Australian Government

Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports

# Annual report
2025–26



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**Acknowledgements**

The Inspector-General thanks Dr Naveen Bhatia and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for their assistance in preparing this report.

**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

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# Letter of transmittal

22 October 2026

Hon Julie Collins MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2900

Dear Minister

I am pleased to provide you with the annual report of the Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports for the year ended 30 June 2026.

This report has been prepared in accordance with section 40 of the *Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports Act 2019.*

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Ash Bunce**
Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports



# Inspector-General's foreword

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports for the year ended 30 June 2026.

The 2025–26 financial year was a period of significant transition for the Office of the Inspector-General. Dr Katherine Clift resigned as Inspector-General on 29 August 2025, and the position remained vacant for much of the reporting period. I commenced as Inspector-General on 1 May 2026 and therefore served in the role for the final 2 months of 2025–26.

While no review reports were finalised or published during the reporting period, important work was undertaken to maintain continuity of the Office and preserve the foundations necessary for the effective exercise of its statutory functions. Existing review records, submissions and supporting material were retained, and administrative arrangements remained in place to support the future work of the Office.

Following my appointment, I focused on building an understanding of the livestock export regulatory environment and the role of independent oversight within that framework. During my first 2 months, I met with departmental officials, industry representatives, animal welfare organisations and other stakeholders to hear a broad range of perspectives on the operation of the livestock export system and the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. These engagements were invaluable in informing my understanding of stakeholder expectations and future areas of focus for the Office.

I also began considering the future direction of the Office, including the status of work inherited from my predecessor and the development of a forward oversight program. This work laid the foundations for the 2026–27 annual work plan, which was published in August 2026 following consultation with stakeholders and the minister.

The Office also progressed governance and administrative arrangements to support its effective operation. This included work to strengthen the collaborative relationship between the Office and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry through the development of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that recognises the importance of both independence and constructive engagement.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by Dr Katherine Clift during her tenure as Inspector-General and thank departmental staff, industry representatives, animal welfare organisations and other stakeholders for their engagement and support throughout this period of transition. I also acknowledge the professionalism and commitment of the staff of the Office, who maintained continuity and supported the re-establishment of the Office following my appointment.

As we enter 2026–27, my focus is on providing independent, evidence-based oversight that promotes transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in the administration of Australia's animal welfare and live animal export regulatory framework. I look forward to working constructively with stakeholders as the Office progresses its future review program and contributes to improved confidence in the livestock export regulatory system.



**Dr Ash Bunce**
Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports



# Overview

## Key achievements, 2025–26

Despite a prolonged vacancy in the statutory office during 2025–26, the Office undertook several important activities to maintain continuity and support the effective re-establishment of independent oversight of Australia's animal welfare and live animal export regulatory framework.

Key achievements during 2025–26 included:

- commencing a comprehensive stakeholder engagement program following the appointment of the new Inspector-General, including meetings with departmental officials, industry representatives and animal welfare organisations to inform future oversight priorities
- reviewing work inherited from the former Inspector-General and considering options for future progression of review activities
- progressing governance and administrative arrangements, including work towards an MOU between the Office and the department to support the effective operation of the Office while maintaining its statutory independence
- establishing the foundations for the 2026–27 annual work program through stakeholder consultation, environmental scanning and early planning activities.

## New Inspector-General

Since taking up the role on 1 May 2026, the Inspector-General, Dr Ash Bunce, has consulted extensively with:

- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry officials
- state and territory government officials
- livestock exporters
- veterinarians
- key industry bodies
- registered establishments
- animal welfare groups.

These consultations have given the Inspector-General a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the live animal export industry and the regulatory system that supports it.

The Inspector-General travelled to Darwin and Perth to see firsthand several registered establishment facilities, the inspection processes and livestock being loaded for export. The Inspector-General acknowledges the significant cooperation and generosity of all stakeholders who made their time available and shared their knowledge and insights.

## Annual work plan 2025–26

Under the *Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports Act 2019*, the Inspector-General is required to prepare and publish an annual work plan outlining proposed review activities and priorities for each financial year.

Implementation of the 2025–26 annual work program was significantly affected by the resignation of the former Inspector-General on 29 August 2025 and the subsequent vacancy in the statutory office until 30 April 2026. At the start of the reporting period, 2 reviews initiated under the 2024–25 annual work plan remained underway:

- Review of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's responses to significant livestock export incidents
- Review of preparation of livestock for export.

During the vacancy, no new reviews were commenced, and no review reports were finalised or published. The Office focused on maintaining continuity, preserving records associated with ongoing review activities and supporting the transition to a new Inspector-General.

The former Inspector-General had progressed both reviews to the draft reporting stage. Public consultation had been undertaken and draft reports, including recommendations, had been provided to the department. However, fact checking, exit meetings, consideration of formal departmental responses and publication were not completed before the statutory office became vacant.

## Memorandum of understanding

During the reporting period, work continued on establishing an MOU between the Inspector-General and the department. This MOU is an important step in strengthening governance arrangements, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and supporting effective collaboration while maintaining the statutory independence of the Inspector-General. The MOU was not finalised by 30 June 2026.

## Looking forward

Following the appointment of Dr Ash Bunce on 1 May 2026, the Office began re-establishing its oversight program, strengthening stakeholder relationships and considering future priorities for independent review and assurance.

In 2026–27 the Inspector-General will focus on delivering an independent, evidence-based program of work that promotes transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in the administration of Australia's animal welfare and live animal export regulatory framework. This work will be guided by the Office's 2026–27 annual work plan, which was developed following consultation with the department, the minister and stakeholders and was published in August 2026.

A key priority for 2026–27 will be to progress review activities identified in the 2025–26 and 2026–27 annual work plans, and continuing to engage with government, industry, animal welfare organisations and other interested stakeholders. These engagements will help ensure the Office remains informed by a broad range of perspectives and continues to provide independent oversight that is constructive, transparent and focused on driving improvements in regulatory performance.

The Office will also continue to strengthen its governance and operating arrangements, including the implementation of administrative and collaborative arrangements that support the effective exercise of the Inspector-General's statutory functions while preserving the Office's independence.

As the Office moves beyond a period of significant transition, it is well positioned to deliver meaningful oversight activities that contribute to public confidence in Australia's animal welfare and live animal export regulatory system. The Inspector-General looks forward to working collaboratively with stakeholders and the department to support positive outcomes for animal welfare, regulatory integrity and continuous improvement across the livestock export sector.

# Overview of livestock exports

In 2025–26, Australia's livestock export industry was valued at approximately $993 million. The industry is estimated to support around 13,000 jobs across Australia. The department regulates the livestock export industry in accordance with the Export Control Act 2020 and the Export Control (Animals) Rules 2021.

In July 2026, 14 registered exporters were active. Table 1 shows the species exported between 2022–23 and 2025–26 by mode of transport.

**Table 1** Livestock exported from Australia by air and sea, 2022–23 to 2025–26

| Year | Mode of transport | Cattle | Sheep | Buffalo | Goats | Camels | Alpacas | Llamas | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2022–23** | Air | 2,774 | 18,859 | 0 | 13,860 | 13 | 401 | 12 | 35,919 |
| | Sea | 611,325 | 620,558 | 8,574 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,240,457 |
| | **Total** | **614,099** | **639,417** | **8,574** | **13,860** | **13** | **401** | **12** | **1,276,376** |
| **2023–24** | Air | 2,531 | 16,691 | 0 | 16,499 | 18 | 839 | 8 | 36,586 |
| | Sea | 744,288 | 502,840 | 5,350 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,252,478 |
| | **Total** | **746,819** | **519,531** | **5,350** | **16,499** | **18** | **839** | **8** | **1,289,064** |
| **2024–25** | Air | 2,233 | 17,443 | 0 | 17,852 | 99 | 1,463 | 18 | 39,108 |
| | Sea | 778,933 | 407,490 | 4,820 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,191,243 |
| | **Total** | **781,166** | **424,933** | **4,820** | **17,852** | **99** | **1,463** | **18** | **1,230,351** |
| **2025–26** | Air | 2,940 | 11,871 | 0 | 37,914 | 80 | 288 | 0 | 53,093 |
| | Sea | 679,354 | 63,609 | 6,959 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 749,922 |
| | **Total** | **682,294** | **75,480** | **6,959** | **37,914** | **80** | **288** | **0** | **803,015** |

Note: Figures are correct at 31 July 2026 and are subject to change.
Source: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Australia's livestock export industry remained relatively stable between 2022–23 and 2024–25, exporting between 1.23 million and 1.29 million animals annually.

Between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026, Australia exported more than 800,000 livestock. Cattle exported by sea accounted for the majority of exports (Table 1). Approximately 54% of all sea-exported cattle departed from Darwin, and around 78% were destined for Indonesia. In addition to Darwin, livestock exports were shipped from ports in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria.

However, 2025–26 saw a significant contraction in the live export trade. Total livestock exports fell to 803,015 head, representing a reduction of approximately 35% to 40% compared with each of the preceding 3 years.

Throughout the period, sea freight remained the dominant export mode, consistently accounting for the overwhelming majority of exports. While air exports increased steadily and reached a record level in 2025–26, the growth in air movements was not sufficient to offset the substantial decline in seaborne exports. As a result, total export volumes fell sharply in the final year.

The overall composition of the trade also changed significantly. The industry became increasingly concentrated around a smaller number of export streams, with traditional high-volume trades declining while specialist and breeding-stock shipments became more prominent. Air freight activity expanded, indicating growing demand for higher-value livestock moved in smaller consignments, whereas bulk sea shipments were markedly reduced.

The data suggests that the livestock export sector is transitioning from the broad-based export profile seen in earlier years towards a more concentrated and specialised model. The past 2 years have been characterised by:

- stable export performance through 2024–25
- strong growth in air-freighted livestock exports
- reduced reliance on some traditional export streams
- a significant decline in overall export volumes in 2025–26 driven primarily by lower sea freight activity
- increasing importance of niche and breeding-stock markets within the export portfolio.

Overall, the 4-year trend indicates an industry adapting to changing market conditions and export demand, with a gradual shift towards specialised livestock movements occurring alongside a reduction in large-scale seaborne exports.



# Purpose, role and function

The Inspector-General reviews the performance of functions and exercise of powers by the department in regulating livestock exports under the *Export Control Act 2020* and the Export Control (Animals) Rules 2021.

The Inspector-General is an independent statutory office holder with functions and powers under the *Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports Act 2019* (IGAWLAE Act).

The Inspector-General role was established in 2019 under the *Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports Act 2019*. On 4 December 2023, this Act was amended to the IGAWLAE Act to strengthen animal welfare and increase accountability and transparency for animal welfare in livestock exports.

The functions and powers of the Inspector-General are set out in the legislation.

The Inspector-General is appointed by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, usually for a set term of 5 years.

## Purpose

The purpose of the Inspector-General is to provide independent assurance to the minister and the public as to whether the department is properly performing its functions as regulator of the livestock export industry.

The purpose is guided by the role of the Inspector-General as set out in section 10 of the IGAWLAE Act.

The Inspector-General's role is to monitor, investigate and report on the department's implementation of animal welfare and live animal export legislation and standards, with the intention of:

- promoting continual improvements in the regulatory practice, performance and culture of the department
- providing an additional layer of accountability and assurance of the regulation of Australia's livestock exports
- ensuring livestock export officials consider the welfare of animals when performing functions and exercising their powers
- increasing accountability, regulatory compliance and transparency in accordance with Australia's livestock export legislation and standards.

## Functions

Conducting reviews is the main activity the Inspector-General carries out to deliver on the purpose. These reviews provide transparency and accountability for a regulatory system that has a high level of public interest. They also make observations, findings and recommendations that identify potential improvements to the department's livestock export management systems.

## Annual work plan

The IGAWLAE Act stipulates that the Inspector-General must develop an annual work plan for each financial year. The annual work plan sets out the key outcomes and priorities for the year, including the reviews that are scheduled to be conducted, and details of the reviews.

In preparing the work plan, the Inspector-General must consult with the minister and any other person the Inspector-General considers appropriate. The Inspector-General is not subject to direction from the minister in preparing an annual work plan.

The Inspector-General must publish the annual work plan on the Inspector-General website as soon as practicable after it has been finalised. The annual work plan can be varied if the Inspector-General is satisfied that it is reasonable and appropriate to do so. The new varied annual work plan must be published.

## Review process

The Inspector-General may conduct a review on their own initiative.

The minister may, in writing, direct the Inspector-General to conduct a particular review. This is referred to as a directed review under section 10 of the IGAWLAE Act. When directing a review, the minister must have regard to the objects of the IGAWLAE Act, the functions of the Inspector-General, the annual work plan and available resources. The Inspector-General must comply with a direction from the minister to conduct a review.

The Inspector-General must consult with the minister following a directed review. The consultation is to help determine the terms of reference and the priority level of the review. The independence of the Inspector-General means they are not subject to direction by the minister on these matters.

The minister or the secretary of the department may also request the Inspector-General to conduct a particular review. However, the Inspector-General is not required to comply with this request.

Under section 11 of the IGAWLAE Act, the Inspector-General may require a person to answer questions or give information in writing if the Inspector-General reasonably believes it is relevant to the review (Figure 1).

## Stakeholder engagement

The Inspector-General engages throughout the year with people and organisations that have an interest in livestock exports to help inform the work of the Office, including reviews. As part of this activity, the Inspector-General maintains a stakeholder contact list to help inform interested parties of public submission openings, annual work plans and publishing of reports. If you would like to be added to the email distribution list, email IGAWLAE@aff.gov.au.

The Inspector-General also maintains a website with the support of the department. It contains information about the Inspector-General's functions and powers, contact information for the Office, the annual work plan, and reports and completed reviews.

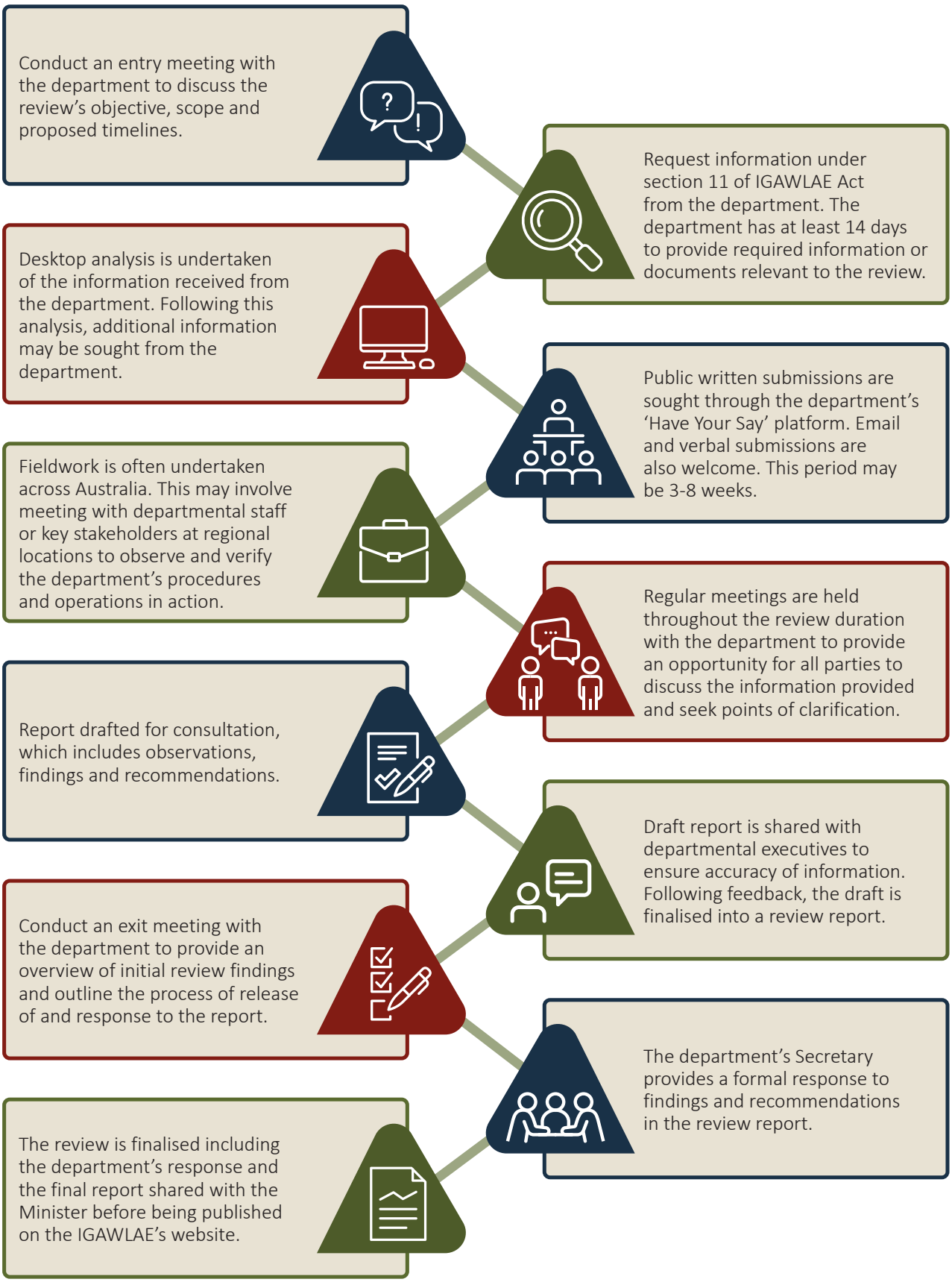
During reviews the Inspector-General seeks stakeholder views. This is crucial for understanding the complexities of the relationships and processes involved in exporting livestock and provides opportunities for people who are either directly involved in the industry or have an interest in it to provide their perspectives.

The Inspector-General uses the department's 'Have Your Say' platform to invite online public submissions. The timeframe for making submissions is typically 3 to 6 weeks. Submissions may be made in writing or, if offered, responses to survey questions. The Inspector-General also employs less formal methods for gathering information, including online or in-person meetings and direct submissions to the Inspector-General email inbox.

Non-confidential written submissions are published on the Inspector-General website at the conclusion of the review process.



**Figure 1** Overview of Inspector-General review process




Source: IGAWLAE annual report, 2024–25.

## Management and accountability

The Inspector-General is not a listed entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). Financial reporting and other information required under the PGPA Act are reported in the department's annual report. Risk management, policies and governance relating to the Inspector-General are also reported on by the department and are the accountability of the secretary. Accountable Authority Instructions (AAIs) are issued by the secretary under section 20A of the PGPA Act to officials on matters relating to the use of public resources in the delivery of policies, programs and services. The AAIs apply to all officials in the department, including officials of the Office.

## Budget

In the 2022–23 budget, $4 million was allocated over 4 years, commencing in 2022–23 and concluding on 30 June 2026. This funded the new policy proposal for the establishment of the Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports.

For 2025–26, the initial budget allocation for the Office was $805,000.28 (Table 2). Following a mid-year adjustment, the budget was reduced to $604,424.98. Total expenditure for 2025–26 was $568,969.80.

**Table 2** Summary of 2025–26 budget for the Office of the Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports

| Expense type | Total budget | Mid-year adjustment | Actuals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employee expenses | $693,813.28 | $570,823.99 | $465,329.00 |
| Operating supplies and expenses | $68,187.00 | $9,472.30 | $80,169.21 |
| Staff development and training | $3,000.00 | $0 | $0 |
| Travel | $40,000.00 | $24,128.69 | $23,471.59 |
| **Total** | **$805,000.28** | **$604,424.98** | **$568,969.80** |

## Staffing

The Inspector-General is a part-time office holder whose remuneration and allowances are set by the independent Remuneration Tribunal. Payment of the Inspector-General's daily fee is capped at 120 days per year under section 22 of the Remuneration Tribunal (Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-time Public Office) Determination 2025.

The Office had an average staffing level of 2 full-time equivalent staff during 2025–26. Before the departure of the former Inspector-General there were 3 full-time equivalent staff allocated to the Office. This was reduced to 1 full-time equivalent staff allocated to the Office by the time the current Inspector-General was appointed on 1 May 2026. Non-Senior Executive Service staff available to support the Inspector-General are provided by the department and employed under the *Public Service Act 1999.*

# Appendix A: Brief history of Inspectors-General

The death of 2,400 sheep on board a livestock carrier ship travelling to the Middle East in 2017 led to the Review of the Regulatory Capability and Culture of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Regulation of Live Animal Exports (Moss review). This review initiated the establishment of the Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports:

> "The department is progressing 48 recommendations from 8 reviews completed by successive Inspectors-General from March 2020 to August 2026. By 30 June 2026, 27 of the recommendations had been closed and 21 remained open. Table B1 summarises the status of recommendations from these reviews. Closed means recommendations are implemented. Open means they are still in progress (Moss 2018)."

In March 2019, Mr Ross Carter commenced as Interim Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports (interim IGLAE). Following royal assent to the Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports Act 2019, he served as the interim IGLAE until his tenure ended in April 2023. During that period 6 reviews were completed.

In 2023, the Australian Government committed to expanding the Office of the Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports to include animal welfare-related objectives and functions. Between 2 February 2023 and 9 March 2023, the department opened public consultation to invite feedback on additional animal welfare-related objectives, functions and expertise that could form part of the new role. A total of 24 submissions were received from industry groups, animal welfare organisations and other interested parties.

In August 2023, Dr Michael Bond was appointed acting interim IGLAE. On 4 December 2023, the Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports Amendment (Animal Welfare) Act 2019 received royal assent, expanding the responsibilities of the Inspector-General role. Dr Bond then became the acting Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports. Dr Bond's tenure ended in August 2023. He had completed 2 reviews.

In September 2024, Dr Katherine Clift was appointed as the Inspector-General for 5 years. She published the 2024–25 annual work plan in January 2025 and initiated 2 reviews. Dr Clift resigned on 29 August 2025, and the position remained vacant between September 2025 and April 2026. The 2 reviews Dr Clift initiated also remained pending until the next Inspector-General was appointed on 1 May 2026.

On 1 May 2026, Dr Ash Bunce was appointed for 5 years as the next Inspector-General.



# Appendix B: Status of recommendations

The department is progressing 48 recommendations from 8 reviews completed by successive Inspectors-General from March 2020 to August 2026. By 30 June 2026, 27 recommendations had been closed and 21 remained open. Table B1 summarises the status of recommendations from these reviews. Closed means recommendations are implemented. Open means they are still in progress.

**Table B1** Overview of Inspector-General reviews and recommendation status

| Inspector-General reviews | Published | Inspector-General recommendations | Agreed | Closed | Open |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Report on monitoring and reporting during livestock export voyages | 2 March 2020 | 12 | 12 | 10 | 2 |
| Implementation of Moss review's recommendations | 15 December 2020 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Review of the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System | 28 June 2021 | 8 | 8 | 2 | 6 |
| Livestock export permit systems and processes | 24 November 2021 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 4 |
| Livestock export licences and approved arrangements | 11 October 2022 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Communication and engagement in livestock export regulation | 6 April 2023 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| Implementation of Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports recommendations | 20 August 2024 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Independent Observer Program | 20 August 2024 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| **Total** | **–** | **48** | **48** | **27** | **21** |

Note: As at 30 June 2026.