

Consent Requirements for Small Scale Pig Farms

November 2020, Primefact 20/878, Second edition

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Introduction

In NSW a common enquiry pertaining to small scale pig farms involves the legal requirements for their operation. This fact sheet highlights the need for all intending pig owners to talk to their local council before acquiring their pigs.

Local Government Requirements

Check with your local council before you embark on a new land use even when changing from one agricultural enterprise to another. Your local council is the consent authority and different councils will have different requirements. For example, the grazing of livestock such as sheep and cattle is classified as extensive agriculture. Raising of pigs even when they are roaming in paddocks is classified as intensive agriculture which may have different land use requirements.

All councils have a Local Environment Plan (LEP) and different geographical areas have designated Landuse classifications; for example, residential, industrial or rural. Within the major Landuse classifications there may be further subdivisions and there will be restrictions on certain Landuse practices.

Council LEPs generally require a development application (DA) for intensive agriculture proposals which include pigs, poultry, dairy and feedlots. This is to ensure that the land resource is managed to prevent land degradation and pollution from livestock manure or effluent, and to prevent nuisance to neighbors.

Whether you are keeping pet pigs, pigs for own use or for commercial purposes it is recommended that your plans are discussed with council before you purchase the pigs or the property (if it is not already yours). For example, there may be restrictions for the keeping of pigs in sensitive environmental areas such as drinking water catchments and close to residential areas.

What is required in a development application?

Council will inform you what they require. In general, it will include a site map, information on your planned pig operations, your plans to manage the environment to prevent degradation or pollution, and contingency plans for fire, flood or livestock mortalities.

A Statement of Environmental Effects of the pig farm development could be requested. The larger the scale of the operation, or the more sensitive the area, the more detailed this statement will need to be.

A key component of the DA process is community consultation. At the most basic this involves talking to your neighbors to understand any concerns they may have in relation to your plans. Unfortunately, not everyone likes pigs. If you can allay fears early in the DA process it can reduce the angst.

NSW DPI does have a [Land Use Planning page](#) with useful information to guide both council planners and property owners.

A useful document especially if you are new to country life is the [Rural Living Handbook](#). This book is available online or from your Local Land Services office.

Although written for developing a small scale commercial pig enterprise [Environmental Guideline for Rotational Outdoor Piggeries](#) on the Australian Pork website is a useful guide for all pig farmers.

Manure management and odour problems

All manure smells and many people seem to be particularly sensitive to pig manure odour. Odour issues would be the major complaint against pig farms to councils. A pig voids approximately 6% of its body weight every day. Piggery waste can have 20 to 50 times more degradable organic matter per unit volume than municipal sewage waste. Recently a research project to underpin [the quantitative assessment of odour dust and noise emissions from free range pig farms](#), documented very low odour emissions, dust concentrations and noise levels. However, pig owners need to be sensitive to the levels of odour, dust and noise experienced by neighbors and implement measures to minimize any impacts.

While there is much less odour on outdoor pig farms than from indoor units, odour problems can still occur in wet and humid weather; and when the pig farm is poorly managed, allowing manure to accumulate and break down anaerobically.

Odour reduction

Most odour problems can be reduced if a [proper management plan](#) is developed before the pigs arrive on farm. To minimize the negative impacts on the available land it is recommended a paddock rotation system is developed. This means the land area should be subdivided into paddocks and the smaller paddock area would determine the number of pigs that can be safely managed over time. Internal electric fencing works well with pigs.

Pigs will spend most of their time moving between their feed, water and shelter and this area can quickly become denuded and compacted. Pigs are also attracted to any low-lying area that collects moisture and these areas become wallows. A paddock rotation system allows the paddock to recover between rotations; and allows the farmer to apply remedial measures (such as re-seeding the pasture or the growing of a hay crop to utilize manure nutrients) to reduce environmental degradation. The periodic moving of pig feed and water points within a paddock between paddock rotations, will help to achieve a more uniform use of any pasture and spread the fecal load more evenly across the paddock.

If pigs are to be pastured, they need to be managed to minimize their environmental impact. The local climate and weather patterns should be used as a guide together with the available land. High rainfall will allow pasture to recover more quickly but the land can also become boggy due to foot traffic; while drier areas will become denuded and stay denuded for longer periods of time. The situation will change with season and drought years.

The Australian Pork Limited [National Environmental Guidelines for Rotational Outdoor Piggeries \(Revised\) 2013](#) recommend that piggery capacity be based on the Standard Pig Unit (SPU). The SPU is a unit for defining pig farm capacity based on manure and waste feed output. One SPU is an average size grower pig (50kg) with volatile solids (VS) production of 90kg VS per year. A lactating sow with litter is 2.5 SPU and a gestating sow 1.6 SPU. For small scale pig keepers this can seem complicated. A question often received is how that translates to stocking rate.

The Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Pigs, suggest 20-25 gestating sows per hectare or 9-14 lactating sows per hectare. Critics feel this is too high for most Australian conditions. Well run commercial outdoor pig farms work on the relationship of duration of time in the paddock x soil type and vegetation x type and age of pig. Stocking rates in the vicinity of 10-15 gestating sows per hectare have been reported. Stocking rates for grower pigs are higher but the numbers are reduced over time as pigs are sold as soon as they reach market weight. The paddock is then remediated with new pasture or crops.

Some councils have Development Control plans (DCPs) which may specify the maximum number of pigs allowed to be kept. Victorian planning guidelines suggest 12 SPU per hectare for a 3-month period, but animals can be pastured at greater density so long as they are moved to fresh areas more frequently.

Remember you have a paddock rotation system so plan stocking rates around the paddocks used to keep pigs not the whole property size if you have other livestock. Normal pig rooting behavior (digging with their nose) means pigs have impact both above and below the surface of the ground so their impact is much greater than sheep or cattle grazing, and paddocks need time to recover.

If pigs are to be housed, straw bedded systems generally produce fewer odours, but management is key. Periodically the bedding will need changing. Used bedding is usually

composted before use on the paddock or garden. Compost that gets too wet or when turned, can be a source of odour.

Pig wallow areas, essential for pig cooling in summer, can be a source of odour if not properly managed. Stale stagnant water can have its own peculiar odour. In some areas, wallows are not permitted due to the odour potential.

Good planning and attention to detail in management are the key to the success of any pig farming system.

Further Reading

Responsible Pig Ownership Primefact 712

Your Reference number PUB20/878

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