



## **NLIS - Cattle identification requirements**

The **National Livestock Identification Scheme** (NLIS) is Australia's system for identifying and tracking beef and dairy cattle.

The South Australian Government and cattle industry organisations have agreed to work together to fully implement the NLIS so that consumers in Australia and overseas can have confidence in our beef and dairy products. The NLIS will enable cattle to be reliably identified individually and tracked from their property of birth to slaughter, protecting the reputation of South Australia's cattle industry as a supplier of 'clean' wholesome beef and dairy products and providing a competitive advantage in domestic and export markets.

### **ANSWERS TO COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **1. What are the new requirements?**

##### ***NLIS identification***

Cattle born after 1 January 2004 must be identified with a white NLIS Breeder Tag before they leave their property of birth.

##### ***Bobby calves***

Bobby calves (calves less than six weeks of age, not accompanied by their dam) consigned to an abattoir, saleyard or calf truck for immediate slaughter can still be identified with a bobby calf ear tag only.

Bobby calves to be raised on another property must be identified by the breeder with a Breeder Tag before leaving their property of birth.

##### ***NLIS tags***

NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder devices must be attached to the right (or offside) ear.

Never attach a second NLIS device if a NLIS device is already present.

Breeder and Post-breeder devices purchased for use on one property cannot be applied to cattle located on another property, unless registered with the same Property Identification Code (PIC).

Breeder and Post-breeder Tags cannot be sold, given away or reused.

Breeder and Post-breeder Tags cannot be removed until the animal is processed in an abattoir or slaughterhouse.

##### ***Tail tags***

Cattle identified with a NLIS device consigned to a saleyard or directly to an abattoir from the property on which they were identified with a NLIS device do not have to be identified with a transaction tag provided the consignment is accompanied by a correctly completed current National Vendor Declaration (Cattle) form.

All other cattle consigned to a saleyard or abattoir must still be identified with a transaction tag (wrap-around tail tag, ratchet tail tag or large ear tag) before dispatch.

### **More information**

For more information, call the PIRSA's toll free **Infoline on 1800 654 688**.

## **2. What are NLIS devices and when must they be used?**

There are two types of NLIS devices endorsed for the permanent identification of cattle. They are known as Breeder devices and Post-breeder devices. **NLIS Breeder devices** are white and are used by a breeder to permanently identify cattle before they leave their property of birth. **NLIS Post-breeder devices** are orange and are used to permanently identify introduced cattle, not already identified with a Breeder or Post-breeder device.

NLIS devices are stamped with the NLIS logo and the words 'Do not remove'. Cattle only need to be permanently identified once, either with a NLIS Breeder device or a NLIS Post-breeder device. If cattle you buy are already identified with a NLIS device, **do not** attach a second NLIS device.

*Breeder devices and Post-breeder devices contain a microchip (transponder) encoded with a unique unalterable number that can be accurately read electronically in a fraction of a second with a suitable reader. Another unique number, known as the NLIS number, is printed on each NLIS device. This number can be read visually.*

A special applicator designed for the attachment of NLIS tags must be used. If the wrong applicator is used, tag retention will be compromised and the microchip may be damaged.

Producers selling cows with calves at foot must identify the calves with a NLIS Breeder device before they leave their property of birth if the calves were born after 1 January 2004.

The NLIS identification of cattle born after 1 January 2004 can occur at any time before cattle leave their property of birth. A convenient time to attach a NLIS device is at marking on beef properties and at weaning on dairy farms. Cattle are easier to restrain for tagging when they are young.

Visit or call any PIRSA office to order NLIS devices.

## **3. Do adult cattle need to be NLIS identified?**

The NLIS identification of cattle born prior to 1 January 2004 remains voluntary. However **from July 1 2005 all cattle** that are being moved to a property that has a different Property Identification Code ('tail tag number'), saleyard or abattoir will be required to be identified with a NLIS tag prior to dispatch. This includes cattle consigned from a South Australian property to a sale for breeding or store cattle.

If cattle are identified with a NLIS device attached by a former owner, they must not be identified with a second NLIS device. Because NLIS ear tags are small, it is relatively simple to place a NLIS tag in the right (off-side) ear of cattle even when the cattle already have a management tag in this ear.

To facilitate the turn off of breeding animals born before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004, producers will be able to consign lines of 20 or more breeders from property of birth direct to slaughter without being identified with a NLIS device until 2010. These animals will still need to be identified with a transaction tag.

#### **4. Do purchased bobby calves need to be NLIS identified?**

Bobby calves are cattle less than 6 weeks of age not accompanied by their dams. If consigned for slaughter they can continue to be identified with a bobby calf ear tag.

Bobby calves born after 1 January 2004 that are purchased from a calf truck operation or saleyard for rearing must be identified by the purchaser with an orange NLIS Post-breeder Tag within 30 days of their arrival on the purchaser's property.

Bobby calves to be raised on another property, eg. by a contract rearer or as part of a 'bull beef' program, must be identified by the breeder with a NLIS Breeder Tag before leaving their property of birth.

#### **5. What happens if an animal loses its Breeder or Post-breeder device?**

Provided NLIS devices are applied using the correct applicator and in accordance with the instructions supplied by the manufacturer, the loss rates of NLIS devices is less than 1% per year.

If a NLIS Breeder or Post-breeder device is lost from cattle born after 1 January 2004, the owner must re-tag the animal with a white NLIS Breeder device if the animal is still on its property of birth, or with an orange NLIS Post-breeder device if the animal is no longer on its property of birth.

Re-tagging can occur at any convenient time prior to the movement of the animal from the property on which the NLIS tag was lost. NLIS devices that are lost, if located in yards or paddocks, cannot be reused.

#### **6. Do cattle need to be NLIS identified if they are moving from their property of birth to another property?**

Cattle born after 1 January 2004 that are to be moved to a property that has a different Property Identification Code ('tail tag number'), including an agistment or lease property, must be identified with a NLIS device before leaving their property of birth.

From July 1 2005, all cattle regardless of their age will need to be identified with a NLIS device before being moved to another South Australian property that has a different Property Identification Code.

#### **7. Will saleyards and abattoirs be required to read the NLIS tags on my cattle?**

Abattoirs will be required to read the NLIS tags carried by the cattle they process and notify the NLIS database that these cattle have been slaughtered.

The NLIS database is managed on behalf of Australia's cattle industry by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA). All South Australian export and domestic abattoirs will have readers and links to the NLIS database operating by July 2004.

SA saleyards are currently installing readers and associated infrastructure for the reading of NLIS devices and will be required to read all devices from July 2004. Saleyards will read the NLIS devices and advise the NLIS database of the Property Identification Code ('tail tag number') of the purchaser's property.

#### **8. Are producers required to notify the NLIS database when they buy, sell or move cattle?**

With the exception of producers accredited under the Commonwealth Export Control Act to supply cattle for the European Union (EU) market, producers are not currently required to notify the NLIS database when they buy or sell NLIS tagged cattle. However, from July 1 2004

purchasers of cattle identified with a NLIS must inform the NLIS database. In many cases the transfer will occur automatically when cattle are scanned at saleyards and the PIC of the purchaser is recorded. It is the responsibility of the purchaser to ensure the information is provided.

Cattle producers, if they wish, can notify the NLIS database of the cattle they sell. They can also update their information to take account of past transactions, deaths and losses. The easiest means of communicating with the NLIS database is via the Internet, although MLA will accept written information for a small number of transfers of cattle identified with either a NLIS Breeder or Post-breeder Tag. To access the NLIS database, visit [www.nlis.mla.com.au](http://www.nlis.mla.com.au) For further information, contact MLA's NLIS Database Helpline on 1800 654 743.

### **9. Can I remove, sell or reuse a Breeder or Post-breeder device?**

Once a NLIS Breeder or Post breeder device is attached to cattle it must not be removed until the animal is slaughtered in an abattoir or slaughterhouse unless written permission is first obtained from the Department. The only exception is if the microchip in a NLIS tag is damaged and cannot be read (*see Question 10*).

NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder devices cannot be sold or given away. Tags that have been lost from cattle, if found, cannot be reused.

### **10. What should I do if the microchip within a NLIS tag can not be read?**

If the microchip within a NLIS tag will not read, firstly check that the reader is functioning properly. Flat batteries and loose connections are often to blame.

If a NLIS tag still will not read, a producer is permitted to remove it provided, the animal is immediately re-tagged with either a NLIS Breeder Tag (if the animal was bred on the property) or a NLIS Post-breeder Tag (if the animal was introduced). For the animal to retain whole-of-life traceability you will need to advise the NLIS database of the replacement of the device.

### **11. Do I still need to identify NLIS tagged cattle with 'tail tags'?**

During the transition phase cattle born before 1 January 2004 will still require transaction tags. Transaction tags, such as wrap-around and ratchet tail tags and transaction ear tags, are still needed to identify the last owner, and typically the last property of residence, of cattle consigned to saleyards and abattoirs. For cattle that have been on the consignor's property for less than 7 days, the transaction tags of the property on which the cattle had previously been held can be used if still attached.

Cattle identified with a NLIS device consigned to a saleyard or directly to an abattoir from the property on which they were identified with a NLIS device do not have to be identified with a transaction tag. The consignment should be accompanied by a correctly completed current National Vendor Declaration (Cattle) form.

If you have already purchased cattle that are identified with a NLIS device, it is possible that the identification number of the animal has not been transferred to your Property Identification Code, in this case you will need either notify the NLIS database or apply a transaction tag to ensure that the traceability of the animal is maintained.

AQIS requires that EU eligible cattle that are consigned to an EU accredited saleyard or directly to an EU listed abattoir continue to be identified with lime-green tail tags.

Processors might insist that cattle purchased 'over the hooks' be tail tagged as a condition of purchase.

As the NLIS is progressively implemented in South Australia, it is anticipated that the requirement to 'tail tag' will be phased out completely.

## 12. Can I use my NLIS tags for on-farm herd management purposes?

NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder Tags contain microchips that can be read electronically by cattle producer who purchases a suitable reader. Hand held readers are available from \$900. Panel readers with a read distance of over one metre are more expensive, but can be used to automatically read the NLIS tags of cattle entering a milking shed or moving along a race.

By linking a reader with a suitably programmed computer, cattle producers can use NLIS tags to record any information they want to improve the management of their herds. NLIS tags act as a 'back-up' if cattle are identified with a larger management ear tag and this tag is lost.

NLIS technology can be used on beef properties for the maintenance of herd and pedigree records, to better utilize carcass feedback information down-loaded from the NLIS database, and when used in conjunction with a suitable scale to accurately and quickly weigh cattle.

On dairy farms, the NLIS tags attached to cows can be read as they move onto a rotary platform or into the bails of a herringbone shed. This then allows electronic identification of cows at milking, and facilitates simplified herd recording, automatic drafting and computer control feeding. Information on reader and software suppliers is available on the MLA website at [www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au). Further information can be obtained by calling MLA's NLIS Database Helpline on 1800 654 743.

## 13. What is the number printed on the external surface of a NLIS Breeder or Post-breeder Tag?

The unique number printed on Breeder and Post-breeder Tags is called the NLIS number. The following is an example of a NLIS number that might appear on a Breeder Tag issued for use on a South Australian property –

**SA123123 XB Y 00034** where:

“**SA123123**” is the 8 character Property Identification Code ('tail tag number') of the property on which the tag is to be used,

“**XB**” is the combination coding for the manufacturer (“**X**”) and tag type (“**B**”), eg. whether the tag is a Breeder or Post-breeder Tag,

“**Y**” is the year of supply (using the Australian Breedplan alpha character for that particular year), and

“**00034**” is the serial number.

## 14. Can I select the serial number sequence for the NLIS tags I order?

To allow NLIS tags to be used for on-farm herd management purposes, producers can specify the serial number sequence (the last 5 digits of the NLIS number on NLIS tags) they would like printed on their tags.

The serial number can consist of a letter and four numbers (Z0001) or five numbers (00001).

Cattle producers, if they wish, can place a management tag in the left ear of their cattle, printed with numbers matching the serial numbers on the NLIS tags they have used. The NLIS tag can then act as a 'back-up' if the management tag is lost.

## **15. What number is encoded in the microchip located within NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder Tags?**

Microchips within NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder Tags are encoded with a number that is unique and unalterable. Microchip numbers, when read electronically with a suitable reader, have 16 characters in the following format - Manufacturer's code 3 numeric characters, Space 1 character, Individual chip number 12 numeric characters. The following is an example of the microchip number that might be encoded on the microchip embedded in a Breeder or Post-breeder Tag - **982 000001234567**

## **16. How are the NLIS number and the corresponding microchip number for each NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder Tag linked?**

Cattle producers applying for NLIS tags must specify the property on which the tags are to be used. An order is generated by the Department to the nominated tag supplier specifying the Property Identification Code ('tail tag number') allocated to that property and a serial number sequence for the ordered tags.

The tag supplier establishes a link between the NLIS number printed on each tag, and the number encoded in the microchip. This information is up-loaded to the NLIS database. Either the visually readable NLIS number printed on the external surface of the tag or the electronic microchip number can then be used to identify the tagged animal.

## **17. Can I obtain a list of the NLIS numbers and associated microchip numbers for the NLIS tags I have, or the NLIS identified cattle I own?**

For NLIS identified cattle registered on the NLIS database as residing on their property, producers can down-load from the NLIS database a list linking the NLIS number on the external surface of the Breeder and Post-breeder Tags attached to these cattle and the associated microchip numbers. Contact the MLA's NLIS Database Helpline on 1800 654 743 for further information.

When ordering NLIS devices you can request a "tag bucket file" containing the same information from the manufacturer.

## **18. Can I identify my cattle using NLIS endorsed rumen boluses?**

NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder Tags are available in the form of an ear tag, or an ear tag/rumen bolus combination. With ear tag/rumen bolus combinations, the visually readable NLIS number is printed on a large ear tag (white for NLIS Breeder Tags and orange for NLIS Post-breeder Tags) along with the letter 'R' or word 'RUMEN'. The bolus contains the microchip.

South Australian producers have the option of using NLIS endorsed ear tag/rumen bolus combinations instead of the NLIS endorsed ear tags if they wish. Rumen boluses cannot be administered to calves younger than 3 months of age, but 6 months would be preferable.

## **19. How do I order NLIS devices?**

It will just be like ordering tail tags. You call your local PIRSA office and provide them with your details – PIC name, address and the number of devices. An order will then be created for you to send to the manufacturer.

## **20. Can unused NLIS tags be transferred for use on another property?**

Producers who move from one property to another may apply to the Department for permission to use unused Breeder and Post-breeder Tags on their new property. Producers seeking permission to transfer unused NLIS tags should call the Department on 8207 7911 before

moving properties. Producers accredited by AQIS to supply cattle for EU processing are not permitted to transfer unused NLIS tags for use on a new property.

Breeder and Post-breeder Tags purchased for use on one property cannot be used to identify cattle located on a property with a different Property Identification Code (“tail tag number”).

## **21. Do cattle leaving South Australia need to be identified with a NLIS tag?**

The States/Territories are currently introducing legislation that will require the NLIS identification of cattle moving between States for other than immediate slaughter.

It is likely that at some point in the future, all cattle that are being moved to another State will need to be identified with a NLIS tag prior to dispatch from their South Australian property.

## **22. What is the role of the NLIS database?**

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) operates the NLIS database on behalf of the cattle industry and State and Commonwealth Governments.

The database’s functions include registering the NLIS Breeder and Post-breeder Tags supplied to producers, including the NLIS number and microchip number associated with each device, and supporting the national scheme for the production of cattle for EU markets. The database will be progressively used to record the movement of cattle from their property of birth to those of subsequent owners and finally to slaughter. Where applicable, the residue and disease status of NLIS identified cattle will be registered on the database.

The database will also be used to facilitate the provision of carcase feedback to producers.

Contact the MLA’s NLIS Database Helpline on 1800 654 743 if you would like further information on the operation of the NLIS database.

## **23. What makes the NLIS superior to other livestock identification systems?**

Other countries, including Canada, New Zealand and countries throughout the European Union, have introduced schemes for the permanent identification of cattle based on either visually readable tags, or a combination of both bar coded and visually readable tags. These schemes in many instances require expensive and cumbersome paper-based systems for recording relevant information about specific animals, often with compromised accuracy. For example, in the United Kingdom, 550 people are employed to maintain the database operated by the British Cattle Movement Service, and in France 600 people manage that country’s cattle identification and tracking database.

Recent cases of ‘Mad Cow Disease’ has resulted in other countries progressing the adoption of electronic identification schemes to provide them with a reliable and efficient means of identifying and tracking their cattle herds.

The NLIS utilises tags that contain a microchip that can be read in a fraction of a second, enabling cattle to be quickly and accurately identified on-farm, and in saleyards, feedlots and abattoirs. Once the microchip is read, information can be quickly and accurately transmitted electronically to and from the NLIS database, at a fraction of the cost of cattle identification and tracking systems currently operating in other countries.

## **NLIS Contacts**

**PIRSA Helpline**

**1800 654 688**

**MLA NLIS Helpline**

**1800 654 743**

**MLA Support (email)**

**[nlis.support@mia.com.au](mailto:nlis.support@mia.com.au)**

**(website)**

**[www.nlis.com.au](http://www.nlis.com.au)**

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**Author:**

Denice Rendell, Senior Animal Health Consultant, Disease Surveillance.



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