically by a stockpersons.

## **9.2: QUIET HANDLING**

- a. Birds must be handled quietly with minimal stress.
- b. Birds must not be lifted by their tail feathers or wings.
- d. Use of electric prods is prohibited.
- e. Birds will not be sold through poultry auctions.

## **9.3: CATCHING**

- a. Catching crews must allow sufficient time to ensure the birds are handled with care.
- b. Birds must not be deprived of feed for more than 12 hours before processing.
- c. During catching the birds must not suffer prolonged hunger, thirst or be deprived of rest.
- d. Drinkers, feeders and other obstacles in the shed must be removed or raised out of the way prior to catching to prevent harm to the birds.
- e. Action must be taken to prevent birds from crowding together during catching.
- f. Catching should take place in low light to minimize fear in the birds.

## STANDARD 10: BIOSECURITY

### **10.1: MANAGING BIOSECURITY RISKS**

- a. A register of all visitors to poultry sheds and poultry ranges will be maintained. The register will include visitor name, address, contact details and the date.
- b. Unauthorized vehicles will not have free access to areas in the vicinity of birds.
- c. Fencing shall be designed to exclude feral animals and predators.
- d. Paddocks and housing must be checked daily and any sick or dead animals removed promptly.
- e. Producers must make themselves familiar with the National Farm Biosecurity Manual – Poultry Production and also the National Water Biosecurity Manual – Poultry Production.

## STANDARD 11: RECORD KEEPING

- a. A farm diary will be maintained as evidence of day to day events, monitoring of paddocks and watering systems, maintenance, cleaning, paddock rotations or any need for verification that the requirements within this Humane Choice Standard, that are not covered by the use of the documents set out in section 11c. below, are being complied with.
- b. The farm diary must have dated entries.
- c. Records must be kept of mortalities and rates for all flocks and calculated over the life of each flock. If target rates for mortalities are exceeded, the course must be immediately investigated and remedial action taken. A mortality rate in excess of 0.5% over a 7 day period should prompt immediate action.
- d. Mortality rates for chicks must be recorded daily and if the rate exceeds 1% in a given 7 day period, immediate remedial action must be taken.
- e. The following records will be maintained and made available for the Humane Choice Auditor. Records must be kept for a period of at least three years:
  1. Farm Diary
  2. Animal Treatment Record
  3. Medicine/Chemical Log
  4. Pasture/Crop Treatment Record
  5. Stored Grain Treatment Record
  6. Feed Purchase Record
  7. Feed Ingredients
  8. Records for animal deaths, births, sales and purchases

**OBJECTIVES:** *Flock health should be based on the prevention of disease through maintenance of the well being of the birds with balanced nutrition, stress free living conditions and handling. The disease burden of poultry is reduced in the well managed outdoor flock.*

STANDARD 12: BIRD HEALTH
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Health promotion and disease prevention should include the following techniques:

- Breeding and selection
- Exercise and access to the open
- Appropriate stocking densities and rotational grazing

Approved veterinary treatment should be considered as an adjunct to, and not a substitute for good management practices.

The aim should be to develop resistance in animals through breeding and selection and to correct the cause of the disorder, rather than treating the symptoms.

Growth rate of birds should not be greater than 45g per day on average.

**12.1: ANIMAL HEALTH RECORDS**

- a. All farms must keep accurate animal records that detail the following:
1. Details of any vaccinations;
  2. Information on treatments and other aspects of flock health and welfare;
  3. Causes of mortality, when known;

**12.2: ANIMAL SURGICAL TREATMENTS**

- a. Animal mutilations are not allowed.
- b. Surgical treatments shall only be carried out when the operator can demonstrate that the benefits of the action outweigh the consequences of non treatment and there are no other acceptable management options.
- c. The following procedures are not permitted:
1. Beak cutting or trimming
  2. De-beaking
  3. Wing cutting
  4. Toe trimming
  5. De-snooding

**12.3: PREVENTATIVE TREATMENTS**

- a. The following treatments are permitted:
1. Coccidiostats if Coccidiosis is regarded as a welfare issue
  2. Vaccinations for diseases as recommended by a veterinarian or statutory authority.

#### **12.4: MANAGING CHICKS**

- a. Care must be taken to avoid thermal stress during transport from the hatchery to the farm.
- b. Chicks must be placed in an appropriate environment as soon as possible after arrival.
- c. Chicks must be raised in circumstances that will allow for adaptation to the conditions they will be kept under in their adult life. Perches must be provided and temperature of the shed must be slowly adjusted to reflect the outdoor conditions they will eventually be transferred to.
- d. Brooder surrounds must be designed and placed so that chicks can move freely toward or away from the brooder.
- e. Chicks must be observed at least twice a day in the first 24 hours of placement in the brooder.
- f. Chicks should maintain their body weight or record a gain in the first 3 days of life.
- g. Feeders and drinkers inside the brooder surrounds must not be allowed to become hot.
- h. The brooder must be placed in the centre of the surround.
- i. The temperature of the brooder must be monitored to ensure that the chicks are maintained at a comfortable temperature.
- j. Brooder surrounds must be gradually moved to accommodate chick growth and be fully removed to allow full access to the shed as soon as practicable.
- k. Chicks must be given access to the outdoors when well feathered or at a maximum of 21-28 days of age (depending on current temperatures) for meat birds, and 8 weeks of age for layer hens.
- l. Records for chick purchases, deaths and culls must be kept. Refer to Standard 11.

#### **12.5 BROUGHT IN BIRDS**

- a. Meat birds must be purchased as 'day olds' and grown out by the certified producer.
- b. Layer birds may be purchased as 'day olds', pullets, or point of lay. Pullets must be purchased at an age that will ensure they will meet the requirement for outdoor access as per Standard 12.4.k. Alternatively pullets or point of lay birds may be purchased from a supplier that produces birds to meet the requirements of the Humane Choice Standard for outdoor access and non mutilation of birds. A Vendor Declaration must accompany each delivery of birds that will declare these requirements have been met.

#### **12.6: CARE OF SICK AND INJURED ANIMALS**

- a. Sick birds must be isolated from the rest of the flock.
- b. Injured or sick birds must be treated without delay and veterinary treatment must not be withheld.

#### **12.7: CONTROL OF PARASITES**

- a. Parasites, both internal and external, shall be treated promptly. Every effort shall be made to minimize parasite infestations.

## STANDARD 13: EUTHANASIA

### 13.1: ANIMAL SUFFERING

- a. The suffering of sick or injured birds will not be prolonged unnecessarily. If all reasonable steps have been taken to improve the animal's health without a timely response, the bird must be destroyed humanely.
- b. Meat birds with a gait score of 2 (Dawkins 2004) must be humanely destroyed and must not make up more than 1% of the flock.
- c. Birds must be monitored to ensure death has occurred.

### 13.2: CARCASS DISPOSAL

- a. The carcasses of all dead birds will be disposed of responsibly and under the guidelines of any state or statutory requirements.
- b. In the absence of any state or statutory requirements, acceptable methods of carcass disposal are:
  1. Deep burial
  2. Incineration
  3. Composting
  4. Removal by Contractor

**OBJECTIVES:** *Transport of stock should be carried out in such a manner that it will ensure the best animal welfare and sanitation and the preservation of identity that will permit traceability of the animals. A management plan will be used to ensure that the holding, watering, transport and delivery of birds is conducted with compassion, hygiene and oversight.*

STANDARD 14: TRANSPORT REQUIREMENTS

Birds should be transported to the nearest available facilities for slaughter and should not be unnecessarily transported between properties or owners unless required by feed shortages and drought.

**14.1: GENERAL**

- a. Transport of birds between properties or to abattoirs shall take into consideration welfare requirements and shall ensure the minimization of stress to the animal at all times.
- b. The period from catching the first bird to slaughter of the last bird in that consignment must not exceed 12 hours.
- c. Birds must not be deprived of feed for more than 12 hours before processing.
- d. Loading and unloading facilities must not have parts protruding or sharp edges that can cause injury, contamination or harm to the birds.
- e. Transport vehicles shall be of suitable size to prevent overcrowding, damage and/or bruising.
- f. Birds will not be lifted by their tail feathers or wings.
- g. Water must be made available before and after transport.
- h. Unfit animals must not be transported.
- i. Each consignment of birds will be accompanied by appropriate documentation indicating that this document has been completed by a nominated competent person.
- j. A Transport Management Plan that addresses the following shall be in place and documented and made available to the *Humane Choice* Auditor.
  1. Holding
  2. Feeding
  3. Watering
  4. Loading
  5. Identification
  6. Travel
  7. Oversight
  8. Delivery
  9. Documentation
- k. Producers will also make themselves familiar with the Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals – Land Transport of Livestock or, an equivalent code of practice where it exists.

STANDARD 15: ABATTOIRS

- a. Slaughter will be carried out quickly and without undue stress.
- b. Shackles must be of a suitable type so as not to cause undue pain and distress to the bird.
- c. Birds must not be suspended in shackles for more than 60 seconds before stunning.
- d. Bleeding out must occur within 10 seconds of stunning.
- e. Animals must not be conscious during slaughter. Birds must be monitored to ensure stunning is effective.
- f. Killing with exposure to gas is the preferred practice to affect death (Controlled Atmosphere Killing).
- g. A stun device must be backed up by emergency measures in the case of failure.
- h. Death by bleeding, without stunning, is not permissible.
- i. All birds must be checked to ensure that death has been effected before they reach the scald tank.
- j. Clearly identifiable labelling such as branding of all carcasses must take place which differentiates them by colour from conventional carcasses and identifies them as 'Humane Choice'.
- k. Where stock is slaughtered for "Humane Choice" sale, the operator (party certified) must give assurances that any processing facility that is employed to process their poultry meets the requirements as set out in Section 15 of these Standards.
- l. An operator must visit each abattoir employed to process their poultry at least four times each year to assess the operational procedures and facilities at each plant to satisfy themselves and give assurances to Humane Choice that Section 15 of these Standards are being met.
- m. If an operator should witness any act of cruelty, or a processor or staff member of a processing facility acting contrary to the conditions set out in Section 15 a through to i of these Standards, they must notify Humane Choice immediately. Humane Choice will log a record of the operator's report and act on behalf of Humane Choice to keep the relevant authorities advised. Failure to report such incidences to Humane Choice by an operator will result in suspension or cancellation of accreditation.

*HSI concentrates on the preservation of endangered animals and ecosystems and works to ensure quality of life for all animals, both domestic and wild. HSI is the largest animal protection not-for-profit organisation in the world, with over 9 million supporters globally and has been established in Australia since 1994.*



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