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Proposed Code of Welfare Entrenches Cruelty and Undermines Animal Welfare Law

The proposed Code of Welfare for Sheep and Beef Cattle, currently open for public consultation, represents a profound failure of New Zealand's animal welfare system. Rather than lifting standards or upholding the Animal Welfare Act 1999, this code would entrench practices that cause widespread suffering—including painful procedures without pain relief, intensive confinement in mud farms and feedlots, and a diluted shelter standard that puts animals' lives at risk in extreme weather.

SAFE rejects the premise that this code provides meaningful guidance for compliance with the Animal Welfare Act. It does not. Instead, it offers legal cover to inherently harmful farming systems and practices that cause serious and avoidable suffering.

For that reason, SAFE will not be participating in the consultation process for a code that attempts to sanitise cruelty.

When animals are confined on mud farms, concrete, or barren feedlots, they are stripped of their most basic expressions of life—grazing, playing, resting comfortably, ruminating, and relating to one another. These are not abstract ideals, but the everyday needs of sheep and cattle.

Codes of welfare are intended to support our animal welfare legislation—not undermine it. If this code is adopted, it will set a dangerous precedent: where cruelty is legitimised, public expectations are ignored, and the intent of the Animal Welfare Act is effectively nullified.

This failure is not isolated. In 2023, the Regulations Review Committee recommended a prompt and substantive review of how secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act is developed—and whether existing instruments, particularly codes of welfare, are consistent with the purpose and intent of the Act. Almost two years have passed without action. It must now be prioritised to ensure that regulation genuinely reflects the law and protects the animals it exists to serve.

SAFE is calling for the proposed Code of Welfare for Sheep and Beef Cattle to be scrapped. The code must be rewritten in full alignment with the Animal Welfare Act—not shaped to prioritise profit, productivity, or convenience over animals' wellbeing and legal rights.

We urge the Government and the public to reject this code and demand a future where animal welfare law is not just symbolic but lived. It's time to build a system that reflects what the Animal Welfare Act already affirms: that animals are not merely commodities to be managed, but sentient beings with needs, feelings, experiences, and intrinsic worth.