

AUSTRALIA'S SYSTEM OF IDENTIFYING AND TRACKING CATTLE (NLIS) – A PRODUCER PERSPECTIVE

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Australia is a relatively small beef producing nation, and yet it is a major world beef trader. Some 65% of Australia's beef production is exported.

As a consequence, Australia places great importance on its reputation as a reliable supplier of clean, safe product.

Australia's official cattle identification system began in the 1970s with the registration of properties, and the use of fire branding, tail tagging and paper based records to track cattle for disease control purposes. By the early 1990s, the limitations of these arrangements became apparent during incidents when large numbers of cattle had to be traced quickly.

In 1996 a decision was made between the Government and industry that Australia needed a "whole of life" identification and tracking scheme, based on the use of machine readable devices.

The National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) was developed, and then mandated across Australia from 2002 by all State Governments. NLIS involves the individual electronic identification of cattle, and the recording of all their movements through a single database operated by the producer-controlled Meat and Livestock Australia.

NLIS is now used routinely by Government agencies for disease control, food safety and market access purposes.

Apart from these obvious advantages in tracing, the individual RFID technology has also provided opportunities for efficiency gains and information flow along the supply chain from producer to meat processor.

New uses for the technology on-farm have been developed, and these will continue, giving rise to new and innovative management techniques.

The NLIS has been introduced successfully throughout Australia as a result of the partnership and sound working relationship that exists between industry and Governments.

Key words: Cattle traceability – Electronic tagging – RFID.
