

NLIS: Guidelines for managing an agent code

How to manage an agent code

Animal Biosecurity unit, NSW DPI

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Figure 1

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

Figure 2: Sheep sales. Photo © Integrity Systems Company Ltd

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Preamble

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 permanent identifiers, movement documents and database records.

The NLIS database holds information on cattle, sheep, goats and pig movements from birth to slaughter, to protect and enhance Australia's reputation as a producer of animal products that are 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 National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) whenever cattle, sheep and goats are sold by public auction in NSW and are transferred to an agent code. These requirements are prescribed under the Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017 (NLIS Regulation).

In summary:

- agent codes may be used to temporarily assign livestock if agents buy stock on behalf of a number of clients and do not know at the point of sale the Property Identification Code (PIC) of the properties the stock will be sent to, and
- livestock must be transferred off an agent code within 2 days.

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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 2 days.

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

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

While the stock is assigned to an agent code, traceability is provided by the agent's own records. To ensure that the stock is not in limbo for too long, they must be transferred off the agent code within 2 days.

The NLIS Regulation 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 carries on 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 stock in their possession together with cattle 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.
- Cattle, sheep, and goats must be transferred on the NLIS database from an agent code within 2 days.
- Normal permanent identifiers (NLIS breeder devices or visual tags) cannot be obtained with an agent code.
- Stock cannot be transferred from an agent code to another agent code.

Conditions of use of an agent code

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

An agent who is 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 message daily to each agent about overdue stock which has been on the agent code for more than 2 days. To comply with the required 2 days for the transfer of stock, agents are obliged to monitor overdue stock 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 stock listed on their agent code (note: agents that don't act upon these reminders may be subject to penalties).

A stock agent who has just purchased or taken temporary possession of stock 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 stock may be

temporarily transferred to the agent code by the saleyard operator then transferred by the agent to the destination PIC within 2 days from the date of sale.

The saleyard operator may transfer stock to the selling agent's code if neither the agent nor the buyer has provided the saleyard operator with the PIC for the property of destination by the end of the sale. This arrangement is sanctioned by the industry's own code of practice and provided for under the NLIS Regulation if the selling agent is deemed to still be in possession of the stock. 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 their agent code, as this is not publicly available.

Transfer of stock to a destination PIC

Cattle, sheep, and goats must be transferred on the NLIS database from an agent code within 2 days. This is one of the most important conditions for use of an agent code because of the risk that the traceability of stock will be lost. The longer stock remains 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 cattle that are on an agent code for more than 2 days.

The stock cannot be transferred between agent codes - they must be transferred to a property PIC. If the stock is moved to a holding paddock or some other temporary location while still in the possession of an agent, then the stock 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 2 days to transfer stock on the NLIS database from an agent code, it is best practice for an agent to transfer stock 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 stock but is unsuccessful, they may request the stock be removed from their agent code to 'Inactive status' by contacting the NSW Department of Primary Industries. 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 stock in their possession together with cattle NLIS ID or RFID numbers. These records must be kept for at least 2 years and made available to an authorised officer on request. This is to facilitate tracing and locating stock if required, and for auditing compliance with the conditions of use of agent codes. The records may be in the form of note or day books, NVD, invoices, business software, or other office systems that the agent normally uses.

Property Identification Codes

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 and a NSW agent code at <https://www.nlis.com.au/>

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

Other requirements

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

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

Application for an agent code

Who can apply?

The NLIS Regulation defines a stock and station agent as a person who is 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 if they wish. 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 stock on the NLIS database. Only persons authorised by the agent to operate their NLIS account will be allowed to transfer stock to and from their agent code.

Other persons who regularly buy stock in saleyards (such as commissioned buyers and dealers) must either provide the saleyard operator with the PIC of the destination property before the stock 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 carry on 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

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.verify.licence.nsw.gov.au)

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 of 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 allows agent codes to be readily distinguished from PICs while still identifying the former RLP districts in which they are assigned and 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 3 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 stock currently assigned to the code have been on the NLIS database for more than 2 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 is no overdue stock 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 DPI 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 2 days and asking that these be moved to their destination PIC immediately.

Agents may also be contacted by DPI on an adhoc 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 NLIS Regulation 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 three 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, and Traceable 'To PIC' (Destination PIC).

A performance score of 95% or more is satisfactory. A score of between 75% and 95% indicates that improvement is required. Less than 75% means that the NLIS Regulation 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 cattle and combined number of sheep and goats 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 2 days, and after 2 days.

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 (AAAAAAA) or other agent codes.

Transfer of stock off an agent code

To monitor use, agents must regularly check for movements of livestock onto their agent code.

The NLIS database reports which may be used to check what devices (cattle) and mobs (sheep and goats) are on an agent code are:

- View my current holdings (agent) (for cattle)
- Mob-based movement off agent PIC (for sheep and goats)

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

- Livestock moved from my current holdings - Cattle
- Mob-based movement off agent PIC - 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*** in relation to movements of stock off an agent code:

- *Livestock moved (non-written authority) - Cattle*. This function must only be used to record cattle movements for someone else’s properties when their PICs are not linked to the Agents’ NLIS database account.
- *Livestock moved off my property – Cattle*. This function must only be used to record cattle 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*. This function must only be used to record sheep or goats’ 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*. This function must only be used to record sheep or goats’ movements from a (property) PIC (not an agent code) which is 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 NLIS is difficult or use of the agent code is minimal. Contact DPI to cancel a code that won’t be used in the future and this will be performed by LLS.

If an agent’s compliance with the NLIS is continually poor, compliance action may be taken by DPI 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 Department of Primary Industries: 1300 720 405 or email nlis.enquiries@dpi.nsw.gov.au

NLIS database see: [NLIS | Australia's system for identification and traceability of livestock](#)

Local Land Services: 1300795 299 or see [Home - Local Land Services \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)



Figure 2