

Australian Capital Territory

# **Animal Welfare (Welfare of Poultry: Non-Commercial) Code of Practice 2010\***

**Disallowable Instrument DI2010–89**

made under the

***Animal Welfare Act 1992, section 22 (Codes of practice)***

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**1 Name of instrument**

This instrument is the *Animal Welfare (Welfare of Poultry: Non-Commercial) Code of Practice 2010*.

**2 Commencement**

This instrument commences the day after notification.

**3 Approval of code of practice**

The document entitled the “Code of Practice for the Welfare of Poultry: Non-Commercial 2010” attached to this instrument is approved as a code of practice.

Jon Stanhope MLA  
Minister for Territory and Municipal Services

28 May 2010

\*Name amended under Legislation Act, s 60

Authorised by the ACT Parliamentary Counsel—also accessible at [www.legislation.act.gov.au](http://www.legislation.act.gov.au)

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE WELFARE OF  
POULTRY: NON-COMMERCIAL 2010**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This Code of Practice for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) outlines the minimum welfare requirements for the care of non-commercial domestic poultry as required by the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*. Its purpose is to provide general guidelines on the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care appropriate to backyard poultry, which includes, but is not limited to, chickens, ducks, turkeys, geese, and pheasants. Adhering to the full implementation of this Code will achieve a high quality of life for a domestic non-commercial bird.

This Code has been prepared by the ACT Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) to outline the welfare needs of birds that are not covered by the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Captive Birds in the ACT* or the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. These codes are available from Environment ACT or they can be downloaded from: [www.tams.act.gov.au/live/pets/animalwelfare](http://www.tams.act.gov.au/live/pets/animalwelfare).

Animal welfare considerations are becoming increasingly important in the keeping of animals. This Code is based on established experience and current scientific knowledge. Practices once considered acceptable are now being reassessed and modified according to new knowledge and changing attitudes.

A person in charge of poultry has a legal responsibility under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* to ensure that each bird receives appropriate and adequate food, water, shelter and exercise and is not caused to suffer unnecessary pain or neglect so as to cause it pain. A person in charge of poultry must not fail to take reasonable steps (including, where appropriate, seeking veterinary treatment) to alleviate any pain suffered by the animal.

This Code does not deal with common or statute law requirements such as those relating to public health, public nuisance, the establishment and operation of a particular venture, environmental protection and occupational health and safety.

## 2. RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP

Since humans can alter or control an animal's environment, animal welfare includes the concept that people have duties and responsibilities towards animals. The greater the level of interference with, or control of, an animal's environment, the greater our responsibility. It is necessary to take into account the bird's potential interaction with neighbours and its potential life span. People wishing to keep roosters should take into account the impact their crowing may have on neighbours.

Responsible ownership means looking after the physical and emotional needs of animals, and includes adult supervision of children if feeding or interacting with the birds. An adult is responsible for ensuring the daily needs of the birds are met. In all matters relating to the care of chickens, owners should seek professional advice, or that of an experienced poultry keeper.

Birds must not be allowed to escape from the owner's control, as they are susceptible to attack from other animals and to being hit by cars. Wing clipping can be useful to control free-range birds, but birds rendered unable to fly may require additional protection from predators. Wing clipping is the practice of cutting the tip of the first few flight feathers of one wing of each bird.

It is recognised that there may be times when a person will be unable to keep and/or care for an animal. If that occurs, arrangements to pass the animal on to a new owner, either privately or through the RSPCA, should be made. It is illegal under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* to abandon or release an animal. When efforts to have an animal rehomed have been unsuccessful it may be necessary to consider euthanasia. Euthanasia should be performed by a veterinary surgeon, or conducted in accordance with the advice provided later in this Code.

### **3. GENERAL**

The basic needs of birds are:

- Ready access to food and water to maintain health and vigour;
- Freedom to move, stand, turn around, stretch, sit and lie down;
- Freedom to scratch, dust bath, perch and lay their eggs in a nest;
- Contact with other members of the species;
- Accommodation which provides protection from the weather and which neither harms nor causes distress, including adequate protection from rain, wind, direct sunlight and extremes of temperature;
- Prevention of disease and injury, and their rapid treatment should they occur; and
- Protection from predators, for example foxes, dogs, cats and predatory birds.

### **4. HOUSING**

All poultry require protection from the elements and from predators. The style of housing chosen should also be designed to minimise the risk of disease, and to prevent injury. Backyard poultry should be provided with a fully enclosed (including a roof) night roosting area, to ensure protection from predators, as well as an outdoor enclosure for their use and protection during the day. Birds should be confined from sunset in the roosting area, but should not be confined for more than 16 hours at a time. Ideally, birds should have access to the outside enclosure for as many daylight hours as possible.

Birds may not be restrained by:

- Being tied or bound;
- Being enclosed in opaque containers such as cardboard boxes (with the exception of roosters being housed overnight only); and
- Being enclosed in small cages.

Exceptions apply from the last two dot points, for brief periods of transport, for showing or when being held for veterinary examination. See section 10—Handling and Transport and the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Short Term Display* for further details.

The minimum acceptable floor space and height for the night roosting area, and full run will vary by type of bird. Birds that roost on perches that are set at varying heights within either the roosting area or the full run may require less floor space than birds that are restricted to ground level.

**Chickens:** Minimum floor/run area of 3 m<sup>2</sup> for housing up to six bantams or three large birds. Additional birds will require additional space at the ratio of 2.5 birds / m<sup>2</sup>. An Increase in enclosure size of 0.4 m<sup>2</sup> for every large bird and 0.3 m<sup>2</sup> for every small bird is recommended.

Birds may be individually housed in preparation for shows or for individual treatment. The minimum size enclosure for large birds is 0.55 m<sup>2</sup> and the minimum size enclosure for small birds is 0.45 m<sup>2</sup>.

Show preparation will usually commence approximately two weeks prior to a show. Birds may be housed in individual cages for the duration of a registered poultry show, but they should be provided with alternative stimulation, such as human contact, during this period.

**Turkeys:** Minimum floor/run area 8 m<sup>2</sup> which may house up to four birds, unless full intensive rearing conditions are met (see *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*)

**Ducks:** Small (bantam) ducks require 3 m<sup>2</sup> for up to three birds and 0.4 m<sup>2</sup> for each additional bird.

**Geese and Guinea Fowl** require large areas in which to wander and are not recommended for urban areas. Specialised advice should be sought before obtaining these species.

For other species, refer to the Appendices within the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry 4<sup>th</sup> Edition* for minimum housing and space requirements. Systems involving wire flooring are not acceptable for housing birds in non-commercial applications.

The above recommendations apply to adult birds. Young birds may be housed at greater per capita density, but a mass of 5kg/m<sup>2</sup> should not be exceeded at any time.

The requirement for shelter is the same whether birds are allowed outdoor access or not. A facility must be provided which effectively shelters fowl from rain and wind, and which gives protection from extremes of temperature by virtue of shade, insulation and ventilation. All birds must have access to nesting boxes and perches as appropriate for the species.

The perches should be wide enough to be comfortable, and free of any sharp edges. At least 14 linear cm of perching space should be provided per bird.

Perches and nesting boxes should be easily accessible to avoid injury. Nesting boxes should contain appropriate nesting material such as wood shavings or rice hulls and should be placed in a secluded comfortable and dark place to avoid attack by other hens. Nesting material such as straw and hay is not recommended for use as it can hide mites and other parasites.

Flooring of indoor poultry houses should be designed to assist with sanitation. The provision of litter is recommended.

Outdoor areas for poultry should keep birds contained and exclude predators. The provision of shade is required, for example shade from trees or creeping vines.

For chickens, an area to dust bathe is required. For ducks, a bathing area of some kind is recommended. A child's paddling pool is ideal.

Where chicken coops are purpose constructed at home it is advisable to make them large enough to allow access for cleaning.

## **5. ENVIRONMENT**

Whichever system of confinement is chosen, the bird's environment can be enhanced by the provision of:

- Shade trees, this can include fruit trees;
- Creeping vines to create a cooler environment;
- Water to play in (although care should be taken to ensure it is not deep enough for them to drown);
- Areas to dust bathe and scratch;
- Logs within the enclosure which can be turned over to allow the birds to scavenge for insects.

## **6. NUTRITION**

Birds need to receive a diet containing adequate nutrients to meet their requirements for good health and vitality.

Water is essential and needs to be available in a clean potable form 24 hours a day. Water containers should be positioned to minimise contamination from

bird faeces. Do not place food or water containers under perches. If using water feeders with a nipple, be aware that in winter the water may freeze and no longer be available to the birds.

Commercial feeds are readily available and provide all the nutritional needs of birds. Feeds should be selected for the appropriate type of bird and stage of growth. Feed should generally be available continuously. An increased supply should be made available in colder weather.

Household scraps in moderation can supplement a birds diet. Ensure that the scraps are reasonably fresh, with no mould and not excessively salty.

Shell grit is essential to aid digestion and is also an added source of calcium. Chickens also like a variety of greens and fruit. More information can be obtained from various bird publications.

Bird carers should only consider a home-prepared diet instead of a commercial diet after extensive research and advice from bird nutritionists. Dietary deficiencies and excesses lead to ill health, suffering, and poor production in birds.

## **7. HYGIENE**

The shelter floor is to be maintained in a sanitary state to prevent a build up of ammonia, manure and odours. Under optimal conditions, cleaning may only be required infrequently. However, litter (whether it is deep or shallow) will need to be changed if it becomes wet, caked or dusty.

Drinking containers should be maintained in a clean state.

## **8. OBTAINING BIRDS**

Buyers should be aware that birds available for purchase as layers are often bred specifically for short production lives in the commercial environment and their life span may be shorter than birds which have not been specifically bred for their egg-laying, non-broody qualities. If not vaccinated, they are also likely to be more susceptible to disease. Vaccination of poultry is difficult, and it may be preferable to purchase stock that has been bred to be resistant to diseases such as Mareks and Infectious Laryngo-Tracheitis.

### **8.1 Rearing Birds:**

Chickens should be maintained in an environment of 30 degrees celsius when first hatched for five to six weeks until they are fully feathered. At this stage the heat can gradually be withdrawn. Where necessary, feed may be withheld from day old chickens for up to 24 hours. Young birds should be fed a commercial “grower” diet until mature.

## **9. HEALTH**

### **9.1 General**

Good management is essential to maintain healthy birds. Good hygiene (see above) should be maintained at all times. Overstocking is detrimental and can lead to cannibalism (see the section on Housing for appropriate numbers of birds). Regular observation of all individuals in the flock will ensure that any emerging health or welfare problems are addressed immediately.

Observe birds at least once daily to check their state of health. Feeding times provide a good opportunity to observe their behaviour, appearance and vitality.

Moulting is a normal phenomenon that occurs seasonally, often in Autumn and late Winter. The timing of the first moult will be influenced by the time of year of hatching. During moulting, egg-laying drops off, feathers are lost so the birds may look almost naked, and the comb may be pale. Moulting birds should be provided with additional protection from extremes of weather and be given additional high protein supplements. This can be provided by the use of commercial “brooder mix” or by the addition of meat or fish-meal plus greens. Overcrowding should be avoided during moulting because birds may peck at newly emerging feathers. Forced moulting by starvation is not acceptable.

Sick birds may show similar symptoms to moulting birds but may also:

- separate themselves from the flock and appear depressed;
- have droopy comb or tail;
- be dull and fluffed;
- have a dark or pale comb; and
- be pecked by other birds.

Sick birds should be housed separately for their own protection, comfort, and to enable treatment and observation. In cold weather, additional heat should be provided.

Dead birds should be removed immediately.

Birds that are too ill to recover should be euthanased by a veterinarian or killed in accordance with the advice provided later in this Code. Carcasses of ill and euthanased birds are unsuitable for consumption.

### **9.2 Vaccination**

Backyard chickens bred for commercial establishments should be vaccinated against Marek’s Disease at one day of age. Other vaccinations (eg Infectious Bronchitis, Newcastle Disease) may be available and are recommended.

Some non-commercial breeds may be more resistant to disease and owners may prefer not to have them vaccinated (see above: “Obtaining birds”).

### **9.3 Parasites**

Poultry are commonly infested with lice and mites, which lead to irritation or ill health (retarded growth, reduced egg production, lowered vitality, damaged plumage and even death). Products for the elimination or control of these parasites are readily available and should only be used in accordance with directions.

Poultry are also commonly infected with worms including roundworms, caecal worms, thread worms and tape worms. These worms cause ill thrift, reduced production and can cause death, both directly and by acting as intermediate hosts for other serious parasites. Control is by regular medication and good sanitation. Choice of product depends on the species of worm, and veterinary examination of fresh faeces or post mortem of a bird may be necessary. Follow product directions carefully.

Control of other internal parasites such as Coccidia may also be required.

Natural products such as derris dust or pyrethrum can be added to the dust bath area to deter parasites including those that cause diseases such as Marek’s Disease. Small amounts of garlic in the feed and vinegar in drinking water may also be useful in preventing parasite infestation.

## **10. HANDLING & TRANSPORT**

Handling and transport are extremely stressful for birds. Poultry should only be transported when absolutely necessary. Stress of handling can be reduced if the bird is handled regularly from a young age.

Birds should be captured in a manner that minimises stress and injury. If it is necessary to handle a bird prior to transportation, only one bird should be handled at a time. It should be picked up with both hands and held so that it cannot flap its wings and so that its body is supported. Handling for transportation or husbandry purposes should last as short a time as possible. Chickens are ideally captured at night when they are asleep.

Care needs to be taken to select appropriate containers for transporting the birds and transportation should be in line with the Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals: Land Transport of Animals.

Containers should:

- be easy to clean, and maintained in a clean state;
- be safe with no sharp edges or protrusions;
- provide adequate ventilation; and
- be secure to avoid escape and to protect from predation.

For occasional use over short distances, a cardboard box with sufficient holes for ventilation is adequate.

Poultry are particularly susceptible to heat and should not be transported in hot weather unless cooling (air conditioning) is available. Alternately, they should be transported during cool periods (early morning).

For short trips, containers in which the bird cannot injure itself by moving around much are better. However, if the bird is to be confined in the container for more than two hours, it should have sufficient space in the container to turn around, stand up, sit down and stretch its wings.

- Poultry are can not be transported in the boot of a car.
- Poultry are not to be tied up by the legs or any other part of the body.
- Poultry are not to be held and carried by their legs, wings or necks.

Birds, excluding day old chicks, should not be transported for more than three hours, without water. Newly hatched chickens may be transported for periods up to 24 hours without food or water. Time of transport begins from when they are placed in a container, or earlier if food or water has been unavailable prior to containment. This time will vary according to weather conditions and whether or not they are in an air conditioned vehicle.

## **11. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

### **11.1 Practices to minimise damage by aggressive birds**

Beak trimming, dubbing, desnooding, and toe removal should not be used on backyard birds. These procedures are used in commercial establishments where high stocking densities can lead to aggression. Lower stocking densities in non-commercial establishments should reduce the risk of aggression. Where a particular bird is unacceptably aggressive with other birds, it is recommended that the offending bird be housed separately or rehomed.

Toenails should be clipped if they become overgrown, but an environment in which they can scratch may avoid this problem. Care needs to be taken to prevent bleeding – seek the help of an experienced individual or veterinarian.

Sharp spurs on adult male chickens may be trimmed to prevent injury to other birds. To avoid injury to hens during mating, the terminal segment of each inward pointing toe of male breeding birds may be removed within 3 days of hatching. These procedures must be carried out by a veterinarian.

### **11.2 Flight Restriction**

Pinioning (which includes de-winging, notching or tendon severing) is a procedure that permanently restricts flight in birds and are not to be performed. The exception is day-old pheasants provided the operation, which

involves the removal of the distal or terminal segment of the wing, is carried out on one wing only and by a veterinarian or a trained competent operator.

Wing clipping, where the primary flight feathers are cut, is an acceptable means of temporarily restricting flight. However, birds that are unable to fly properly are at increased risk of predators and should be protected by predator proof enclosures.

### **11.3 Identification**

Wing and leg bands used for bird identification should be checked regularly and where necessary loosened or removed to avoid injury to the bird.

### **11.4 Other practices**

Castration and devoicing are unacceptable practices and should not be undertaken.

The use of blinkers and other vision impairing equipment should not be used without veterinary advice.

## **12. EUTHANASIA AND SLAUGHTER**

If a domestic poultry bird of any species is to be killed, it should be killed in a manner that minimises distress, pain and suffering.

Birds may be euthanased by a qualified veterinarian using barbiturate injection. Birds euthanased with any chemical agent are unsuitable for consumption. Birds that are euthanased because of ill health are, in any case, unsuitable for consumption. Carcasses of diseased birds should be disposed of to avoid spread of disease, odour, and risk of consumption by other animals, for example, they can be disposed of, at an ACT Government designated carcass area, such as incorporated at ACT Government land fill sites, or buried at an appropriate depth in the backyard.

The AWAC recommends that birds should be killed only by persons who are sufficiently expert to ensure that killing is immediate and the animal does not suffer. AWAC therefore recommends that owners do not kill their own birds, even for home consumption. However, where owners do intend to kill their own birds for consumption, AWAC recommends, with reservations, that breaking the bird's neck is the least inhumane method.

The bird's head should be covered with a cloth (a drawstring bag is suitable) in order to calm the bird. The bird's body should be held under one arm to prevent flapping and struggling, and the neck held with the hand on that side. The other hand holds the head, and the head is twisted and pulled sharply away from the body.

The assistance and advice of a person experienced in poultry euthanasia needs to be obtained before any birds are killed. Such a person should be

engaged to demonstrate the killing technique at least once before a poultry owner attempts to kill a bird, and should also be present when the owner first kills a bird.

### **13. REFERENCES**

- *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Captive Birds in the ACT.*
- *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.*