

FAST FOOD, SLOW PROGRESS

AUSTRALIA LAGGING BEHIND ON CHICKEN
WELFARE STANDARDS





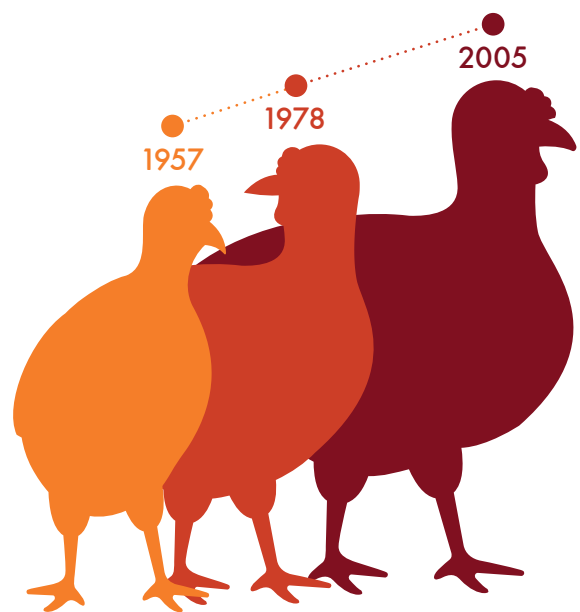
Introduction: The Modern Meat Chicken

Many Australians may recall a time when chicken was only eaten on special occasions. However, that is no longer the case. Globally, chickens are the most intensively farmed land animals in the world, and the same is true in Australia. In 2023, Australians consumed an average of 50.2kg of chicken per person, making them the most consumed animal in the country.

Over 700 million chickens are killed for meat in Australia every year, averaging nearly two million chickens per day.¹ Chicken is popular because it is cheap, but this affordability masks an acute animal welfare crisis of which few Australians are aware.

Shockingly, Australian laws and regulations do not protect these chickens from the industrial cruelty of factory farming. Poor welfare conditions, fast growth genetics and overcrowded spaces are all legal and can cause stress and suffering. It is legal to only give chickens an area roughly the size of an iPad, where they can spend their entire short lives. It is legal - and indeed commonplace - to use breeds that grow so quickly that they suffer from debilitating health problems.²

Chicken farming has undergone significant changes over the decades. The demand for cheap meat has led to an increase in the size and industrialisation of chicken farming, resulting in the use of sheds that can hold up to 40,000³ birds at a time. However, this increase in size and speed does not only apply to chicken farms but also to chickens themselves,



A fully grown meat chicken now weighs over 3.5 times more than 60 years ago.

who have been bred to grow at such unnatural rates that they reach slaughter weight in six short weeks. That is the equivalent of a 3kg newborn human baby reaching 300kg in less than two months.⁴

The Importance of Breed

Chickens in Australian factory farms have been bred to grow big quickly because the faster and bigger a chicken grows, the more meat each bird produces, and the less money chicken producers spend on food and water for each animal. While this may sound like a smart business strategy, the cost of cheap meat is borne by the bodies of the chickens in factory farms.

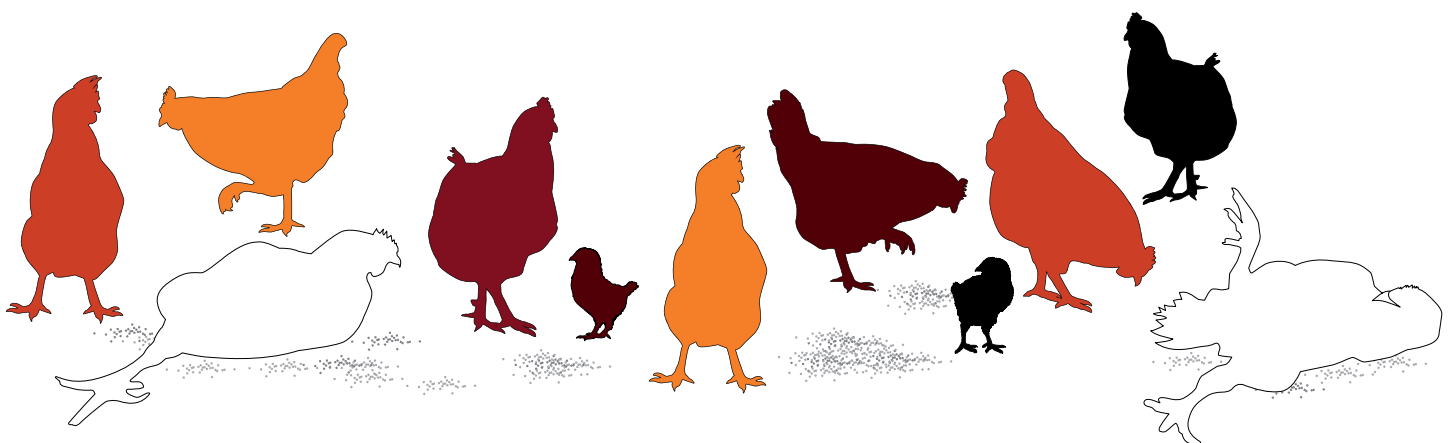
Prior to slaughter many chickens are unable to support the weight of their body. They may suffer from lameness and leg injuries and may become unable to walk. Their rapid growth rate also causes their heart and lungs to overwork.

Because a chicken's breed plays such an important role in their quality of life, it is impossible to consider the welfare of a chicken without considering their breed. In fact, given the number of health problems associated with fast-growing breeds, **fast-growing chickens cannot truly experience a good life; they are born to suffer.**

This suffering could be reduced if chicken producers switched the breeds of chickens that they farm.

Using breeds that grow at a slower rate – making commensurate environmental changes necessary to the use of such breeds – would substantially reduce the suffering and mortality rates of chickens on farms.⁵ This does not mean that factory farms would be good for the welfare of animals but a switch to slower-growing breeds could alleviate some of the worst animal welfare concerns on industrial chicken farms.

Switching to slower-growing breeds – when combined with additional welfare improvements to accommodate their growth rate – would be the single most impactful way to improve the lives of Australia's more than 700 million meat chickens.





The Better Chicken Commitment

Fast-food restaurants and other food companies have profited from chicken suffering for decades, but there is hope for a more humane future.

Shifting attitudes about animal welfare have led many food companies to adopt animal welfare policies within their supply chains that go beyond legal requirements. One such policy is a set of science-based standards called the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC). The BCC is the leading set of minimum welfare standards for chickens used for meat. It can be applied to supply chains of various sizes, improving the lives of animals. To date, there have been over 600 commitments to the BCC globally, including commitments from large, global food companies.

Drawing on the latest scientific evidence, the BCC aims to improve the lives of chickens from birth to slaughter. It provides updated rules for useable perch space, the provision of natural light, greater air quality and more humane slaughter methods based on current research and thinking. And it mandates the use of slower-growing breeds.

The BCC standards reflect current best practice for industrial meat chicken welfare, exceeding standards currently set out by regulatory bodies. In the absence of adequate legal protections for meat chickens that are in line with community expectations around welfare, commitment to the BCC ensures that food companies are providing the animals in their supply chain with a quality of life that far exceeds legal minimum standards.

Australian fast-food companies are falling behind

In 2023, chicken-based fast-food accounted for 19.3% of all fast-food sales in Australia, approximately four and a half billion dollars.⁶

Major retailers like KFC, McDonald's and Hungry Jack's purchase millions of chickens a year for their restaurants. Because of this enormous purchasing power, fast-food restaurants in Australia have the potential to change the chicken industry for the better.

But unlike a growing number of their counterparts in Europe and the United States (U.S.), Australian fast-food and takeaway restaurants are continuing to use fast growing breeds and poor welfare standards.

Worldwide, hundreds of companies have pledged to improve their supply chains to reflect the standards of the BCC. Globally, there have been over 600 commitments by food companies, including European and North American supply chains for global fast-food brands like KFC, Starbucks and Nando's and eight companies in New Zealand.

In 2023, 32 companies in the European Union, four in the U.S. and four in New Zealand signed the BCC. **In Australia, the number is zero.**⁷



Community Sentiment

Community attitudes to animal welfare, including chickens, are evolving quickly and recognition of animal sentience and the failure of our existing laws to acknowledge this is growing. A significant majority of Australians value the wellbeing of farmed animals. A 2019 report by Futureeye found that 95% of respondents view farmed animal welfare with concern. These attitudes reflect the fact that Australians see the intrinsic value in animal lives and believe that they deserve protection from harm. The chicken industry is aware of this community sentiment.

A 2021 Agrifutures Market Insight report for Australia's chicken industry states that increasing concerns for animal welfare are specifically likely to affect future demand for chicken meat.⁸ The expansion of animal welfare labelling on chicken products over the past decade is a tangible reflection of how animal welfare concerns have already impacted the market. RSPCA Approved chicken, for example, makes up over 90% of Australia's chicken meat market while other

certification schemes like the Free Range Eggs and Poultry (FREPA) and Australian Certified Organic are commonly used.

Community concerns about animal welfare will only grow, and the chicken industry needs to be planning for this. They should not make the mistake of assuming that the change will be gradual.

The abrupt shift in sentiment that saw battery cages for layer hens lose their social license so quickly will inevitably happen with meat chickens in the near future. The growing uptake of the BCC around the world is evidence that food companies know this, and are adjusting their supply chains in response, regardless of regulatory standards.

For the Australian fast-food and takeaway restaurant sector, this growing uptake should be seen as a warning of how far behind they have already fallen, and how quickly they need to act to begin implementing changes to their supply chain. Adopting the BCC is not just the right thing to do – it is a prudent business decision.



Methodology

This report assesses nine of the largest major fast-food companies' commitment to giving chickens better lives. The United Kingdom, and the United States were chosen to provide a point of comparison, to see how Australian companies are performing against similar international counterparts.

Companies' performance on meat chicken welfare is assessed against the BCC. Companies need to have signed onto the BCC to achieve the highest rating. Those that have received a mid-tier rating on meat chicken welfare need to have all chicken in their supply chain certified by RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme, such as the Free Range Egg and Poultry Association (FREPA) standards.

While RSPCA Approved certification is a good first step, the certification does not currently address the issue of fast-growing meat chicken breeds.

A traffic light system is used to rate and present the scores in an easily digestible way. The legend below presents the reasoning behind each scoring methodology. Where a company is not present in the market, the rating will be left blank. Transparency is critical in managing chicken welfare and performance. For that reason, only publicly available information is used to rate performance.

LEGEND



Green

Have signed on to the Better Chicken Commitment and have announced this publicly.



Amber

Entire meat chicken supply chain is RSPCA Approved or equivalent, this information is publicly available.⁹



Red

No publicly available independent chicken welfare commitments. Have not signed onto either of the above welfare standards.

Key Findings




































The results show that globally, Australia is underperforming. With the exception of Domino's, which signed the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC) for its Australia and New Zealand locations in 2021, none of the top Australian fast-food restaurants have signed the BCC.

To date, Domino's is the only fast-food company in Australia to commit to higher-welfare farming by ensuring slower-growing breeds with better welfare outcomes will be introduced into their supply chain and by providing chickens with the opportunity to experience more space, enrichment and natural light.

During the research phase of this report, World Animal Protection met with representatives from Guzman y Gomez to discuss the supply chain animal welfare standards for their Australian locations. Guzman y Gomez told us that these standards align with those used by Lilydale Free Range Chicken, which are based on the Free Range Egg and Poultry Association (FREPA). FREPA standards do not require the use of slower-growing chickens, a critical component of the Better Chicken Commitment.

Our report methodology is based on publicly available information. Given that Guzman y Gomez has not made publicly available any additional information indicating that their chicken welfare standards exceed FREPA, we have maintained an amber rating for Guzman y Gomez in this report.

While KFC in the UK and six other countries across Europe have adopted the BCC, KFC in Australia has so far declined to do so. The same can be said for Hungry Jack's, Starbucks, Subway, Nando's and Pizza Hut. Three of these companies - Subway, Pizza Hut, and KFC - have not even taken the first step to improve the welfare of chickens in their Australian supply chain.

| Company | Australia | UK | US |
|---|---|---|---|
| Domino's  |  |  |  |
| Starbucks  |  |  |  |
|  Nando's |  |  |  |
| Guzman y Gomez  |  | N/A |  |
| Hungry Jack's (Burger King)  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  Pizza Hut |  |  |  |
| McDonald's  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

Conclusion

Australia is falling behind the rest of the world when it comes to chicken welfare.

As consumer demand for chicken grows and factory farms continue to profit from animal cruelty, Australian companies are turning a blind eye to the suffering in their supply chains. These companies are out of step not only with global trends, but with their own customers who want farmed animals to be given a life worth living.

Businesses that use animals in their supply chains have an obligation to continuously reevaluate, reassess and improve their business model to improve the welfare of those animals. While the rest of the world moves forward by incorporating the tenets of the Better Chicken Commitment, Australia lags behind, leaving over 700 million animals trapped in their own bodies, bred to suffer.

To ensure they are in line with global best practice and community expectations, all Australian fast-food companies should adopt the Better Chicken Commitment as their minimum chicken welfare standard with a priority on transitioning their supply chains to breeds that grow at a healthier, more natural rate.





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9. Note - only one other scheme matched closely enough to RSPCA Approved to fit within this category, and that is the Free Range Egg and Poultry Accreditation Scheme (FREPA).



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