



# NEW ZEALAND STOCKYARD LOADING FACILITY GUIDELINES V1.1

Prepared by

**THE NATIONAL LIVESTOCK  
TRANSPORT & SAFETY COUNCIL**



AUGUST 2025

# CONTENTS

03	Introduction
03	Design objectives
04	Vehicle access
05	Cattle yards
07	Sheep yards
08	Calves

# PICTURES & ILLUSTRATIONS

03	Figure 1. A set of sound yards to handle cattle
04	Figure 2. A yard with good access and vehicle turning ability
04	Figure 3. A yard with poor access
05	Figure 4. A cattle ramp with a timber buffer
06	Figure 5. Loading race with catwalk access to the crate door
08	Figure 6. Ramp loading with no forcing pen
08	Figure 7. Good pen with no firm vehicle access
08	Figure 8. No firm vehicle access to ramp and race
08	Figure 9. Good pen with level loading and firm vehicle access

# APPENDICES

09	Appendix A. Loading & Unloading Facilities Checklist
10	Appendix B. Bobby Calf Loadout Facilities Checklist
11	Appendix C. Truck Turning Circle Specification

## INTRODUCTION

This guide provides detailed information regarding the design, construction, and operational best practices for stockyard and livestock loading facilities in New Zealand. Its primary objective is to foster a safe and healthy working environment for all personnel interacting with livestock while ensuring the highest possible standards of animal welfare.

Livestock handling infrastructure plays a critical role in:

- Receiving and dispatching animals in a calm and controlled manner
- Managing the movement of animals for drafting, weighing, and transportation
- Performing animal health inspections and livestock management procedures efficiently
- Ensuring proper restraint and close observation of livestock is performed with minimum stress and no injury to the animals

Well-designed and maintained loading facilities offer numerous benefits, including improved animal flow, enhanced safety for workers and livestock, reduced handling stress, and minimization of operational delays or disruptions.

All facilities should be incorporated into the wider farm or site layout and must feature appropriate infrastructure such as holding pens, access lanes, forcing yards, races, drafting areas, ramps, catwalks, shelter, and provisions for animal and transport documentation to be accessed.

## DESIGN OBJECTIVES

Effective livestock handling systems should be constructed and managed in accordance with the following key principles:

- Full compliance with New Zealand animal welfare legislation, codes of practice, and guidelines
- Full compliance with New Zealand Health and Safety Legislation, Regulations and Best Practice Guidelines
- Integration of low-stress animal handling techniques based on natural animal behaviour and internationally recognised livestock handling techniques
- Prioritisation of both animal comfort and handler safety to reduce incidents and injuries
- Efficient operational design that enables smooth livestock flow with minimal disruptions
- Flexibility to accommodate growth or changes in livestock volume and species
- Robust construction to handle varying environmental conditions and long-term use
- Facilities that can accommodate a range of vehicle types and sizes that are standard in modern livestock truck fleets



*Figure 1. A set of sound yards to handle cattle*

## VEHICLE ACCESS

### Minimum Requirements:

- Road access to stockyards must be safe, functional, and accessible in all weather conditions
- Roadways must be wide enough for large vehicles and feature adequate turning radii (minimum 13 metres)
- No loading/unloading under overhead power wires. The distance between any live overhead electric line and any part of any mobile plant or load carried shall be “AT LEAST 4.0 METRES” (NZECP 34:2001 NZ Electrical Code of Practice for Electrical Safe Distances)
- Livestock transport vehicles should never be required to reverse in or load out on public roadways
- Clearance along access roads must meet a minimum of 4.5m in height and 4m in width
- The road base must have a stable subgrade with a crowned profile to facilitate drainage
- The surface must be smooth, free of potholes, loose materials, or obstructions
- Truck approach areas must include a level and firm pad to ensure proper alignment with ramps
- Sharp turns on steep grades should be avoided to prevent vehicle instability
- Bridges, culverts, and cattle stops over 2 meters must be built to support 54-ton fully loaded trucks and comply with all regional authority standards
- A clearly marked no-go zone must be maintained between reversing trucks and loading ramps

### Recommendations:

- Roadway entrances should be splayed to allow large trucks and trailers to enter without crossing into opposing lanes
- Signage to the yard should be prominently placed and clearly show the direction to travel
- Livestock should never be held on access roads or loops leading to the yards
- Accessways should be routinely sprayed to prevent weed growth and ensure clear visibility
- Buffers and bumper stops in front of ramps should be maintained in good condition



*Figure 2. A yard with good access and vehicle turning ability*



*Figure 3. A yard with poor access*



## CATTLE YARDS

### Minimum Requirements:

- Yard design must ensure trucks can reverse safely and align correctly with loading ramps
- Holding yards should be spacious enough to contain the entire consignment/load
- Yards must be secure and facilitate controlled drafting and selection processes
- Stock should be withheld from feed for a minimum of four hours before transport
- Yard fencing must be at least 1.7 meters high with a backrub indicator (a cross bar above the race) at 1.4m high
- For cattle over 1.4m in height at the hip, loading must be on a single-deck unit or adequate height lower deck to avoid injury to the animal (backrub)
- Farmers must ensure they let their transporter know in advance so the right truck is provided for cattle over 1.4m high
- Ramp height should range from 1.1m to 1.2m with a slope not exceeding 20 degrees
- As a guide, livestock generally manage loading and unloading best when the maximum slope of ramps does not exceed 20° for all animals except young animals.
- For livestock younger than one week of age the use of ramps is not encouraged however, where a ramp must be used, the maximum slope should be no greater than 12°
- Ramp flooring should be solid, non-slip, and designed to minimize noise and vibration
- Ramp should be sheeted from the bottom at least 600mm and cleats should be spaced 300mm apart and raised at least 40mm
- Personnel gates at the top of ramps must be self-closing and open onto flat, obstruction-free platforms
- Raised catwalks should be a minimum of 500 mm wide, include handrails and non-slip surfaces, and comply with all NZ safety standards
- Provide a gate at the entrance of the race and/or lock bars as a means of preventing livestock reversing out of the loading race
- Ramps in high-throughput operations must accommodate dual or multi-deck loading
- Animals going to a processor must be identified and adequately marked prior to loading
- A separate ramp and yard/pen should be incorporated at dairy sheds to ensure stock can be loaded/unloaded during milking times
- Yards shall have no broken rails or protruding objects and all gates should swing and be secured when closed
- The owner or person in charge of the livestock must always be present at loading and unloading
- Ensure that there is a document holder on right-side of ramp for ASD forms and Veterinary Certificate

### Recommendations:

- Provide a pen capable of holding at least four adult cattle to check welfare and tag status prior to loading
- Forcing pens should measure approximately 2.5m x 2.5m and be operable from outside of areas where animals are contained
- Try to align ramps north-south to avoid sun glare during loading and unloading
- Ensure facilities used at night are well-lit to support safe operations during the hours of darkness
- Include personal access gates (600mm wide) to safe areas with slam-shut latches
- Use pressure-treated timber or galvanized steel for posts, with proper installation to avoid rot or corrosion
- Gates must have secure, easy-to-operate latches and captive hinges to avoid lifting off by animals
- Avoid having ramp flaps or gates protruding from the ramp that could catch on reversing vehicles
- Allow for the safe discharge and capture of effluent in accordance with environmental regulations
- Documentation holders should be included at the right hand side of the ramp for paper ASD's and Vet Certification to be collected or left by the transporter



*Figure 4. A cattle ramp with a timber buffer*



*Figure 5. Loading race with catwalk access to the crate door*



## SHEEP YARDS

### Minimum Requirements:

- Drafting and holding yards should comfortably contain all stock intended for transport
- Sheep should be stood for a minimum of four hours prior to loading
- Yards must be clean, structurally sound, and provide safe animal handling pathways
- Ramps should incline between 20 to 25 degrees, with 30 degrees as a strict upper limit
- As a guide, livestock generally manage loading and unloading best when the maximum slope of ramps does not exceed 20° for all animals except young animals. For livestock younger than one week of age that are expected to walk up or down ramps themselves, the maximum slope is 12°.
- A reinforced barrier must be placed behind fixed ramps to absorb truck impact during reversing
- Ramps must be adjustable (ideally between 1000mm and 3000mm) to match multi-deck vehicles
- Closed sides on ramps help direct sheep forward and minimize distractions
- Cleats should measure 25mm in height and be spaced at 200mm intervals
- Ramps must include walkways on at least one side, providing handlers with safe access
- Fall-prevention mechanisms should be installed for adjustable ramps
- Where ramps are adjustable they shall be prevented from free falling in the event of a failure of the lifting mechanism, either by use of mechanical safety locks or by some other means
- Space under fixed raised ramps to be fenced off to prevent the operator from walking under a raised ramp
- Yards shall have no broken rails or protruding objects and all gates should swing and have be secured when closed
- The owner or person in charge of the livestock must always be present at loading and unloading
- Ensure that there is a document holder on right-side of ramp for ASD forms and Veterinary Certificate

### Recommendations:

- Use a third deck ramp where required for commercial transporters
- Minimize slope where possible to ensure efficient sheep movement
- Design continuous walkways without steps if possible to reduce trip hazards
- Align ramp width with common stock crate gate widths (450mm to 900mm)
- Avoid loading directly from laneways—use dedicated holding and forcing areas
- Avoid having ramp flaps or gates protruding from the ramp that could catch on reversing vehicles

# CALVES

## Minimum Requirements:

- Farms must have facilities allowing calves up to 14 days old to walk on and off trucks freely
- Shelters must be provided for calves during pre-loading and while loading
- Loading platforms must be anchored securely to prevent movement when reversed in to
- Flooring surfaces should be slip-resistant and free from gaps or tripping hazards
- Head clearance for loaders/operators in covered pens of at least 2 meters is required
- Ensure a dry, weatherproof area is available for writing and maintaining documentation

## Recommendations:

- Ramps should not be used to load young calves – They are not fit for purpose and should be decommissioned due to safety concerns
- Use purpose-built pens that are level to the stock crate floor so calves transfer easily
- Inefficient loading procedures can result in increased stress, injury, and frustration for both animals and handlers
- Consider alternate solutions such as ground-level walk-on loading areas wherever practical



Figure 6. Ramp loading with no forcing pen



Figure 7. Good pen with no firm vehicle access











Figure 8. No firm vehicle access to ramp & race





Figure 9. Good pen with level loading and firm vehicle access

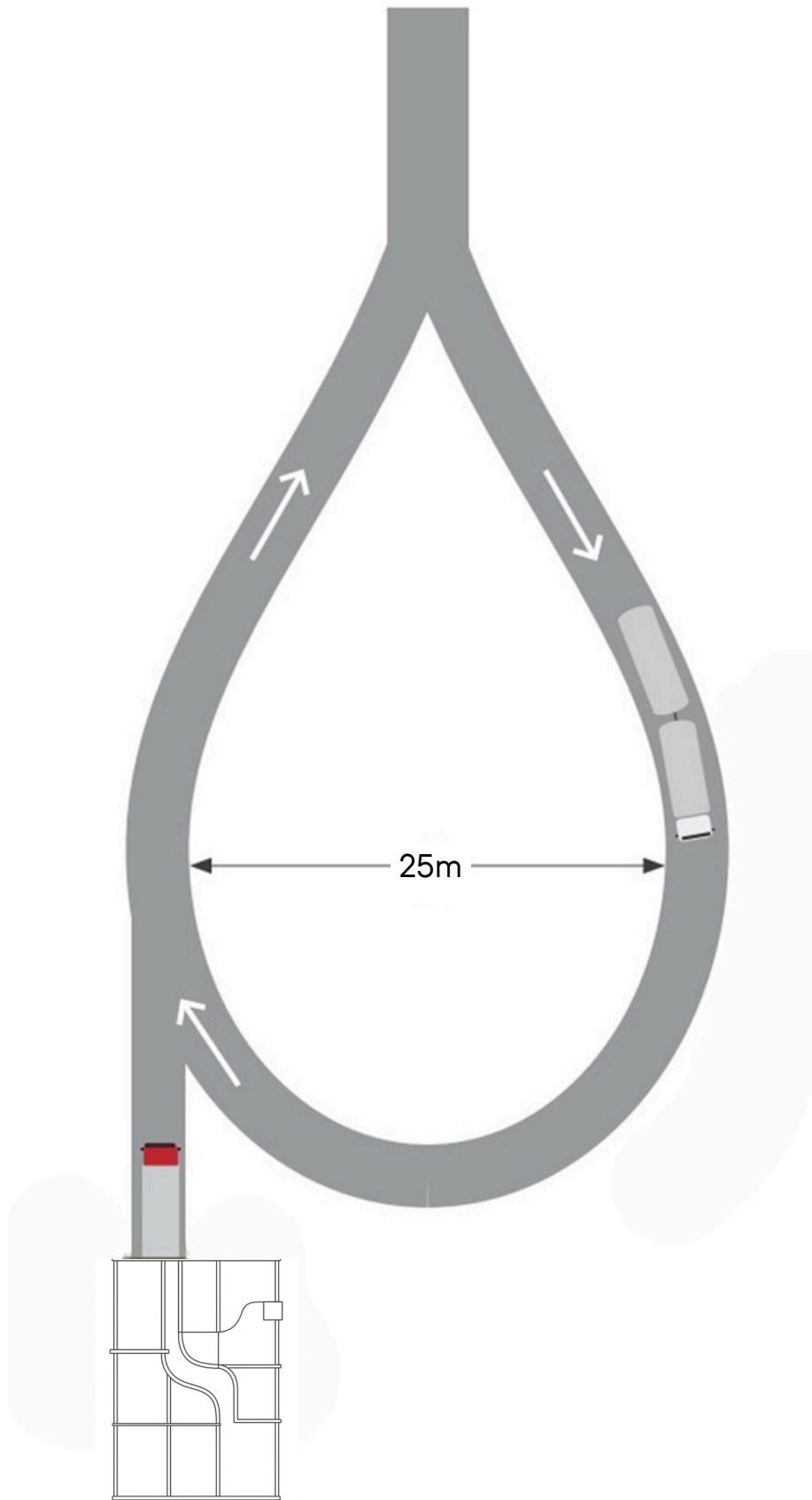
Appendix A: Loading & Unloading Facilities Checklist

VEHICLE ACCESS	 = YES  = NO	Notes
Off the roadside		
All-weather track		
Level surface		
Bridges, culverts & cattle stops can support 54 ton		
Sufficient turning room		
Six metres clearance for overhead power lines		
Height clearances of 4.3 for overhead protrusions		
Marked no-go zone between ramps and reversing trucks		
ALL YARDS	 = YES  = NO	Notes
Truck & trailer can reverse in and butt up square		
Sufficient yard capacity for the entire load		
Secure & facilitate controlled drafting/selection processes		
Ramp slope not exceeding 20 degrees		
Ramp flooring should be solid and non-slip		
No broken rails or protruding objects		
All gates swing		
A weatherproof document holder on right-side of ramp		
CATTLE YARDS	 = YES  = NO	Notes
Yard sides at least 1.7 meters high		
Backrub indicator (cross bar above the race) at 1.4m high		
Ramp height should range from 1.1m to 1.2m		
Cleats spaced 300mm apart and raised at least 40mm		
Personnel/safety gates at the top of ramps (must be self-closing and open onto flat, obstruction-free platforms)		
Raised catwalks 500mm wide and include handrails and non-slip surfaces		
Ramps in high-throughput operations must accommodate dual or multi-deck loading		
A separate ramp and yard/pen incorporated at dairy shed		
SHEEP YARDS	 = YES  = NO	Notes
A reinforced barrier behind fixed ramps to absorb truck impact		
Ramps must be adjustable (ideally between 1000 and 3000mm) to match multi-deck vehicles		
Closed sides on ramps		
Cleats measure 25mm in height and spaced at 200mm intervals		
Ramps include walkways on at least one side, providing handlers with safe access		
Fall-prevention mechanisms installed on adjustable ramps		
Space under fixed raised ramps fenced off		

Appendix B. Bobby Calf Loadout Facilities Checklist

<b>CHECKER:</b>			
<b>Date:</b>			
<b>Farm Name:</b>			
<b>Farm Address:</b>			
<b>Farm number:</b>			
<b>CHECK</b>	 All OK	 Not OK	<b>Comments</b>
Off the roadside			
All-weather track			
Sufficient turning room			
Track width at least 4 metres wide			
Height clearances of 4.3 for overhead protrusions			
Six metres clearance for overhead power lines			
Calves can walk onto truck (deck height 1.2 m)			
Steps and handrails up to calf pens			
Sufficient height under calf pen roof for driver			
Height indicator on pen wall at 700mm			
No gaps in pen floors			
Truck/trailer can butt up square			
All gates/rails/fences well maintained			
Shelter provided for calves			
Pens are clean			
Ramp slope no more than 12 degrees			
Farmer present			

Appendix C. Truck Turning Circle Specification



# NATIONAL LIVESTOCK TRANSPORT & SAFETY COUNCIL

## Email

[admin@nltsc.nz](mailto:admin@nltsc.nz)



## Website *(coming soon)*

[www.nltsc.nz](http://www.nltsc.nz)



An industry partnership between

