

# *Like a duck* **OUT OF WATER**

AN EXPOSÉ OF THE AUSTRALIAN DUCK INDUSTRY







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**A report compiled by Animal Liberation:**  
Working to end the suffering of exploited and confined animals through legislation, consumer advocacy, action, and humane education.





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## Water deprivation for farmed ducks is one of Australia's largest animal welfare concerns.

- 1.1** This report presents the findings of an extensive investigation into the current practices of the duck meat industry in Australia. The overall aim of this project was to provide some transparency about this industry. Prior to this report the welfare practices of this industry had gone relatively unquestioned.
- 1.2** The duck farming industry in Australia is dominated by two intensive producers: Pepe's Ducks in NSW and Luv-a-Duck in VIC. Over 8 million ducks are slaughtered each year.
- 1.3** The majority of ducks raised for meat in Australia are raised in total confinement systems where ducks are kept for 6-7 weeks within a closed shed which allows one square metre of floor space for up to 5 fully grown ducks. Housing systems are very similar to those found in the broiler meat chicken industry.
- 1.4** Pekin ducks are the most common breed used in duck meat farming. Breeding ducks are sold to Australia from Cherry Valley and Grimaud Frères Selection. Both of these companies are involved in selective breeding practices that encourage rapid growth rate in ducks. Rapid growth rate causes severe welfare problems such as muscular-structure issues causing ducks to be in pain and/or unable to stand.
- 1.5** Ducks kept for breeding purposes are housed in confined sheds for over a year. They live on the build-up of faecal matter for periods of up to 16 months.
- 1.6** Water deprivation represents one of the most severe welfare concerns within modern farming practices. All total confinement facilities and most partial confinement facilities do not provide surface or bathing water for ducks to swim or clean with. Ducks are aquatic animals designed for a life on water. They require water to clean themselves, to regulate their temperature, and to take pressure off their naturally weak leg and thigh joints. Deprivation of water can lead to lameness, dislocated joints, broken bones, splay legs, breast blisters, loss of their centre of gravity, bumblefoot, pus-filled cuts/abrasions, skin damage from high ammonia concentrations, crusty eye, and the build-up of filth on feathers. Deprivation of natural behaviours can also cause stress.
- 1.7** The duck industry has minimal veterinary input. Outbreaks of disease at Australian farms have been reported. The most concerning of these are outbreaks of Anatipestifer Disease. Evidence of this disease has been found at major duck companies in the last 10 years. Poor management practices are the most common cause for this disease and ducks suffer extreme pain and discomfort. Other diseases discovered at Australian farms include bacterial septicaemia and meningitis.
- 1.8** In 2012 ABC's "7:30" exposed the treatment of ducks at a Pepe's contract shed. Following this, the ACCC initiated proceedings against Pepe's in the Federal Court alleging false, misleading and deceptive advertising. In December 2012, the Federal Court found against Pepe's Ducks and handed down orders including a penalty of \$400,000. In March 2013 the ACCC instituted proceedings against a second company, Luv-a-Duck, alleging false, misleading or deceptive conduct. This matter is still before the court at time of printing.
- 1.9** The Model Code of Practice is used as a guideline to determine animal cruelty under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979. Ducks currently fall under a one page appendix of a larger Code related specifically to land fowl. The Code only addresses duck stocking densities, handling, and bill trimming. It fails to recognise the aquatic needs of ducks, or any other specific welfare requirements for this species.

### Conclusions/recommendations

Industry argues that providing water for ducks brings with it a host of other concerns such as increased costs and environmental issues. However, these concerns should not be used to excuse the major welfare issue of water deprivation. Rather, these concerns strongly suggest that ducks are in no way suitable for animal agribusiness purposes. Research suggests that while ducks are being raised without proper water provision, pain and suffering are occurring.



# Like a duck OUT OF WATER

The Australian duck industry is shrouded in **secrecy**. There have been significant barriers in compiling the information for this report. However, after an extensive and thorough investigation, this report now compiles many of the hidden truths behind this industry.

## Duck farming in Australia

OVER 8 MILLION ducks are slaughtered in Australia each year<sup>1</sup>. The Australian duck farming industry is dominated by two intensive producers: Pepe's Ducks PTY LTD, who boast a kill rate of 70,000 ducks per week, and Luv-a-Duck PTY LTD, who claim around 100,000 deaths per week<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>. Pepe's Ducks operates production farms in New South Wales, while Luv-a-Duck is based in Victoria<sup>2, 4</sup>. In 2011, Luv-a-Duck had a turnover of \$AU60 million<sup>3</sup>. Overall the industry is worth well over \$AU100 million, and the Poultry Hub<sup>5</sup> website states that the industry

is expanding at a rate of more than 5% each year<sup>1</sup>.

The inhumane living conditions for commercially farmed chickens have been well documented in Australia, but the public is generally less aware of the plight of commercially farmed ducks. The duck industry adopts very similar animal husbandry practices to the chicken industry<sup>5</sup>. That is, ducks are generally reared intensively inside large, closed sheds with limited natural lighting, little space, and compromised health and welfare<sup>5</sup>.



<sup>^</sup> The Poultry Hub is an online resource developed by the Poultry Cooperative Research Centre (CRC).

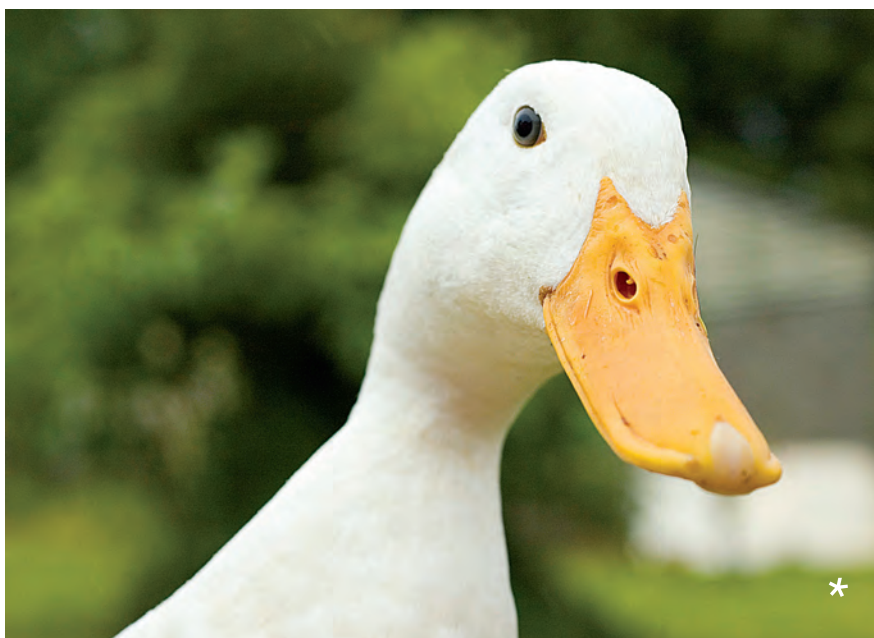
## General husbandry practices

TOTAL CONFINEMENT systems (intensive systems) are the most common housing systems for ducks<sup>6</sup>. Ducks are packed into closed sheds according to a formula which allows one square metre of floor space for up to five fully grown birds, or 50 ducklings<sup>7</sup>. The birds share the same living shed with numerous other ducks<sup>7</sup>. Ducks held in total confinement systems are denied any access to outside space for roaming or socialising, and to surface water for bathing, floating, or swimming<sup>6</sup>.

Partial confinement systems (free range) are uncommon systems for duck farming in Australia and vary greatly in their conditions and the welfare of the ducks<sup>6</sup>. Ducks are again kept inside sheds often with many other ducks, but in partial confinement systems ducks are also given limited access to an outside area<sup>8</sup>. Very few free range duck systems are accredited in Australia<sup>9</sup>. At unaccredited facilities the amount of outside area is decided by the operator, and at some facilities it may be a very small space which may not accommodate all of the ducks held inside the shed. Ducks held in partial confinement systems are also often kept without any access to surface water<sup>6,9</sup>. Other partial confinement productions provide larger, free ranging areas, but such systems are extremely rare in Australia<sup>9</sup>.

Broiler (meat) ducks are slaughtered in Australia after only 6 to 7 weeks of life<sup>1</sup>. Pekin ducks, which are the most common breed of duck raised for their meat in Australia, can live for up to 12 years in the wild<sup>10</sup>.

Ducks are also kept for duck egg production in Australia, but this is a very small industry as imported eggs from China are often cheaper<sup>6</sup>. Eggs are sold as salted, pickled, fresh, or as balut eggs<sup>6</sup>. Balut eggs are fertilised eggs that contain an 18 day old unhatched baby duckling<sup>6</sup>. These ducklings are boiled in the egg and eaten<sup>6</sup>. As there are very few egg producers in Australia this report focuses on the growing trend of confined duck farming.







# Breeds

PEKIN DUCKS are the most common breed of duck raised for their meat in Australia<sup>6</sup>.

The Pekin duck is descended from the wild Mallard and has been domesticated for around 2000 years<sup>11</sup>. Under wild conditions, Mallards are largely aquatic, and can fly, swim and walk efficiently<sup>11</sup>.

Many behaviour types present in the commercial duck reflect the aquatic origins of the ancestor type, especially those behaviours

associated with preening and feather conditioning<sup>11</sup>.

Pekins are commonly described as gregarious in nature, and this is one of the reasons for the industry's preference for Pekin ducks<sup>6</sup>. In other words, intensive producers choose Pekin ducks because they are less likely to react to extreme overcrowding by attacking each other.

Unfortunately breeding companies have used artificial selection to further decrease broody behaviour, to assist

in reducing problems associated with confinement such as feather pecking<sup>12</sup>. This has created a further problem as these highly bred animals will no longer sit on their eggs<sup>12</sup>. This means that artificial incubation is necessary<sup>12</sup>. The incubation process lasts for 28 days and eggs are turned 7 times each day<sup>12</sup>.

Muscovy ducks are also farmed in Australia, however this breed is rarely used<sup>1</sup>.



## BREEDING strands

The majority of ducks farmed in Australia come from one of two genetic strands – the Grimaud Duck imported from France, and the Cherry Valley Duck, imported from the United Kingdom<sup>6</sup>.

### GRIMAUD DUCKS

Groupe Grimaud La Corbiere S.A. has its headquarters in Western France<sup>13</sup>. It is involved in the genetic selection and sale of animal breeds including broiler and layer chickens, pigs, ducks, guinea fowl, rabbits and pigeons<sup>13</sup>. The breeding of ducklings is now operated by Grimaud Frères Selection S.A, a subsidiary of Groupe Grimaud, who breeds nearly one million ducklings every week<sup>13</sup>.

Groupe Grimaud and its subsidiaries are implicated in a range of concerning welfare practices around the world. Ducks reared for meat at Grimaud Frères are reported to be kept on slatted floors<sup>14</sup>. Slatted floors lead to increased incidences of leg deformities<sup>15</sup>. Artificial insemination for breeding ducks occurs 3 times every 2 weeks<sup>15</sup>.

The picture on the right was taken of conditions at a site of Grimaud Farms of California, Inc., a former subsidiary of Groupe Grimaud.

### CHERRY VALLEY DUCKS

Cherry Valley Farms Limited started as a free range duck production enterprise in Lincolnshire East England<sup>11</sup>. The company is now owned by Navis Capital Partners (Asia) Limited (Malaysia based), which also holds a controlling share in the Bangkok Ranch Public Company Ltd of Thailand, an integrated duck processor company<sup>11</sup>. The combined holdings form the biggest duck producer outside China<sup>11</sup>.

Cherry Valley is, as World Poultry magazine describes it, “a world-wide breeding, feeding and processing giant<sup>14</sup>.” Selective breeding has led to what the company calls the ‘genetically improved’ Super M3 with the tagline “The SM3 - quality and performance<sup>14</sup>.” Cherry Valley ducks reach 3.5kg live weight in just 49 days with little food intake<sup>14</sup>. It has been estimated that in China around 40 million table ducks per year come from Cherry Valley’s breeding stock<sup>14</sup>. There is an estimated death rate of 4-5% among this breed of duck<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, if all 8 million ducks raised for slaughter in Australia were Cherry Valley stock, 400,000 per year would die before they reach the age of 7 weeks.

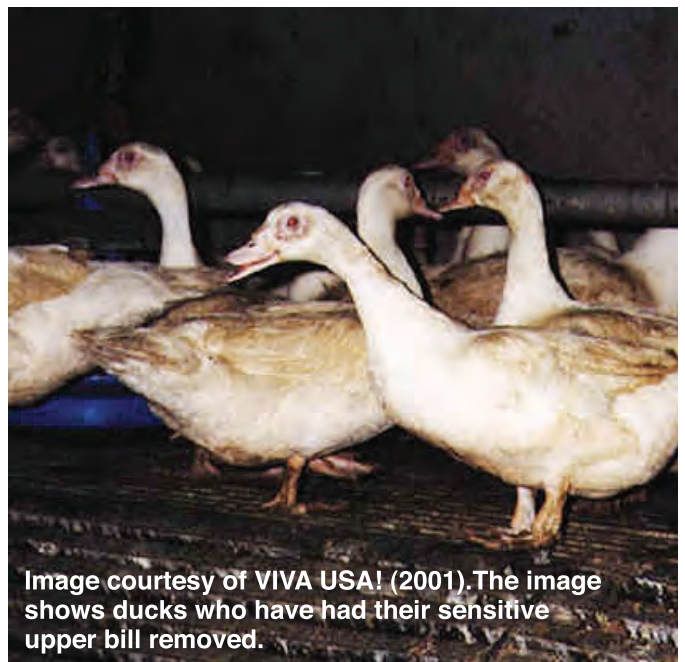


Image courtesy of VIVA USA! (2001). The image shows ducks who have had their sensitive upper bill removed.







"Meat bred ducks  
now grow 10% quicker  
than the rate of  
development of a  
normal, naturally  
growing duck."



# Australian breeding

GENETIC SELECTION has radically changed patterns of growth and the welfare needs of commercially reared ducks. Because of genetic selection, meat bred ducks now grow 10% quicker than the rate of development of a normal, naturally growing duck<sup>14</sup>. Cherry Valley boast that their ducks have 25% more breast meat compared to natural ducks<sup>14</sup>. Extensive research has been conducted on the effect of these rates of growth and changes to body dimensions on chickens and turkeys<sup>16</sup>. The available literature suggests that the extra breast meat creates an abnormal gait and severe leg problems in other types of poultry<sup>16</sup>. With continued genetic selection of ducks, it seems likely that ducks will also display similar health and welfare issues.

Duck breeding in Australia occurs within a system of grand-parent, parent and broiler ducks (those raised for meat)<sup>6</sup>. Companies like Pepe's Ducks and Luv-a-Duck source grandparent birds from large integrated companies like Grimaud and Cherry Valley, which retain the great grandparent stock.

It is expensive to import breeding stock, and security at breeder facilities is high<sup>6</sup>. Inside these sheds, breeding ducks (breeders) are subject to welfare issues similar to those affecting broiler ducks.

Young ducklings are put into a pre-layer shed from 2 weeks of age and are kept in these sheds until around 28 weeks of age<sup>12</sup>. The ducks are then moved to layer sheds where they will remain for approximately 12 months<sup>12</sup>. Ducks are kept for breeding and laying for a maximum of 16 months, with a laying cycle of approximately 42 weeks<sup>12</sup>. Between roughly 18 months and 23 months of age these ducks are then taken to be slaughtered<sup>12</sup>.

During their time within each shed, breeders often remain on the same floor litter<sup>12</sup>. While fresh litter is

sometimes provided, this fresh litter is often placed on top of older litter which is unlikely to be cleaned out until the ducks are taken out of the sheds<sup>12</sup>. As a result, these ducks often live on a large amount of accumulated faecal matter causing major health and welfare problems including ammonia inhalation, disease, and skin burns<sup>5</sup>.

Mating periods continue for two weeks before the eggs are collected<sup>12</sup>. It is recommended that small numbers of female birds are mated with one or two drakes (males) because some male ducks can become aggressive during mating<sup>17</sup>. Despite this, the NSW Department of Primary Industries website states, "(f)or economic reasons commercial breeders have to practise mass matings<sup>18</sup>."

Images (left) from a breeding shed taken in New South Wales depict the hideous life for breeding females.

*The duck on the left page has had her feathers pecked out by aggressive males during mating. She has scabs and sores on her body from the attacks. The ground she lives on is thick with faeces and the unremoved bodies of dead females who either didn't survive the abuse, or just didn't cope with the conditions. The nesting boxes behind her are smattered in waste. Her eggs are taken away to be incubated. Maternal instincts of any kind are denied.*

Animal behaviourists have observed that ducks in the wild demonstrate a strong bond between mother and young<sup>14</sup>. Wild Mallards often stay with their young until they reach two months of age<sup>14</sup> – ducklings in the meat industry are slaughtered well before this age. Oils from the mother's feathers are used to waterproof their young to allow them to swim without drowning<sup>14</sup>.

Breeding females in the Australian duck industry are never allowed to tend to their young in this way. Use of near continuous artificial lighting and year-long mating can also cause health issues with the reproductive organs of females<sup>14</sup>.

Breeding sheds often contain many birds. For example, a planning application for a breeding facility, DA321/2009, on land described as Lot 1254 DP 1035814 and Lots 28, 29, 53 and 54 DP 753770, 5756 Putty Road, Howes Valley in NSW, indicated that 12 sheds would hold 22,000 ducks<sup>12</sup>.





## Ducks out of water

THE SINGLE most shocking, and arguably the most significant welfare concern for duck farming in Australia is water deprivation. There is no legal requirement in Australia for commercial duck farms to have water available for ducks to swim, bathe, or even dip their heads<sup>6, 7</sup>. Water deprivation is a common feature of Australian duck farms irrespective of the nature of confinement – total or partial<sup>6</sup>.

### Is it really deprivation?

A STUDY in 2008 compared water deprivation in ducks to sleep deprivation in humans<sup>19</sup>. Humans without sleep and ducks without water show 'post-inhibitory rebound' – that is, they compensate for what they have been deprived of<sup>19</sup>. Ducks given access to water after a period of deprivation have been shown to overcompensate by spending excessive amounts of time on or in water<sup>19</sup>.







# Welfare issues

DUCKS ARE aquatic birds, so they naturally have weak leg and thigh joints as they do not normally need to hold their body weight for extended periods of time<sup>1</sup>. Where surface water is available, ducks will float for long periods, reducing pressure on their muscular and skeletal system. However, when water is denied, as in most Australian farms, ducks must hold their entire body weight on their legs for up to 7 weeks (and often much longer periods of time for ducks kept for breeding), resulting in lameness, dislocated joints and broken bones<sup>5</sup>.

Selective breeding compounds this issue: as ducks are bred to grow faster and heavier, their juvenile skeletal system has insufficient bone formation to hold their obese bodies<sup>1</sup>. This adds extra pressure on the already weak leg and thigh joints<sup>1</sup>. The risk of injury is further compounded by the fact that litter floors are often not changed during the ducks' 49 days of life<sup>5</sup>. Duck faeces are made up of 90% moisture, which can make the floor slippery and result in accidents leading to breakages or splay legs, (where legs splay out each side of the duck and the animal is unable to stand)<sup>22, 21</sup>.

Because of high ammonia content in duck faeces, wet litter for standing ducks can also cause footpad lesions<sup>5, 22</sup>. Injured ducks, or ducks without the strength to stand, may suffer from painful breast blisters caused by lying on wet litter<sup>5</sup>. Research shows that access to open water reduces the incidence of these problems<sup>23</sup>.

Weak legs and excess pressure can also cause ducks to fall onto their backs<sup>24</sup>. While chickens are often observed falling forward because of their unusually heavy and fast growing breast area, ducks, whose stature is quite different, appear to lose their balance when suffering from accelerated growth and fall backwards<sup>24</sup>. From this position they struggle to re-erect themselves<sup>24</sup>. There are two further potential causes for this regularly observed welfare issue<sup>24</sup>. Nerve damage is possible for ducks kept in farming systems as the feed provided does not reflect the natural diet of ducks and can therefore lead to nutritional deficiencies<sup>24</sup>. Alternatively, if ducks can't swim or float on water they are unable to find their centre of gravity, causing problems with balance<sup>24</sup>. When ducks are unable to find their centre of gravity they continually fall onto their backs and are unable to walk or move around<sup>24</sup>.

Flooring inside sheds is often made up of either litter or wire mesh or a combination of both<sup>1, 6</sup>. Wire mesh floors are particularly problematic, leading to a high incidence of leg and foot injuries as balance can become more difficult<sup>1</sup>. Higher incidences of splay leg occur in sheds with wire mesh flooring<sup>5, 25</sup>. Further, the skin on ducks' webbed feet and hock joints is delicate, unlike land fowl such as chickens and turkeys who have much tougher skin<sup>20</sup>. Wire mesh floors can damage this delicate skin causing problems such as bumblefoot, and pus-filled cuts or abrasions<sup>21</sup>. Floors with

coarse wood shavings can also cause damage to ducks' fragile feet<sup>5</sup>.

Mesh flooring also allows fallen ducks to catch their wings in the grates<sup>26</sup>. Often the holes are just large enough so juvenile ducks will become stuck on their backs if they slip or fall on the grated area<sup>24</sup>. Ducks' wing tips are extremely sensitive, so these ducks suffer from great physical pain, as well as the stress of being caught in the flooring<sup>24</sup>. Ducks stuck in grates have no access to food or water and if they aren't released from the grating (a process that is usually painful and distressing to the animal<sup>24</sup>), they will perish.

The high water content in ducks' faeces corresponds to elevated concentrations of ammonia<sup>22</sup>. Ammonia production from ducks can be almost four times higher than that produced by chickens<sup>22</sup>. Such high ammonia levels increase both the severity and likelihood of ammonia related health problems such as breast blister, and skin damage on feet<sup>5</sup>. This in turn increases leg problem incidences for ducks forced to stand, and makes sitting extremely uncomfortable with the increased risk of breast blister or blisters elsewhere on the body<sup>5</sup>.

The United States' Environmental Protection Agency has set a human safety limit for exposure to ammonia







In addition to the respiratory and musculo-skeletal implications of water deprivation, water is also important to the basic comfort and wellbeing of ducks.









at 25 parts per million (ppm) per 8 hours, or 35 ppm per 15 minutes<sup>5</sup>. However, the ducks living inside these sheds will be continually exposed to ammonia. This is of particular concern for ducks as their respiratory system has air sacs that increase pulmonary ventilation<sup>27</sup>. This means that the birds absorb roughly twice as much gas in each inhalation, compared to a mammal of similar size<sup>27</sup>. Therefore ducks may be more significantly affected by air-borne ammonia than humans, and a comparable safety limit could be much lower for ducks. However, a safety limit for farmed ducks has never been considered in farming practices or animal welfare standards, and these ducks live in ammonia-rich environments for most of their lives.

Ammonia exposure causes irritation to the mucous membranes of the eyes and respiratory system, and can increase chances of respiratory disease<sup>28</sup>. Prolonged exposure can lead to keratoconjunctivitis, causing swollen and crusty eyes, and may lead to blindness<sup>5, 28</sup>. Impaired vision may also affect the birds' capacity to find food or drinking water<sup>5</sup>.

In addition to the respiratory and musculo-skeletal implications of water deprivation, water is also important to the basic comfort and wellbeing of ducks. Ducks thermo-regulate using water to cool themselves when needed<sup>5</sup>. Without water, they are unable to do this task either on the farm or during transport to slaughterhouses, which may often be in the heat of Australian summer.

Without water, ducks are unable to keep their eyes, nostrils and feathers clean, so water deprivation also represents a serious health risk for ducks<sup>19</sup>.

In the wild, ducks use their beaks for feeding, preening (with water) and other foraging activities<sup>5</sup>. The lack of water in Australian farms and the lack of outdoor roaming area in all total confinement farms mean that these natural behaviours cannot be performed. This deprivation can cause stress for the birds who, despite being bred to avoid broody behaviour, can still occasionally direct their pecking towards other ducks leading to injuries and sometimes cannibalism<sup>5</sup>. Higher stocking densities lead to greater stress and even more injuries and aggression<sup>5</sup>. These issues are not observed among ducks in the wild<sup>5</sup>.







## Research into water deprivation

ANIMAL LIBERATION has been provided with several videos and photographs identified as coming from various duck sheds in New South Wales and Victoria. Some of this footage was provided to veterinarian Dr Roger Meischke for his expert opinion. Dr Meischke's summary of the relevant scientific literature on water deprivation and his summary of the contents of these videos are set out below<sup>11</sup>.

*Jones and Dawkins<sup>29</sup> state that welfare concerns centre on the provision of bathing water for commercially reared ducks. In this study, it was noticeable that bathing/wet preening was observed with all drinker types but that the percent time spent bathing was lowest with nipple drinkers despite the proportion of ducks wet preening being unaffected by drinker type. This "bathing" from nipples can be considered significantly less effective than bathing from sources of open water, as the condition of the*

*eyes and feathers were poorer.*

*Jones, Waitt, and Dawkins<sup>19</sup> provide clear evidence that duck welfare is related to the nature and extent of their access to water. They recorded body condition and plumage condition and undertook three behavioural techniques to assess the effect of water source on the welfare of ducks.*

*The results show that without the opportunity to at least dip their heads and splash their feathers with water, ducks are unable to keep their eyes, nostrils and feathers fully clean. There was no difference in the time spent bathing from the bath, trough or shower showing that these resources were equivalent in the provision of bathing water. Only ducks in the nipple-only group showed "compensatory rebound" when finally being given access to water from a bath. These also showed very little time spent in bathing movements at the nipples. When*

*given choice, ducks preferred rest and to drink-dabble with the shower, and bathe with the bath; the shower was intermediate to the trough. Little time was spent with the nipples when the ducks were given access to other water sources and little time was spent swimming in the bath. The authors conclude that commercial farms may be able to improve duck welfare as much by providing water from troughs and showers (both clean and economical) as from actual ponds (baths).*

*In a review of European duck husbandry systems, Rodenburg et al<sup>30</sup> conclude that there is a compromise between the husbandry system and the welfare provisions. They consider that the provision of a shower, trough or bell drinker on a slatted part of the floor in a straw-based system would allow for behavioural needs without creating hygiene difficulties associated with contaminated water and wet flooring.*





"The video also shows a significant number of birds with damaged wing tips, many of which are bleeding and show traumatic damage."

A comprehensive review of commercial duck welfare has been prepared by the United States Humane Society<sup>5</sup>. It states that without access to open water ducks can show abnormal behaviour such as head shaking and stereotypic feather preening. The bird's restricted grooming abilities can also lead to dirty bills, nostrils, and eyes which can potentially increase the risk of infection. Ducks also use water to thermo-regulate and can suffer from heat stress in systems without adequate water for wetting their bodies. Like others they conclude that pekin ducks have a behavioural need for freely accessible open water. The report concludes that ducks in meat and egg production suffer significant and varied challenges. The problems caused by total-confinement rearing without access to water for bathing, swimming, or preening – such as leg and foot disorders, respiratory problems, feather pecking – are exacerbated by painful mutilations and sensory deprivation through unnatural lighting regimes.

## The video

The video shows a commercial rearing shed in which the ducks have access to water only through elevated drinking nipples. The behaviours shown by the ducks is consistent with stereotypic behaviour reported elsewhere<sup>19, 30</sup>. The ducks have a need for bathing/wet preening behaviour which under "normal" husbandry would allow them to maintain their skin and feathers in a clean and orderly condition. It is clear that the type of water provision seen in the video does not provide for the normal behavioural needs of the ducks especially when the ducks are growing rapidly and the pin feathers as well as others need extra attention when compared with that needed in adult birds out of moult.

The video also shows a significant number of birds with damaged wing tips, many of which are bleeding and show traumatic damage. There is no clear evidence of cannibalism on the video, although this is a potential risk. It is possible that the nature of the bedding, containing coarse wood chips, means that the soft skin of the duck who is cast on their back, or down on their side, is damaged when the wing hits the ground as they try to get up. There are a number of birds who are cast on their back. This is a simple result of their rapid growth rate and the inability of the wing muscles to provide the force necessary to turn over. A similar effect is seen with over-fat near-term pregnant ewes who cannot get up from a cast position.

Many of the ducks are also showing signs of lameness and foot injury or other abnormalities. These changes are probably a reflection of the rapid genetic changes which provide a very rapid growth rate at a favourable food conversion efficiency. The basic skeletal support is not always adequate to support the body. They also reflect the nature of the husbandry system which does not allow for any swimming or flotation exercise behaviour but limits the ducks to walking on the coarse wood chip floor surface. The added stress on the legs and feet results in the changes seen in the video.

The photographs confirm some of the observations seen in the video. The result of the commercial farming of ducks under these circumstances may be sick and dead birds in part due to:

- the genetic selection for growth and food conversion efficiency,
- the intensive husbandry with wood chip flooring surface,
- the failure to supply water to allow for normal wet grooming behaviour, and,
- the elevated water nipples and food bowls preventing access from sick and downer birds.



## Health issues

ASCITIES IS another common health problem in Australia caused by selective breeding<sup>1</sup>. Ascities occurs when the growth of the heart and lungs is not proportionate to the fast-growing flesh of the duck<sup>1</sup>. These organs are not able to supply oxygen to all the cells in the body as they are not yet strong enough to support the high oxygen requirements for such elevated metabolic rates<sup>1</sup>.

Feeding and drinking water equipment  
**DESIGNED FOR DUCKS**  
are not available in Australia<sup>12</sup>.



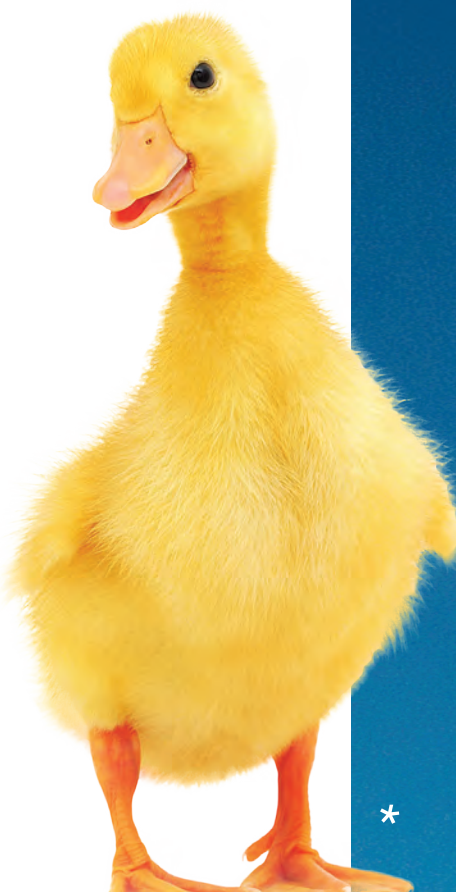
## Other welfare issues

FEEDING AND drinking water equipment designed for ducks is not available in Australia<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, duck farm operators rely on the use of equipment specifically designed for chickens<sup>12</sup>. This causes numerous issues because of the different requirements and size of each animal.

Ducks, in an attempt to wash themselves, often splash at nipple drinkers causing water puddles on their flooring<sup>12</sup>. Some operators have reported that they have altered the design of the nipples to stop the splashing of water in an effort to reduce water puddles<sup>12</sup>. This also means that obtaining drinking

water is possibly more difficult and that even this minor attempt to wash the face has been denied. The space between feeders is another issue with the use of chicken feeding systems, as ducks need twice as much feeding space as chickens<sup>12</sup>.

While most farms have mixed sex sheds, this is not appropriate for some strains of duck<sup>1</sup>. To decipher the sex of the ducklings workers need to visually inspect the internal genitalia of each duckling<sup>1</sup>. This process is called venting<sup>1</sup>. This invasive method is so painful and stressful, that it often increases duckling mortality rates when the procedure is carried out<sup>1</sup>.





# Ducks and

AUTHORITIES AND farmers assure the public that ducks are 'hardy' birds, resistant to disease<sup>6</sup>. However, this report details investigations which have found evidence indicating disease concerns at major Australian producers.

While ducks can be fairly strong birds, the conditions in which they are raised in Australia create an inviting environment for various diseases. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry reports that the duck industry has minimal veterinary input, and that vaccines are not used<sup>6</sup>. Total confinement systems could promote disease because of factors including the build-up of faeces, poor husbandry and the inability for ducks to clean themselves.

Outbreaks of Salmonelle, E.coli, and Pasteurella multocidia have occurred in Australia<sup>1</sup>. The most serious disease concern for ducks is Rimerella (Pasteurella) anatipestifer<sup>1</sup>.

In 2012, Dr Mark Simpson BVSc MANZCVSc (Avian Health) CMAVA produced a veterinary report at the request of Animal Liberation addressing issues relating to Anatipestifer Disease, Thiamine and Vitamin A deficiencies<sup>26</sup>. Dr Simpson examined video footage of ducks within total confinement farming facilities utilised by major Australian producers. The following passages have been extracted from this report.

*By far and away the most common aetiology causing neurological disease noted within the duck broiler industry as causing this problem is Anatipestifer*

*Disease (AD). AD is an infection with Riemerella anatipestifer which is a globally distributed, contagious disease that primarily affects young farmed ducks and turkeys. In general this disease is a concern to domestic ducklings in intensive farming systems. The disease causes a variety of clinical signs including diarrhoea, lethargy, respiratory, and nervous system signs. Infection is thought to occur primarily through microtrauma to the delicate feet of the growing ducks, but may be acquired through aerosols or insect fomites (mosquitoes).*

*Affected ducks from 14 days to 8 weeks of age often exhibit*

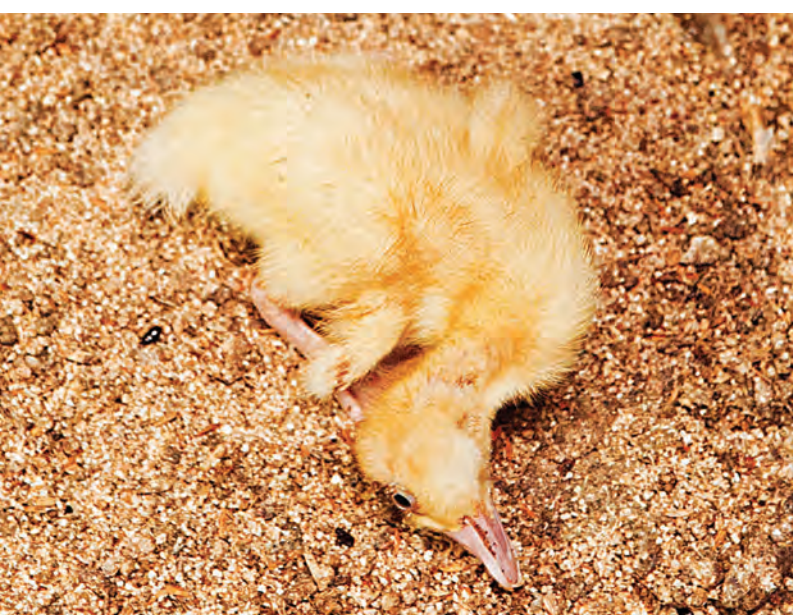
*dyspnoea (difficulty breathing), ocular and nasal discharges, coughing and sneezing, tremors of the head and neck, weakness and incoordination. Poor growth rates across the affected flock are common. Mortality averages 5-30% but occasionally flocks can suffer losses of 75%.*

*Management practices are critical to the control of this disease. Poor environmental conditions such as poor ventilation, and exposure to extremes of temperature predispose to disease*

*– continued on page 20*







development. Crowding of birds may well enhance transmission. In some instances rigid sanitation and depopulation are necessary for elimination of the disease from a particular facility. Vaccines have been used overseas, with some significant improvement in outcomes.

The early, gastrointestinal phase would result in green diarrhoea. The bird would feel a moderate to severe abdominal discomfort. The middle, respiratory phase would result in the pain and discomfort commensurate with a severe cold in my considered professional opinion. As the serosa surrounding the heart and liver are becoming dramatically inflamed at this stage I also expect the birds to be suffering severe pain probably perceived as an unrelenting ache originating from these organs. The delicate serosal surfaces are well recognised as highly sensitive sites of origin of pain, and are generously supplied with nociceptors (pain receptors).

Finally the birds may develop nervous system signs such as incoordination, head and neck tremors, adoption of unusual body positions (such as lying on their back with the legs paddling, opisthotonos, and torticollis), paralysis, convulsions, coma, and finally death. It is my professional

opinion that birds with these clinical signs would be suffering extreme pain and discomfort, as these signs are largely the result of pathology occurring in the brain such as engorged meningeal vessels, generalised meningitis, and cerebral lesions.

Neurological signs may be due to a polyneuritis in ducks, and this may be due to a hypovitaminosis B1 (also known as thiamine deficiency). In the later stages, thiamine deficiency will lead to an accumulation of the intermediates of carbohydrate metabolism. In the initial stages of deficiency, lethargy and head tremors may be noted. A marked decrease in appetite is also seen in birds fed a thiamine-deficient diet. Poultry are also susceptible to neuromuscular problems, resulting in impaired digestion, general weakness, star-gazing, and frequent convulsions.

Vitamin A deficiency has also been recorded to produce similar clinical signs, including growth retardation, muscular weakness, pathological and inappropriate growth of endochondrial bone, ataxia, paralysis, and death. Additionally affected birds will frequently present with ruffled plumage, sinusitis, conjunctivitis, pharyngitis, and oesophagitis. Subclinical signs include an increased susceptibility to infection, most notably





Despite industry suggestions that ducks are hardy birds, resistant to disease, the diseases detected suggest that disease could be more common, especially within total confinement duck farms.

*bumblefoot, but also aspergillosis and chlamydiosis.*

*As in other forms of intensive farming, there has been strong economic pressure to grow out broiler ducks more efficiently. The resulting increased growth rate, as it does in other forms of intensive farming, has led to concerns that such efficiencies increasingly impact on the welfare of the animals so changed. Unfortunately in the duck broiler segment of the market there has been very little peer-reviewed research to assess these impacts, but there is an increasing amount of concern that the domestic duck may not be as suited to intensive farming as other species.*

*In particular the inability of these ducks to swim during the rapid growth phase of their life may change the conformation and development of bones and muscles, and predispose the birds to alterations to their anatomy. These anatomic changes could well accentuate susceptibility to other pathologies, such as bumblefoot, and contribute to problems such as ataxia and muscle weakness.*

A further report by Dr Simpson in 2012 was based on post-mortems conducted on two deceased ducks removed from a commercial duck farm in New

South Wales where *E. coli* was found on the brain<sup>31</sup>.

*The necropsy examination (post mortem) was performed on two of the birds that had died. The hock joints in particular, were swollen and red. There were lesions on the weight-bearing pressure points of the feet suggestive of early pododermatitis (bumble foot). There were no detectable external parasites. The feathers about the vent were heavily stained with droppings, particularly fetid faeces.*

*Both in-house and external laboratories cultured Escherichia coli and Pseudomonas aeruginosa. The latter organism was isolated from the meninges while the former from the kidneys in both birds examined. The external laboratory also cultured  $\beta$ -haemolytic Streptococcus from both sites, but this organism was not grown at our hospital.*

*These findings are consistent with a post mortem diagnosis of bacterial septicaemia and meningitis.*

Despite industry suggestions that ducks are hardy birds, resistant to disease, the diseases detected suggest that disease could be more common, especially within total confinement duck farms.



# Bird flu

H5N1, better known as bird flu, took its first known human life in 1997 in Hong Kong<sup>32</sup>. Since then it has spread to Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe and has mutated as it has spread<sup>32</sup>. As it mutates, it becomes more lethal<sup>32</sup>. The influenza virus originated as a waterborne infection of aquatic birds<sup>32</sup>. For this reason wild or free range birds have been blamed for the introduction of H5N1.

However, total confinement rearing sheds allow for large amounts of faecal matter, extreme confinement and constant stress. These sorts of facilities allow for immune suppression and, without the opportunity for fresh air or sunshine, offer the perfect environment for a super flu to multiply<sup>32</sup>.

While most of the attention of bird flu has been on chickens, some evidence exists where H5N1 has spread through intensive duck farming facilities<sup>33</sup>.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has justified the practice of not vaccinating ducks, because it suggests highly pathogenic duck viral enteritis and avian influenza is comparatively uncommon<sup>6</sup>. However, the risk of outbreaks has also been proposed as a key reason for denying farmed ducks access to surface water<sup>6</sup>. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry states that providing access to water is challenging as it attracts wild ducks who may bring with them avian influenza, stating in its report, "Structure and Dynamics of Australia's Commercial Poultry and Ratite Industries" that "production units 15 years ago would have allowed ducks daily access to surface water. Such husbandry is more difficult nowadays given environmental and planning restrictions and that such access could attract wild water fowl and the exchange of avian influenza and Newcastle disease viruses between populations<sup>6(p.76)</sup>." Therefore, it is not clear if avian influenza is a real threat, in which case the failure of vaccinations suggests that human and animal welfare has been severely compromised to save costs, or that there is not a large threat within the duck industry and that the threat of influenza has been used simply to justify the serious welfare issue of water deprivation.

The most common health problems in Australia that farmed ducks may face include: Anatipestifer Disease, leg weakness, cholera, botulism, mycosis, non-specific diarrhoea, salmonellosis, sinusitis, spirochaetosis, rickets, vitamin A deficiency, or white eye<sup>34</sup>.



## Health issues for humans

IT IS common practice within duck farming systems for dead birds to be sent to rendering plants to turn into protein meals fed to other poultry and pigs<sup>6</sup>. According to The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry same species feeding (forced cannibalism) occurs, and is completely unregulated in Australia<sup>6</sup>.

That is, dead birds are collected, rendered and added to feed that is given to other groups of ducks to eat. Other animals that could be in the feed include pigs, chickens and turkeys<sup>6</sup>. The practice of using slaughterhouse waste and deceased animals in feed mixes has been implicated in the development of the prion disease Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) aka Mad Cow Disease<sup>35</sup>.

Duck meat producers often attempt to sell duck meat as a low fat option. In reality, nearly half the calories from a roasted duck come from fat, when skin and excess fat is removed<sup>36</sup>. If skin and fat are not removed, more than 80% of the calories come from fat<sup>36</sup>. Further, traditional Chinese style 'duck' has the same fat value as a deep fried Mars Bar<sup>14</sup>.



# Slaughter and transport

## TRANSPORT TO SLAUGHTER

BECAUSE OF weaknesses in the leg and thigh joints, ducks may be particularly susceptible to injury when being caught and crated to be taken for slaughter. Ducks are sometimes thrown into crates that are stacked on the back of trucks. Ducks placed under others can have faecal matter fall onto them from those above them during the trip. Mortalities during transport are common<sup>5</sup>. While day-olds are transported in temperature controlled crates, older ducks are not<sup>12</sup>. Considering their limited capacity to

self-regulate their temperature without water, these ducks are likely to suffer<sup>5</sup>. Various factors such as mode of transport, stocking density, season, time of day and ventilation contribute to the potential suffering involved in transport<sup>5</sup>.

## SLAUGHTER

During the slaughter process ducks are shackled upside down – this is a particular concern for ducks with their weak leg and thigh joints<sup>5, 21</sup>. Many may suffer from dislocation. If birds are uncomfortable in this

unnatural position, they may flap their wings getting an electric shock through their wings from the electrified water bath that is regularly used to stun the birds<sup>5</sup>. Many raise their heads from the water bath and, as a result, have their throat slit while fully conscious<sup>14</sup>. After scalding, the birds are waxed/de-feathered and prepared for sale.

The flesh inside the cling wrap packaging tells little of the weeks of suffering undergone by the young deceased bird wrapped inside.



# Australia's duck companies

## PEPE'S DUCKS

Pepe's Ducks has 21 properties, each holding 10,000-50,000 ducks<sup>2</sup>. This company also operates in New Zealand<sup>2</sup>. Pepe's sells the majority of its ducks (80%) to the Australian Asian market<sup>2</sup>. Each week Pepe's kills around 70,000 ducks<sup>2</sup>. Pepe's was founded in 1974 and is based in Windsor in New South Wales<sup>2</sup>. Pepe's conducts its own breeding, hatching, growing and slaughtering<sup>2</sup>.

Footage<sup>^</sup> from a Pepe's contract shed in New South Wales showed ducks with their wings caught in grates and showing various signs of distress<sup>37</sup>. Ducks were found lying on their backs unable to re-erect themselves<sup>37</sup>. A veterinarian report commissioned by Animal Liberation suggested that ducks at this shed may have also been suffering from a variety of disease and health concerns.

## LUV-A-DUCK

Luv-a-Duck has 16 properties each holding 10,000-50,000 ducks<sup>4</sup>. Luv-a-Duck supplies 30% of its ducks to the Australian Asian market, and relies heavily on an export market<sup>4</sup>. Luv-a-Duck was established in the 1960s and is based in the Wimmera Wheatlands in Western Victoria<sup>4</sup>. Luv-a-Duck also conducts its own breeding, hatching, growing and slaughtering<sup>4</sup>.

A few years ago, Luv-a-Duck properties suffered a major outbreak of *Pasteurella anatipestifer*. Glenys Oogjes reported on the issue in *Animals Today* in 2005<sup>38</sup>. The following is a direct quotation from this report.

*Despite its name, the Luv-A-Duck facility has been poorly managed, with a disease caused by the bacteria Pasteurella anatipestifer affecting the welfare of young ducks for at least the past three years. This common*

<sup>^</sup>This footage was used as part of an exposé on ABC's 7:30 in June 2012



disease is exacerbated by any stress or distress to the birds. It affects the central nervous system and prevents the birds from reaching food and water. The activists met with management and were distressed to learn that up to 30% (42,000) of all birds on the property were being infected and dying during the 6 week growing period, and that the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) animal health officers were already aware of this ongoing disease issue.

After being contacted by the activists, the RSPCA inspected the facility and issued orders to Luv-A-Duck management. Orders included increased monitoring to prevent prolonged suffering, and correction of brutal and ineffective euthanasia techniques.

Despite this, as recently as January 2005, activists witnessed the ongoing suffering of ducks and cruel killing methods. Leaked daily recording sheets showed that mortality in some sheds was still reaching over 20% in just 6 weeks. Changes to management and the decommissioning of some sheds on the main property largely failed to reduce the high infection and death rates.

Activists called for the facility to be closed, yet the Victorian DPI insisted that management changes would in time minimize disease prevalence. Despite DPI's joint responsibility under animal welfare and disease legislation, this agency's officers had shown a dogged insensitivity to the importance of individual animal suffering as opposed to flock disease management principles.

It is also worth noting that Australian law prohibits the slaughter and sale of diseased animals for human consumption.

Luv-a-Duck has also been attempting for many years to import ducks to New Zealand<sup>3</sup>. However Biosecurity New Zealand (an arm of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) refused to import Australian ducks in 2006 because of disease and health concerns<sup>39</sup>. Their 2006 report, "Import risk analysis: Cooked duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*) meat from Australia", states, "IBDV is present in Australia but is not present in New Zealand. It is an exotic notifiable organism and is therefore considered to be a potential hazard in this risk analysis<sup>39</sup> (p.10)." If the disease were to enter New Zealand, it could kill hundreds of thousands of chickens, turkeys and ducks<sup>39</sup>.

Despite these health concerns Luv-a-Duck met with Australia's Food Processing Sector Committee in April 2012 to ask for assistance in securing exports to New Zealand<sup>3</sup>. Minutes from that meeting record that Mr Millington, Luv-a-Duck's Company Spokesperson, explained why he felt that New Zealand was refusing imports: "they found one obscure research document from bloody Chad or somewhere that says this disease has been found in ducks<sup>3</sup>." However, the New Zealand report states, "Since IBDV is a highly heat resistant virus that has been found in tissues of chickens and has also been isolated from ducks, the likelihood that virus could be present in cooked duck meat from Australia is considered to be non-negligible<sup>39</sup>."



## TINDER CREEK

Tinder Creek is a much smaller operator than the other companies discussed in this report. Tinder Creek slaughters roughly 6000 ducks per week and is based on Putty Rd in New South Wales. It operates 14 sheds on one property and kills twice a week at its own slaughterhouse in Kellyville, New South Wales.

In 2012, Animal Liberation received several complaints about this company from locals who witnessed trucks carrying the ducks to slaughter. Soon after these complaints Animal Liberation received anonymous video footage taken at Tinder Creek properties that had been filmed over several months. This footage was taken to an avian specialist who expressed strong concerns the animals were severely diseased. The video showed animals with their necks twisted around, and walking in circles - similar behaviours to those observed among infected ducks at Luv-a-Duck in 2004/5.

The footage also revealed that deceased animals were not removed from sheds, and many lay decomposing in piles of manure. Other ducks had deformities such as twisted beaks. Many live ducks were stuck on their backs and unable to re-erect themselves. The ground was covered in insects and larvae.

All vision and reports were provided to relevant authorities for investigation.



# ADVERTISING

ADVERTISERS ARE able to take advantage of the limited public awareness of husbandry practices in duck farming, in particular the lack of access to water. Some of the common labelling claims that have been used for ducks reared in total confinement systems described the ducks as 'grown nature's way', 'open-range', 'range-reared' and 'country grown'.

## PEPE'S labelling

In 2011, Animal Liberation and the Public Interest Law Clearing House NSW made a joint complaint to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), alleging that Pepe's labelling – which stated variously that Pepe's Ducks were "open range" and "grown nature's way", and included a cartoon image of a 'happy duck' by a pond – was in breach of Australian Consumer Law (ACL), because it would lead a reasonable member of the public to believe that the ducks were raised with access to surface water, when in fact they were bred and raised in closed sheds.

The issue of water access was a key issue in arguing that Pepe's Ducks had contravened section 29(a) of the Australian Consumer Law, by making a false representation in relation to the history of the product. Animal Liberation was advised that the use of the phrase "grown nature's way" to describe ducks that are intensively farmed, housed indoors, and have no access to surface water, might also be challenged as a false representation in trade.

A feature on ABC's "7:30" exposed the true conditions of a Pepe's Ducks' contract property in June 2012<sup>40</sup>. By mid-2012 the ACCC had filed against Pepe's Ducks in the Federal Court, alleging misleading and deceptive conduct in trade.

In December 2012, the Federal Court found against Pepe's Ducks and handed down orders including a penalty of \$400,000.00 and orders to remove misleading claims including "Open Range" and "Grown Nature's Way" from all of its packaging and branding<sup>41</sup>. These terms are no longer on its packaging. However, at the time of

writing, the image of the duck near surface water is still part of its logo, despite no surface water actually being supplied to the ducks.

The Court declared that Pepe's Ducks' conduct contravened the Australian Consumer Law because the representations it made were false, misleading and deceptive<sup>41</sup>.

## LUV-A-DUCK labelling

In 2012 Animal Liberation and the Barristers Animal Welfare Panel raised their concerns with the ACCC about the marketing claims of Luv-a-Duck. In March 2013, the ACCC instituted proceedings in the Federal Court against Luv-a-Duck, alleging false, misleading or deceptive conduct in promotional statements made on its packaging, website and brochures<sup>42</sup>. At the time of printing, Luv-a-Duck is still in proceedings with the ACCC.

The following is a direct quotation from the ACCC press release (15 March, 2013):

*The ACCC alleges that Luv-a-Duck engaged in false, misleading or deceptive conduct by use of one or more of following statements on its packaging, website and brochures:*

- *a statement that its ducks were 'grown and grain fed in the spacious Victorian Wimmera Wheatlands', and other promotional statements of a similar nature;*
- *a statement that its ducks were 'range reared and grain fed'.*

*The ACCC alleges that the duck meat products sold or offered for sale by Luv-a-Duck were in fact processed from ducks that did not have substantial access to the outdoors, or access to spacious outdoor conditions<sup>42</sup>.*

The Court declared that Pepe's Ducks' conduct contravened the Australian Consumer Law because the representations it made were false, misleading and deceptive<sup>41</sup>.



# Australian animal protection law and duck welfare

EACH AUSTRALIAN state and territory has its own animal cruelty legislation. These acts and regulations prohibit certain activities, treatments or usages of animals. Animal cruelty legislation is supplemented by industry codes, which contain a detailed, species-specific set of standards for the treatment of animals used in farming that create a minimum welfare standard.

These codes may be enforceable where they are engaged by state or territory animal cruelty legislation – for example, the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry*<sup>7</sup> is adopted as a guideline to determining animal cruelty under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*<sup>43</sup> and *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2012*<sup>44</sup> of New South Wales.

Animal cruelty is a crime under each of the state and territory-based acts. However the interaction of animal cruelty legislation with the Model Codes means that a range of common practices that compromise the welfare of commercially farmed animals are excluded from the legal definition of animal cruelty, even when it is known that such practices cause suffering. The

Model Codes set out a basic minimum standard of treatment for animals used in agriculture but they do not go anywhere near far enough to protect animals from real harm.

**IF IT WALKS LIKE A DUCK,  
QUACKS LIKE A DUCK,  
LOOKS LIKE A DUCK, IT MUST  
BE A CHICKEN.**

In the case of ducks the demonstrated damage caused by water-deprivation is not addressed in the Model Code<sup>7</sup> as domestic poultry is a general category which does not consider the particular need of waterfowl such as ducks. In effect, the best available law in Australia persists in treating ducks as if they had the same welfare needs as chickens.

Veterinarian Dr Roger Meischke has stated that the changes to the Australian duck industry, particularly the rise in selective breeding for characteristics such as breast-heaviness and intensive production, “have brought with them a need to review the animal welfare provisions in the Australian Code<sup>11</sup>.” According to Dr Meischke:

*The Australian Code of Animal Welfare Practice, Domestic Poultry 4th Edition<sup>7</sup>*

*provides for duck welfare at Appendix 4. This barely covers a single page and deals with stocking densities, bill trimming and bird handling. It states the page should be read in conjunction with the main body of the Code. It is clear that the main body of the Code deals with poultry which have needs for husbandry which are quite different to that of ducks. From time to time the needs are diametrically opposed. There is no discussion, for example, of the need for ducks to have access to water for purposes other than drinking. This is a critical defect which should be addressed without delay.*

*The Australian situation is similar to that seen in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States of America. Most, if not all issues reported overseas, are readily seen in the commercial duck enterprises in Australia. The regulation of the industry continues to reflect its humble origins and the Code of Animal Welfare Practice for ducks remains a vestigial one page appendix to the domestic fowl Code. No mention is made of the water requirements for commercial ducks. This glaring deficiency should be addressed probably by preparing a stand-alone Code for the Welfare of Ducks<sup>11</sup>.*

Further, bill trimming is currently allowed in Australia under the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry<sup>7</sup>, despite research that shows that the procedure can be painful and traumatic<sup>45</sup>. The procedure involves removing the rim of the upper beak. A duck's bill is innervated (i.e. there are many nerve endings, resulting in high sensitivity to pain), and this procedure has been likened to the pain of limb amputation<sup>45, 46</sup>.





Without public pressure to improve conditions, the duck industry will likely continue to ignore this major welfare issue.



## Water off a duck's back: Why water deprivation continues

DUCKS REQUIRE water to fulfil their biological and behavioural needs<sup>5, 14</sup>. Inadequate supply of water is arguably one of the most significant welfare issues for commercially farmed ducks, but the duck industry argues that maintaining hygienic open water for ducks in total confinement and partial confinement systems is unreasonable because of the additional costs and demands on labour<sup>5, 25</sup>.

The duck industry has also argued that providing adequate surface water has major environmental and health impacts<sup>6</sup>. Producers highlight concerns that water will make litter on the floor wet, encouraging disease and making living conditions difficult and uncomfortable for birds<sup>5</sup>. Duck faeces can build up in water if it is not changed regularly and can invite disease<sup>47</sup>. Further, constant water changing constitutes an environmental issue in itself, especially in Australia where water scarcity demands conservation efforts and sustainable farming practices<sup>47</sup>. Animal Liberation does not disagree with these concerns. However, these issues do not excuse the neglect of major welfare problems. Rather, it suggests that ducks are not suitable for any agricultural purpose.

Currently, it seems that as long as water-deprivation remains profitable, the industry will continue to raise ducks in this cruel, inhumane way.

In an episode of Landline in 2004, Pepe Bonaccordo of Pepe's Ducks admitted, "The big problem with ducks is they're a waterfowl so they love their water<sup>48</sup>." He also commented, "They are very cute aren't they? It's amazing. It's a pity you have to kill them<sup>48</sup>." At the time of printing, Pepe's Ducks continues to raise broiler ducks in closed sheds without access to surface water.

In the same interview, Bonaccordo also commented on his own rise to business success, "I think those days, money, success, all of that I was needy for that<sup>48</sup>." Bonaccordo, who is now very wealthy, concluded that now, "I'm here, I'm sparkling<sup>48</sup>".

To date, the lack of public knowledge about the welfare conditions of ducks farmed for meat in Australia has operated to maintain the profitability of inhumane farming practices. Without public pressure to improve conditions, the duck industry will likely continue to ignore this major welfare issue.





## CONCLUSION

SEVERELY COMPRISED welfare is evident in duck farming in Australia and ducks raised here suffer extreme welfare problems throughout their lives. The concerns in relation to water supply at both total confinement and partial confinement systems can lead to only one conclusion: that ducks are unsuitable for any agricultural purpose. Water deprivation is a very serious welfare and health concern and should not be neglected. One research paper concluded that, “ducks are unsuccessful in coping with intensive housing conditions and that suffering, pain and damage are resulting from this<sup>23</sup>.”

Bringing the widespread suffering of these birds into the public domain is only a first step in Animal Liberation's ongoing efforts to challenge the cruel and inhumane duck farming industry. The campaign against duck farming is online at <http://www.aussieducks.com>, with further details on welfare issues, the campaign in Australia, and disturbing footage obtained from inside Australian duck farms.

Log on, share the information and the images, and be a voice against consumption at the cost of so much suffering.



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