**Transport of pigs during hot temperatures**

The welfare of pigs during transport is a shared responsibility between the animal owner and person in charge. Though the pigs are in another person’s care whilst being transported, it does not absolve the owner of their responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Act. Pigs are covered under the Code of Welfare for Pigs (2018) as well as the Code of Welfare for Transport within New Zealand (2018).

During the journey, the responsibility primarily lies with the transport operator as the ‘person in charge’ (i.e., an individual who has an animal(s) in their possession or custody, under their control, care or supervision). However, the decision to transport the pigs in the first place begins with the owner and there is accountability when such decisions result in compromised welfare. The respective responsibilities of the owner and the person in charge will always be determined on a case-by-case basis in the event of an incident.

At this time of the year, high temperatures are expected. The transport of pigs should be avoided on very hot days, and at times of the day when the temperature is likely to peak. The journey length is a consideration also. Though loading will often occur in the morning when the temperature is cooler, pigs may still be in transit hours later when the temperature peaks in the afternoon. This means considering the forecast and journey length, the route (including whether the truck will encounter traffic, road works, hilly and windy roads, or main centres and residential areas with lower speed limits), and whether the driver will be stopping during the journey. Whilst the transporter is responsible for and in control of most of these factors, it is important to communicate with them to ensure that due consideration is given to the pigs’ welfare.

Mortality rates and causes of mortality during transport are a poor indicator of transport conditions. Mortality is an extreme outcome preceded in most cases by a period of welfare compromise that may vary from mild to severe, for varying lengths of time. Heat stress is not necessarily fatal but will certainly lead to poor welfare outcomes. Additionally, meat quality is negatively affected by pre-slaughter stressors including transport. Recent research in New Zealand pigs carried out by Selwyn Dobbinson supports this relationship between transport conditions (as measured by the Temperature Humidity Index) and meat quality, whereby 76% of pork samples from pigs in the ‘low transport stress’ group were within the optimum pH range, compared to only 47.7% of pork samples from pigs that had a longer journey with a greater number of stationary periods.

One of the most stressful components of transporting livestock from the pigs’ perspective is the loading phase. Much of what happens at this time is under the control of the farm staff, and this can have an impact on the pigs’ resilience to stressors during transport. Patient handling techniques such as those taught by the ProHand programme, and a well-designed loading area will help to reduce stress during loading. This is especially important in hot weather. Other means to better prepare pigs and minimise stress prior to transport include:

* Removing feed for 4 hours before loading and ensuring feed is not with-held for more than 18 hours before slaughter
* Ensuring pigs have water ad libitum right up to the point of loading
* Minimising stress in loading pens – consider whether tattooing is necessary before loading if this is carried out
* Adequate shade and ventilation in the loading area
* Using a loading ramp angle of less than 20 degrees