



# Fitness for transport

Being asked to certify that animals are fit to be transported can prompt legal, ethical and practical questions for veterinarians. VCNZ's **Wayne Ricketts** outlines four major guidelines.

**VETERINARIANS ARE OFTEN** asked to provide certification that animals are fit to be transported. This can be challenging: there's pressure from the owner; the economic value of the animal; the owner is a good client; you're an inexperienced veterinarian; or you're just plain unsure. There are four guidelines that you need to be aware of.

## THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 1999

It is a legal requirement under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 that animals must be fit for transport, ie free from injuries, disease, abnormal behaviour or physical abnormalities. It's an offence to transport an animal in a way that, without reasonable excuse, causes it unnecessary pain or distress, and it's also an offence to transport an animal with a condition that renders it unfit (see sections 22 and 23 of the Act for a wider description).

[www.legislation.govt.nz](http://www.legislation.govt.nz)

## CODE OF WELFARE – TRANSPORT WITHIN NEW ZEALAND

Codes of welfare flesh out the requirements of the Act. Minimum standards set the lowest possible requirements to meet the Act. Failure to meet a minimum standard may be used as evidence in a prosecution for an offence under the Act.

The Code does allow in some instances for the transport of animals that are sick, injured or deformed, provided their welfare will not be compromised during the journey. In these cases, veterinary declarations must be completed and must accompany the animals when they are transported.

The NZVA provides veterinary declaration forms, and while the forms

include "for slaughter" in the title, the declarations are for transport for **any** reason.

While the entire Code is about transporting animals, Minimum Standard 6 specifically addresses the selection and acceptance of animals for transport. For example, minimum standard 6 (d) states: *"Animals to be transported must be able to stand and bear weight evenly on all limbs."*

[www.mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response/animal-welfare/codes-of-welfare](http://www.mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response/animal-welfare/codes-of-welfare)

## NZVA GUIDANCE ON FITNESS FOR TRANSPORT, INCLUDING VETERINARY CERTIFICATION

The NZVA guidelines provide further information to veterinarians, especially about assessing animals that may **not** comply with the minimum standards.

[www.vetcouncil.org.nz/documentation/Other/NZVAGuidance\\_FitnessForTransport\\_and\\_VeterinaryCertification.pdf](http://www.vetcouncil.org.nz/documentation/Other/NZVAGuidance_FitnessForTransport_and_VeterinaryCertification.pdf)

The guidelines provide comprehensive information on what's fit for transport and what's not. They are aligned with the conditions that MPI VS considers are not acceptable for transportation. If you are unsure of the suitability of an animal to be transported for slaughter, we strongly advise you to contact an MPI VS veterinarian at the intended slaughter premises destination for guidance. The details and phone numbers of MPI offices at slaughter premises are regularly updated on the NZVA website.

[www.nzva.org.nz/MPIVScontact](http://www.nzva.org.nz/MPIVScontact)

If you are unsure of the suitability of an animal to be transported for other

reasons, read the NZVA guidelines, seek the advice of a colleague or contact the NZVA or VCNZ. If you are asked to provide a veterinary certificate, remember the maximum duration is seven days. The limit can be extended (up to 10 days) in geographically isolated areas, but only where the veterinarian believes the animal would still be fit to be transported. If going for slaughter, they should go to the nearest slaughter premises. If this is not possible, other on-farm options need to be considered. Similarly, certified animals not going for slaughter should travel for minimal distances and be rested as required.

## CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Two sections of the Code apply – the **Animal Welfare** section, and the **Professional Integrity** section.

Veterinarians must maintain the integrity of certification. A couple of important things to remember:

- » Veterinarians retain the right to decide whether to issue a certificate or not.
- » Veterinarians must be familiar with the form of the certificate and any accompanying instructions or guidelines, and consider all the implications of issuing it.

For ethical decisions, I suggest you ask yourself: "Could I defend this if it was reported on the front page of the local newspaper?" or "Could I defend it to my colleagues at a regional branch meeting?" or "Could I defend my actions if a complaint was made to VCNZ?" In my next article, I will discuss some real-life examples. <sup>VS</sup>