

NLIS Guidelines for managing an agent code

How to manage an agent code

[Animal Biosecurity, NSW DPIRD, Orange.](#)

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Figure 1

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Cover image: Figure 1: Sheep at saleyard. Photo © Integrity Systems Company Ltd

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Introduction

The National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) underpins access of Australian livestock products to international markets. NLIS allows for traceability of livestock through a combination of approved permanent identifiers, movement documents and database records.

The NLIS database holds information on cattle, sheep, goats, and pig movements from birth to slaughter, protecting and enhancing Australia's reputation as a producer of animal products free of chemical residues and exotic diseases.

This publication provides guidelines to stock and station agents on how to comply with the requirements of the NLIS, whenever cattle, sheep and goats are sold by public auction in New South Wales (NSW) and are transferred to an agent code. These requirements are prescribed under the Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017.

NSW is currently transitioning to mandatory individual electronic identification (eID) for sheep and goats. This is an enhancement to the existing mob-based system as part of the NLIS. This means a change from a visual tag and mob-based traceability system to one where individual animals can be tracked and traced using electronic identification devices.

Using electronic devices for sheep and goats will ensure more accurate and timely traceability to help manage and recover from any emergency animal disease or residue incident. Key dates for industry groups are staggered between June 2024 and full implementation in January 2027, when mandatory electronic identification devices will be required for all sheep and goats leaving a property in NSW.

In summary:

- agent codes may be used to temporarily assign livestock if agents buy livestock on behalf of a number of clients and do not know at the point of sale the Property Identification Code (PIC) of the property each animal will be sent to, and
- livestock must be transferred off an agent code within two days.

General

Agent identification codes ('agent codes') may be used to temporarily transfer on the NLIS database cattle, sheep and goats that have been bought by an agent and are temporarily in their possession. The agent must then transfer the livestock off their agent code to a buyer PIC within two days.

Agent codes were implemented to make it easier for agents to work with the NLIS when scanning and reporting the movement of livestock through saleyards.

An agent who buys livestock at a saleyard on behalf of several clients and themselves and who does not know the destination PIC of the livestock, can ask the saleyard operator to transfer the livestock to their agent code. The agent determines the final destination of the livestock and is responsible for transferring the livestock on the NLIS database to the PIC of destination.

While the livestock is assigned to an agent code, traceability is provided by the agent's own records. To ensure that the livestock are timely recorded to the final destination, they must be transferred off the agent code within two days.

The Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017 allows a District Registrar to assign an agent identification code to a stock and station agent whose registered office is located in the stock identification district or who conducts business in the district.

The statutory requirements of the NLIS Regulation and the rules and procedures detailed in this guideline have been developed to retain traceability when livestock are assigned to and from an agent code.

The key rules that agents must adhere to are:

- An agent must keep records of the current location of all livestock in their possession together with livestock NLIS ID or RFID numbers.
- Cattle, sheep, and goats must be transferred on the NLIS database from an agent code to a buyer property PIC
- Livestock must be transferred on the NLIS database from an agent code within two days
- Approved permanent identifiers cannot be obtained with an agent code. Agents may be authorised to supply permanent identifiers (and order breeder devices on behalf of a client or emergency devices on a saleyard PIC), however this cannot be on the agent code
- Livestock cannot be transferred from one agent code to another agent code.

Conditions of use of an agent code

An agent code must be used in accordance with the Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017, and the conditions stipulated on the agent code application or renewal form.

An agent assigned an agent code must establish an 'agent' type NLIS database account and link their agent code as the 'PIC' to that account (via www.nlis.com.au). This allows transfers of livestock off the agent code to a destination PIC.

The database sends an automated email daily to each agent about overdue livestock, which has been on the agent code for over two days. To comply with the required two days for the transfer of livestock, agents are obliged to monitor overdue livestock on their agent codes regularly and take note of any emails from the NLIS database.

Agents must also advise the NLIS database of any change of email address through the 'Change' button and 'View/edit my account details'. These conditions and reminders mean agents are made aware when they have overdue livestock listed on their agent code (*note: agents who don't act upon these reminders may be penalised*).

A stock agent who has just purchased or taken temporary possession of livestock must provide the saleyard operator with the PIC of the destination property. If the final destination is not known, the agent must provide their agent code before livestock leave the saleyard. The livestock may be temporarily transferred to the agent code by the saleyard operator then transferred by the agent to the destination PIC within two days from the date of sale.

The saleyard operator may transfer livestock to the selling agent's code if neither the agent nor the buyer has provided the saleyard operator with the PIC for the destination's property by the sale's end. This arrangement is sanctioned by the industry's own code of practice and provided for under the Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017 if the selling agent is deemed to still be in possession of the livestock. The saleyard operator does not need the agent's permission to do this, and the agent may be unaware that this has happened. However, at some stage, the agent would have provided the saleyard operator with their agent code, as this is not publicly available.

Transfer of livestock to a destination PIC

Livestock must be transferred on the NLIS database from an agent code within two days. This is one of the most important conditions for use of an agent code because of the risk that the traceability of livestock will be lost. The longer livestock remain on an agent code the harder it will be for an agent to keep track of them and know where they have gone. Lifetime traceability status may be lost for livestock that are on an agent code for more than two days.

The livestock cannot be transferred between agent codes - they must be transferred to a property PIC. If the livestock are moved to a holding paddock or some other temporary location while still in the possession of an agent, then the livestock should be transferred to this location's PIC on the database. This may be a commercial requirement of abattoirs and feedlots. Subsequent movements must be recorded on the database, such as movements to other properties.

Although agents have up to two days to transfer livestock on the NLIS database from an agent code, it is best practice for an agent to transfer livestock as soon as possible after the destination is known and before livestock are consigned.

If an agent has genuinely attempted to determine the correct property of destination for livestock but is unsuccessful, they may request the livestock be removed from their agent code to 'Inactive status' by contacting the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD). This should only be used rarely (not for expediency) to remove historic holdings or where an insolvable error has occurred.

Records

An agent must keep records of the current location of all livestock in their possession together with NLIS ID or RFID numbers. These records must be kept for at least two years and made available to an authorised officer on request. This is to facilitate tracing and locating livestock if required, and for auditing compliance with the conditions of use of agent codes. The records may be in the form of notes or day books, National Vendor Declaration (NVD), invoices, business software, or other office systems that the agent typically uses.

Property Identification Codes (PIC)

If the PIC for the property of destination is not known, the relevant Local Land Services (LLS) office can assist. The NLIS PIC Register is available to agents with an NLIS database account at <https://www.nlis.com.au/>.

If an agent receives or consigns livestock from or to a property that does not have a PIC (e.g., a property that historically had not grazed livestock), the agent must request that the owner or person in charge of the livestock or the property apply for a PIC through their LLS office. The *Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017* requires that all land that runs livestock (one or more livestock) must have a PIC, and all owners of livestock must ensure that the land their livestock are kept on, has a PIC. Agents should check with their client that they have a PIC before any livestock is purchased for that client.

Other requirements

If agents find that they have any stolen livestock on their agent code, they must promptly report this information to the police.

If any livestock loses its permanent identifier device while assigned to an agent code, the agent must attach an 'emergency' (post-breeder) identifier before the livestock can be moved again. NLIS breeder identifiers cannot be obtained with an agent code. Only emergency identifiers issued by LLS with the district code printed on it may be attached to unidentified livestock that are assigned to an agent code.

Application for an agent code

Who can apply?

The *Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017* defines a stock and station agent as a person licensed as a stock and station agent under the Property, Stock and Business Agents Act 2002 or under a similar law of another State or Territory. This licensing function is performed by the Office of Fair Trading (and only a person who holds a current stock and station agent licence) may be issued with an agent code.

The licensee-in-charge of a stock and station agency should apply on behalf of their agency. Other licensed agents in that agency may also apply for their own agent code. An agent who holds a certificate of registration as a stock and station salesperson cannot apply for an agent code but may use an agent code issued to and under the supervision of a licensed stock and station agent.

Responsibilities

An agent who is issued with an agent code is responsible and liable for the actions of any other agent (whether licensed or the holder of a certificate of registration), employee, contractor, associate, or other person who uses their code to transfer livestock on the NLIS database. Only persons authorised by the agent to operate their NLIS account will be allowed to transfer livestock to and from their agent code.

Other persons who regularly buy livestock in saleyards (such as commissioned buyers and dealers) must either provide the saleyard operator with the PIC of the destination property before the livestock leave the saleyard or form a commercial arrangement with a licensed stock and station agent who accepts responsibility for the use of their agent code.

How to apply?

An agent should apply to the LLS office for the district in which their business is licensed with the Office of Fair Trading. An agent may apply to different LLS if they conduct the bulk of their business in that LLS district, in which case the District Registrar should check with their counterpart in the other district before issuing an agent code. An application fee may be payable, which is specified by the LLS.

An agent code may be used in other LLS districts and in other States (unless otherwise determined by that State's legislation). An agent should not apply for or be issued with more than one agent code in NSW.

An agent code is permanently assigned to the same person (unless cancelled) and the agent should continue to use the same code even if they move to another LLS district.

Assigning an agent code

Local Land Services (LLS)

A valid application for an agent code is one which is correctly and fully completed and signed and is accompanied by the correct fee.

On receipt of a valid application, the LLS District Registrar:

- checks whether the agent has been already assigned with an agent code using FARMS or NLIS database, and
- confirms that the agent is licensed and works in the district from local knowledge, or by checking the applicant's licence details on the Service NSW website: [Verify.licence \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/verify-licence)

Once satisfied the agent is bona fide and predominantly works in the district, the Registrar:

- assigns the next agent code in sequence that has been issued to their district; and
- records the information in the District PIC Register (FARMS database) as for a PIC; and
- advises the applicant in writing the agent code that has been assigned to them and
- advises the NLIS PIC Register as soon as possible (this will occur via the daily auto PIC uploads to the MLA server).

The LLS District Registrar is responsible for ensuring agent code information in the FARMS database is kept up to date.

Agent code format

An agent code has a similar format to a PIC, comprising two letters and six numbers.

The first character is N (NSW), the second character is a check letter generated by a computer algorithm, the third and fourth characters are 00 (double zero), the fifth and sixth characters are the original Rural Lands Protection (RLP) district number, and the seventh and eighth characters are numbers for individual agents from 01 to 99.

This format readily distinguishes agent codes from PICs while still identifying the former RLP districts in which they are assigned. It provides for up to 99 agents in each district.

Renewing an agent code

A renewal fee may be payable and is specified by LLS. The renewal interval is currently three years from the date the code was first assigned or the most recent renewal.

An agent should notify the issuing LLS if there are any changes to their address or contact details to ensure that renewal notices are received. The LLS is not responsible for tracking down agents who have changed jobs or relocated, especially to another district.

On receipt of a valid renewal, the District Registrar checks whether any livestock currently assigned to the code have been on the NLIS database for more than two days, and if so,

- the applicant must be advised that the code cannot be renewed and will not be renewed on the renewal date, and
- as soon as the agent advises that all livestock have been 'cleared off' the code and this is confirmed with the NLIS database, their application will be progressed.

If there are no overdue livestock on the agent code, the District Registrar,

- advises the applicant in writing that their agent code has been renewed, and
- advises the District PIC Register only if some details (e.g., postal address) have changed.

If an application for renewal has not been received within 28 days of the renewal date or is returned undelivered to the address last advised by the agent, the code is made inactive or cancelled.

Compliance and performance monitoring

Monthly and Quarterly monitoring

Compliance with conditions of use of an agent code is monitored by NSW DPIRD Animal Traceability Team (Traceability Team) monthly and quarterly.

Agents with overdue livestock on their agent codes at the end of each month (this is based on NLIS reports run monthly) are sent an automated email advising details of livestock 'sitting' on their agent code for more than two days and asking that these be moved to their destination PIC immediately.

Agents may also be contacted by the Traceability Team on an ad hoc basis to remind them how, or to assist them in doing the correct NLIS transfers if there are persistently high numbers of overdue livestock on their agent code.

All agents with codes are sent a quarterly letter advising of their NLIS performance for the quarter. Other details are also included so agents can see where NLIS compliance can be improved.

An agent must make any records and other relevant information available to an authorised officer on request at any reasonable time. The *Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017* provides for a number of offences for the misuse of an agent code.

The following sections describe agents' key performance areas, how to interpret the data provided, and corrective action that should be taken to continuously improve performance.

Overall NLIS performance score and rank

The overall performance score (percentage) and rank measures how well each agent is complying with the NLIS compared with other NSW agents.

The performance score is calculated as an average of four performance measures detailed below, namely Devices and Mobs transferred on and off an agent code, Timeliness of transfers from agent code to a destination PIC, Traceable 'To PIC' (Destination PIC), and Current Holdings (livestock transferred to and currently sitting on an agent code).

A performance score of more than 95% is satisfactory. A score of equal to and between 90% and 95% indicates that improvement is required. Less than 90% means that the Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017 is not being complied with, and prompt corrective action is essential.

Total devices and mobs transferred on and off an agent code

This shows the total number of livestock transferred to and from an agent code during the quarter. Agents should compare these numbers obtained from the NLIS database with their own records.

Livestock are transferred to an agent code by saleyard operators; however, it is an agent's responsibility to move livestock off their agent code. Any disparity is the difference between the number of livestock moved on and off the agent code. A negative number means more livestock have been transferred off than onto an agent code, resulting in a performance score of 100%. A positive number means not all livestock have been transferred off an agent code. This needs to be resolved.

Timeliness of transfers from agent code to destination PIC

This shows the number of livestock transferred to the destination PIC within two days required by the Regulation, and after two days (non-compliance).

Traceable to PICs

This measures whether an active and valid PIC for the properties that the livestock were transferred to (destination PIC) from the agent code, has been uploaded. District codes must not be used as a destination PIC, nor 8As (AAAAA) or other agent codes.

Current Holdings

This measures the number of livestock transferred to and currently sitting on an agent code. Livestock on the agent code were transferred more than two days ago, resulting in a low compliance score that needs to be resolved.

Transfer of livestock off an agent code

Agents must regularly check for movements of livestock onto their agent code.

The NLIS database reports must be used to check what electronic individual identification devices and mobs (visually identified sheep and goats until 1 January 2027) are on an agent code:

- View my current holdings (agent) - for electronically identified livestock
- View my current holdings - mobs (under View/generate all reports) or mob-based movement off agent PIC (for visually identified sheep and goats)

The NLIS database functions used to transfer devices and mobs off an agent code are:

- Livestock moved from my current holdings for electronically identified livestock
- Mob-based movement off agent PIC - visually identified sheep and goats.

Once in the 'Mob based movement off agent PIC' report leave all the parameters as they are and click on 'Continue'. A list of sheep mobs on the agent PIC will be displayed. To see further details, click on Mob details and further lists will be displayed.

The NLIS functions agents **must not use** when conducting movements of livestock off an agent code:

- Livestock moved (non-written authority) – for electronically identified livestock. This function must only be used to record livestock movements for someone else's properties when their PICs are not linked to the Agents' NLIS database account.
- Livestock moved off my property – for electronically identified livestock. This function must only be used to record livestock movements from a (property) PIC (not an agent code) which is linked to the Agents' NLIS database account.

- Mob-based movement (non-written authority) – sheep/goats until 1 January 2027. This function must only be used to record sheep or goat movements for someone else’s properties when their PICs are not linked to the Agents’ NLIS database account.
- Mob-based movement off PIC – sheep/goats until 1 January 2027). This function must only be used to record sheep or goat movements from a (property) PIC (not an agent code) linked to a database agent account.

Do you need an agent code?

Agents should consider whether it is necessary to continue operating an agent code, especially if complying with the *Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017* is difficult or the use of the agent code is minimal. Contact the Traceability Team to cancel a code that won’t be used in the future; LLS will perform this.

If an agent’s compliance with the *Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017* is continually poor, compliance action may be taken by DPIRD Compliance staff, and it is possible that the agent will receive a warning letter and/or a penalty notice if non-compliance continues.

In time, it is envisaged the use of agent codes will be phased out in NSW.

More information

- NSW DPIRD Traceability Team Phone 1300 720 405 or email: livestock.traceability@dpird.nsw.gov.au
- NLIS database see: [NLIS | Australia's system for identification and traceability of livestock](#)
- Local Land Services: 1300 795 299 or see [Home - Local Land Services \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)