



Working together to improve safety in the sheep and beef cattle farming industry.

NSW Sheep & Beef Cattle Industry Action Plan 2013-2014



Disclaimer

This publication may contain work health and safety and workers compensation information. It may include some of your obligations under the various legislations that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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Why focus on sheep and beef cattle farming

Sheep and beef cattle farming has been identified as a priority under WorkCover's *Focus on Industry Program*, designed to improve workplace safety and injury management outcomes in high-risk sectors. Despite improvements in farming practices, rates of injury and illness across this sector have not declined.

About the industry

In 2011 sheep and beef cattle farming accounted for \$2.2 billion of NSW's agricultural industry's \$11.7 billion revenue. The industry also has the highest median age of 51 years.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that in 2010, 68 per cent of NSW's agricultural businesses were engaged in some form of sheep and beef cattle farming with approximately 26,000 businesses operating in this industry.

According to IBISWorld, from 2013 – 2018 the sheep and beef cattle industry is forecast to grow at the rate of 0.9 per cent annually, sheep farming is forecast to grow at the rate of 1.7 per cent annually; and beef cattle farming is forecast to decline at the rate of 3.4 per cent annually.

How we explored the issues

Data analysis and field validation activities identified key factors that contribute to injuries, illnesses and delayed return to work within this industry.



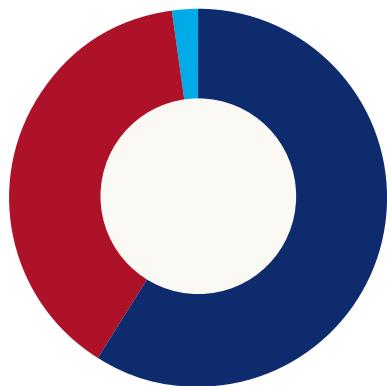
Industry trends and work health and safety and return to work performance

In NSW a total of 26,277 businesses employ approximately 14,000 workers in the sheep and beef cattle farming industry with 6920 workers compensation policies in place and a large number of self employed individuals.

In the three years to 2010/11, workplace injuries and occupational diseases from this industry have cost the NSW WorkCover scheme a total of \$45.7 million.

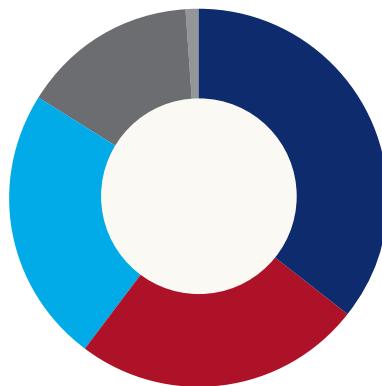
Workers compensation policy holders 2011/12

Figure 1: Policy holders by business size



- Micro (<5 workers) 59%
- Small (5–19 workers) 39%
- Medium(20–199 workers) 2%

Figure 2: Policy holders by sub-industry



- Combined grain growing sheep farming and beef cattle farming 36%
- Sheep farming 25%
- Beef cattle farming 24%
- Sheep-beef cattle farming 24%
- Beef cattle feedlots <1%

Table 1: Policy holders (combined sub-industries) by WorkCover region

Hub	Metro East	Metro West	North West	South West	North Coast	Illawarra/South East	Hunter	Unknown	Total
Number	147	67	2512	2365	249	1179	318	83	6920
Percentage	2.1%	1.0%	36.3%	34.2%	3.6%	17.0%	4.6%	1.2%	100%

Figure 3: Location of WorkCover NSW regions



Workers compensation claims

The incidence rate of claims for grain, sheep and beef cattle farming in 2010/11 was 37.7 per 1000 employees. This was a 9.4 per cent decrease from 2008/09. This figure is higher than the incidence rate for all industries combined (36.4 per 1000 employees).

The average cost of a claim in sheep and beef cattle farming in the three years to 2010/11 was \$30,615. This was significantly higher than the average cost of a claim for all industries combined of \$8,697.

Males account for 69 per cent of the workforce but 90 per cent of the claims. Young workers experience a high number of low cost claims, while workers over the age of 40 account for 53 per cent of the claims but 73 per cent of the cost.

Table 2: Workers compensation claims 2008/09 to 2010/11

Claim summary	Number	Per cent
Total number of claims	1458	100%
Number of major claims	852	58%
Number of fatalities	7	0.5%
Number of permanent disabilities	152	10%
Number of temporary disabilities > = 6 months off work	92	6%
Number of temporary disabilities <6 months off work	1207	83%

Figure 4: Ten-year trend in number of claims

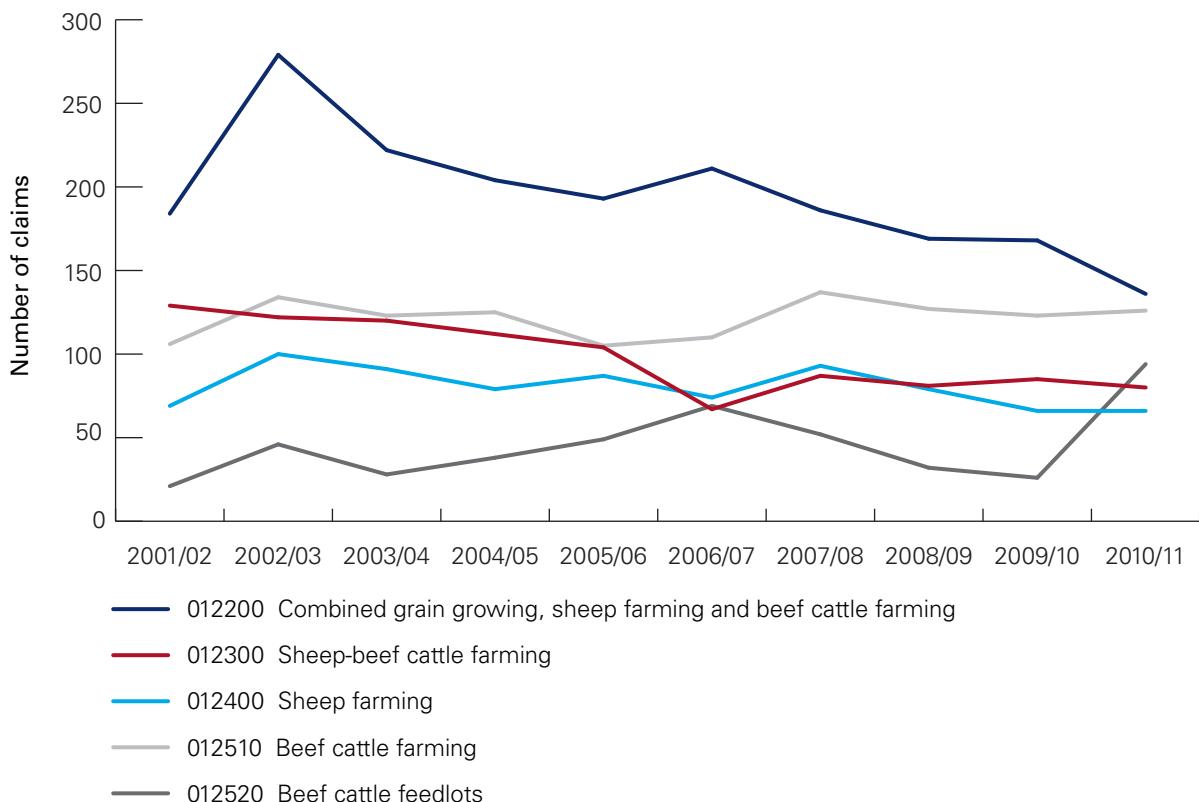
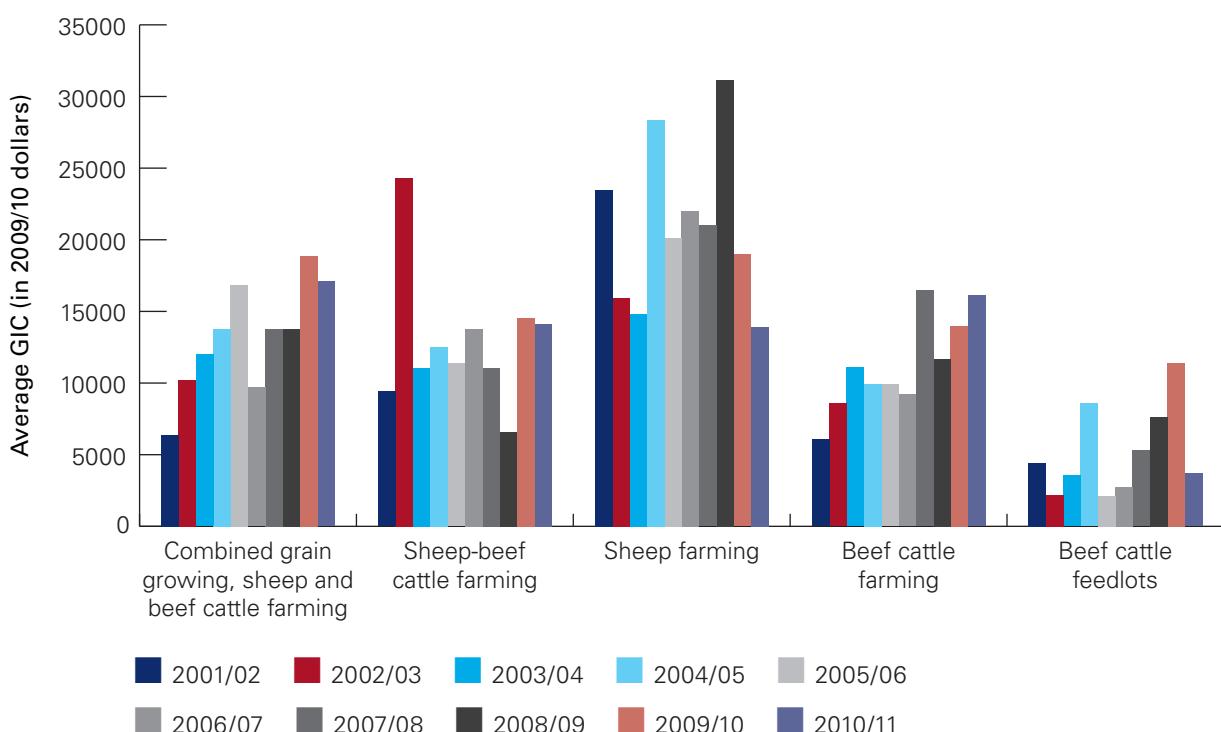


Figure 5: Ten-year trend in average cost (Gross Incurred Cost) of claims



Focus areas

A recurring theme resulting from WorkCover's research and engagement activities was the need for different community representatives to work together to achieve sustainable work health and safety, return to work and injury management outcomes, within a framework of best practice farm management.

The use of existing stakeholder channels such as the NSW Farmers Association and government agencies was identified as an effective way to raise awareness and prompt improvements in safety performance. Key contributing factors common to a number of issues include:

- labour intensive and outdoor work
- aging workforce and inexperienced new farm workers (including contract labour)
- limited training opportunities due to distance and costs.

Issue	Focus area	Contributing factors
Managing and handling livestock – musculoskeletal disorders	Working with livestock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unsafe animal handling practices • unpredictable nature of animals • pen and yard design • poor or no training of workers • loading/unloading livestock
Serious incidents involving quad bikes – crush, rollover, associated trauma	Quad bikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not the correct vehicle for the task or terrain • incorrect use of vehicles • unsuitable and heavy loads • farm track and vehicle maintenance • not wearing a helmet
Serious incidents involving, tractors, implements and attachments – musculoskeletal disorders, runovers, rollovers and entanglement	Tractors and related implements and attachments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • farm track and vehicle maintenance including guarding and moving parts • incorrect use of vehicles • attaching and detaching – slashers, post drivers • front end loaders and their attachments
Occupational cancers Diseases of the nervous system Mental disorders (including stress and depression)	Occupational disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exposure to sun • exposure to noise • zoonosis • financial pressures/isolation/work load
Limited availability of suitable alternative duties Limited experience with return to work and injury management	Return to work and injury management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of accessible/timely medical services • limited experience/awareness of return to work and injury management practices • employers view that return to work/injury management is costly/time-consuming
Children working on or visiting farms are at risk of death or serious injury.	Child safety on farms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being in the vicinity of and/or operating machinery • riding tractors, quad bikes, motorbikes • access to dams, and other sources of water • access to high risk areas – silos, stockyards, electricity, chemical stores and workshops.

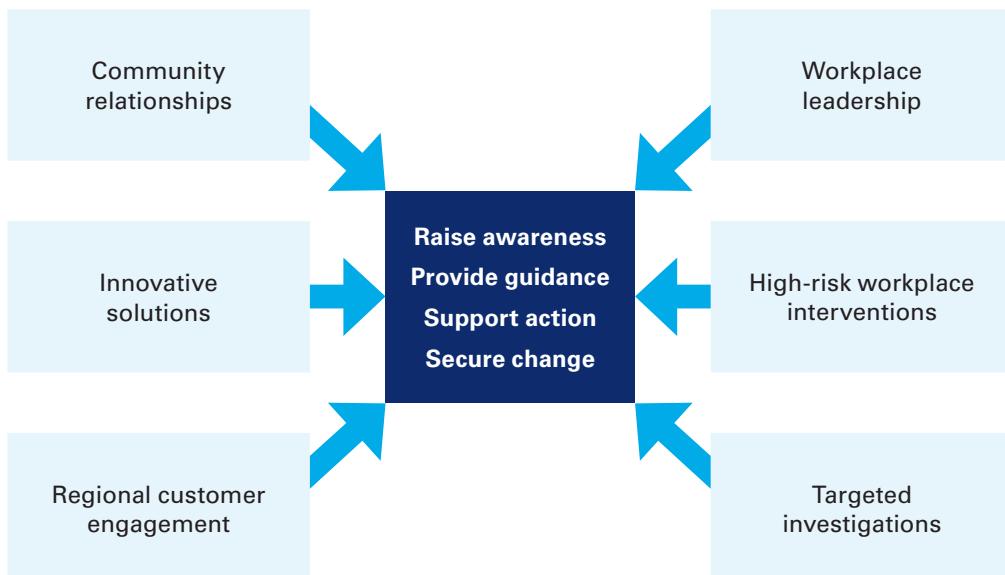
Securing healthy, safe and productive workplaces

Securing healthy, safe and productive workplaces within the NSW sheep and beef cattle farming industry requires action in a number of key areas including:

- building community relationships with those who understand the key issues and can influence change
- designing innovative solutions that produce sustainable change in work health and safety and return to work
- engagement with customers in a way that meets their needs and builds their capability to manage positive safety cultures
- leadership from best practice workplaces who are willing to share their experience and assist others within the community
- intervening in high risk workplaces to help improve work health and safety and return to work performance
- targeted investigations involving serious incidents.

These action areas aim to:

- raise awareness and capability within the industry
- provide guidance to the industry on how to affect change
- support action across the industry
- secure change where necessary.



Plan for change in the sheep and beef cattle farming industry

Outcomes

- Reduced fatalities, injuries and illnesses.
- Reduced exposure to hazards causing injury and disease.
- Elimination/minimisation of high-risk hazards through higher level controls.
- Injured workers are protected and have sustained return to work arrangements.



Contributing success factors

- Injury and illness risks are controlled through the implementation of effective systems, higher level controls, improved competency and improved farm management.
- Those operating in the industry have processes and programs in place for effective early return to work and injury management for injured workers.



Targeted high-risk issues

1. Musculoskeletal injuries sustained by managing livestock and working in and around pens, yards, races, ramps and runs.
2. Working with tractors and quad bikes (crush, rollovers, runovers, musculoskeletal injuries).
3. Occupational diseases and illness – sun, noise, stress caused by financial and environmental pressures.
4. Lack of effective and systematic management of return to work and management of injured workers.
5. Low levels of awareness of how work health and safety, and injury management and return to work, can contribute to increased farm sustainability and profitability.
6. Exposure of children to hazards on farms.

Issue 1: Working with livestock

Workers are at risk of fatal or serious injuries when carrying out high risk animal handling activities such as, moving, separating, treating and loading or unloading livestock.

Outcomes:

Industry will:

- adopt a best practice approach when handling livestock
- move towards adopting a best practice approach to pen and yard design
- have processes in place to ensure that inexperienced (and especially young) farm workers are appropriately inducted, trained and supervised.

Actions:

Raise awareness

- WorkCover in consultation with action plan partners and the rural community will promote safe work practices involving livestock handling and other high risk farm work.
- Action plan partners will collaborate to use existing industry events, field days and accredited training courses to raise awareness of key safety issues involving livestock handling.

Provide guidance

- Action plan partners will disseminate best practice guidance material for the industry using targeted communication channels.
- High-risk livestock handling activities will be the subject of a series of industry demonstration and solution field days with information targeted to inexperienced farm workers, as well as the young and ageing farming workforce.

Support action

- WorkCover will support the adoption of safety improvements by expanding its rebate program to include agreed solutions such as pen and yard improvements, non-slip surfaces, railings, sun protection over yards, crushes and other outdoor work areas.
- Action plan partners will develop and implement a program where industry experts provide assistance to farmers.
- Action plan partners will consider strategies to build the capability of farm livestock workers by increasing access to existing accredited courses and other educational resources.

Secure change

- WorkCover will undertake a workplace visit program to ensure workplaces have systems in place to work safely with livestock.
- WorkCover will provide a coordinated response to complaints and incidents involving livestock handling activities.
- WorkCover will adopt a case management approach to assist identified businesses in the sheep and beef cattle farming industry who exhibit high claim numbers and poor return to work rates to improve their safety performance.

Issue 2: Quad bike use

Workers are at risk of fatal or serious injury or illness when working with or riding quad bikes.

Outcomes:

Industry will:

- support farmers at point of sale and guide them in selecting farm vehicles best suited to their needs
- encourage farmers to consider fitting devices to reduce the likelihood of the rider being trapped under the quad bike in the event of a rollover
- secure increased uptake of riders being formally trained and supervised
- ensure that quad bike designers, manufacturers and suppliers are meeting their work health and safety obligations
- comply with quad bike manufacturers' guidelines in relation to passenger-carrying, load requirements and rider age
- secure an increased rate of wearing approved helmets when riding a quad bike
- be better informed by the results of crash performance testing and research.

Actions:

Raise awareness

- Communication through existing and new channels to raise awareness of the risks and controls associated with quad bike use.
- With the assistance of emergency service organisations and action plan partners, provide case study examples, through industry groups and the media about the consequences of farm vehicle incidents and incident prevention strategies.

Provide guidance

- WorkCover will promote existing guidance including the *Farm vehicle pre-purchase checklist, Quad bike safety: 'What you need to know?* and WorkSafe Victoria's handbook *Quad bikes on farms*.
- WorkCover will progress further crash performance testing and research of quad bikes and distribute the findings to industry.
- Quad bike safety will be the subject of a series of industry demonstration and solution field days with information targeted to new farm workers, as well as the young and ageing farming workforce.

Support action

- WorkCover will support industry adoption of safety improvements by expanding its rebate program to include rider protection equipment and other solutions that may be identified through testing and research.
- Action plan partners will explore opportunities to increase access to rider training courses in remote areas.
- WorkCover will continue to support industry stakeholders in the delivery of the Trans Tasman Quad Bike Industry Strategy to reduce quad bike fatalities and serious injuries.

Secure change

- Action plan partners will actively promote these strategies in other jurisdictions.
- WorkCover will undertake a workplace visit program to ensure farmers are identifying and controlling quad bike risks.
- WorkCover will provide a coordinated response to complaints and incidents involving quad bike use within the sheep and beef cattle industry.
- WorkCover will adopt a case management approach to assist identified businesses in the sheep and beef cattle farming industry, who exhibit high claim numbers and poor return to work rates to improve their safety performance.

Issue 3: Tractors and related implements and attachments

Workers are at risk of fatal or serious injury or illness when operating or working with tractors including related implements and attachments.

Outcomes:

Industry will:

- ensure that only tractors fitted with roll over protective structures are being operated on sheep and beef cattle farms in NSW
- ensure that all attachments are fitted with power take off (PTO) guards
- ensure that all tractors and related implements and attachments are appropriately maintained
- continue to raise awareness of tractor rollover and runover risks.

Actions:

Raise awareness

- Action plan partners will use their existing communication channels to raise awareness of the high risk nature of tractors and implement use and practical prevention strategies.
- With the assistance of emergency service organisations and action plan partners, provide case study examples through industry groups and the media about the consequences of incidents involving tractors and related implements and attachments.

Provide guidance

- Promote guidance material to assist in providing a compatible match between tractors, and related implements and attachments.
- Promote improved point of sale material to better guide farmers in purchasing the vehicle best suited to their needs.
- Industry leaders to provide advice to farmers regarding vehicle selection and use.
- Demonstrations featuring the safe use of tractors, implements and attachments will occur at industry field days with information targeted to inexperienced farm workers, as well as the young and ageing farming workforce.

Support action

- WorkCover will support industry adoption of safety improvements by reviewing its rebate program to consider rollover protective structures, runover prevention solutions and guarding for PTO shafts and auger safety.
- WorkCover will explore opportunities to improve access to accredited safe farm vehicle courses in remote areas.

Secure change

- Action plan partners will actively promote safe tractor use.
- WorkCover will undertake a workplace visit program to ensure all tractors used on farms are fitted with roll over protective structures, PTO guards and side access steps/platforms.
- WorkCover will provide a coordinated response to complaints and incidents involving tractor or implement use within the sheep and beef cattle farming industry.
- WorkCover will adopt a case management approach to assist identified businesses in the sheep and beef cattle farming industry, who exhibit high claim numbers and poor return to work rates to improve their safety performance.

Issue 4: Occupational disease

Workers are at risk of occupational diseases from exposure to sun, noise and zoonoses as well as mental health issues caused by a range of external and internal influences on the farm.

Outcomes:

Industry will:

- better understand occupational disease risks and controls affecting this industry
- better understand psychosocial issues (eg mental health) and the support options available.

Actions:

Raise awareness

- Action plan partners will use existing communication channels to raise industry awareness of the illnesses and diseases associated with farming.
- Collaboration with local health providers to raise awareness in rural communities of occupational diseases, illnesses and controls associated with farming.

Provide guidance

- Action plan partners will provide more guidance directly to the farming community regarding exposure to sun, noise and zoonotic diseases.
- Occupational diseases and illnesses on farms will be topics incorporated into a series of industry demonstration and solution field days.

Support action

- WorkCover will review its small business rebate program and promote best practice solutions to reduce exposure to sun and noise.
- WorkCover will continue to raise awareness of the 'Business in Mind' support service to NSW farm communities.

Secure change

- WorkCover will undertake a workplace visit program to ensure businesses have implemented adequate controls at their workplace to eliminate or minimise the risks associated with sun and noise exposure.
- WorkCover will provide a coordinated response to complaints and incidents associated with occupational diseases.

Issue 5: Return to work and injury management

Workers are at risk of not returning to work and long term work loss.

Outcomes:

Industry will:

- know what to do in the event of a worker being injured to ensure effective and timely return to work
- ensure that effective return to work and injury management systems are implemented
- raise awareness of effective return to work and injury management practices
- develop solutions to overcome challenges in offering suitable work duties on farms and in regional locations.

Actions:

Raise awareness

- WorkCover, in partnership with regional stakeholders will develop and launch an awareness campaign targeting workers and their families, employers and service providers with key messages that include:
 - safe work is good for you – stay at work
 - stay active – early intervention after injury
 - stay connected
 - early return to work – use work to facilitate durable return to work
 - tailor intervention to the needs of the worker
- WorkCover will revise guidance material and training resources to reflect this approach.

Provide guidance

- WorkCover will consider implementation of an engagement model addressing return to work in regional areas. This will assist farmers to fulfil their return to work and injury management responsibilities.
- Effective return to work and injury management will be priority topics for a series of industry demonstration and solution field days.

Support action

WorkCover will develop a return to work financial incentive scheme for employers that are:

- regionally based
- defined as a micro employer
- have developed, identified and offered suitable employment.

Secure change

WorkCover will conduct a series of workplace visits to ensure industry is meeting its return to work and injury management obligations.

Issue 6: Child safety on farms

Exposure of children to hazards in working areas of farms can result in fatal or serious injury/illness.

Outcomes:

Workplaces will:

- develop and maintain a 'safety for children' culture on farms. This includes a systematic approach in the prevention of fatal or serious injury/illness to children when living on and/or visiting farms
- ensure that parts of farms where work takes place are adequately controlled/segregated in order to eliminate or control workplace risks to children.

Actions:

Raise awareness

Action plan partners to use their existing communication channels to inform the farming community of the need for a 'safety for children' culture on farms. This includes a focus on:

- risks associated with farm work including large animals, quad bikes, hazardous chemicals, machinery eg tractors and related implements and attachments
- unsupervised access by children to dams, and other sources of water (eg water tanks, channels), silos, stockyards, electricity, chemical stores and workshops.

Provide guidance

- Action plan partners to promote access to existing resources on child safety on farms through current and new communication channels.
- Child safety on farms will be a priority topic included in a series of industry field days and events.

Support action

- Action plan partners will support the delivery of child safety messages and information to the farming community.

Secure change

- WorkCover will undertake a workplace visit program to focus on the effective prevention of farming risks to children such as hazardous chemicals, farm vehicles, machinery, large animals, water sources and stored grain facilities.

More information

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