

The National Livestock Identification System -Cattle (NLIS)



Legislation has been introduced to underpin the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) in Tasmania. The NLIS is Australia's system for the identification and tracing of livestock. It is a permanent, whole of life identification system that enables individual animals to be tracked from property of birth to slaughter for food safety, product integrity and market access purposes.

Cattle within the System are uniquely identified with an NLIS approved device, either an ear tag or rumen bolus/ear tag combination. Each device contains a microchip enabling the device to be read electronically by readers installed at saleyards, abattoirs or on-farm.

Once cattle are read, data containing details of the property of origin and property of residence is transferred to the NLIS database, creating a traceable record of where animals have been.

The implementation of the NLIS (Cattle) for all cattle producers in Tasmania is being phased in over a 3 year period beginning with calves born from 1 July 2004. The implementation timetable for Tasmania is as follows:

- All calves born from **1 July 2004** must be NLIS identified before they leave their property of birth.*
- From **1 July 2005** all cattle leaving a property must be NLIS identified and all saleyards and processors are to scan and transfer NLIS numbers.**
- From **1 July 2006** all cattle movements are to be recorded on the NLIS database. This will mean that property to property transfers will have to be done.
- **Bobby calves consigned for slaughter** will be exempt from the System and continue to use the bobby calf ear tags.
- **** Mature bulls consigned to an abattoir for slaughter** will be exempt until 1 July 2008.

Frequently Asked Questions

This section provides answers to some of the frequently asked questions about the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

Why is it being introduced?

The NLIS is being introduced to satisfy consumer demand for clean healthy beef and to gain a competitive advantage in domestic and international markets.

Enhanced identifications and tracing systems are needed to provide whole-of-life traceability to maintain consumer confidence in the safety and integrity of meat and to underpin domestic and international trade in livestock and livestock products. This is especially important in the face of increasing global concern about BSE ('Mad Cow Disease'), where whole-of-life traceability is essential for locating all cattle related to the BSE case.

Do I have to participate in the National Livestock Identification System for cattle?

Yes, participation is mandatory, NLIS for cattle will be progressively introduced to Tasmania from 1 July 2004.

What do I have to do to comply with the NLIS rules, and when?

- For the "phase in" year to 30 June 2005, cattle born from 1 July 2004 will have to be identified before they leave their property of birth.
- From 1 July 2005, all cattle, irrespective of age, will have to be identified before they leave any property.
- From 1 July 2005, saleyards will be required to notify the NLIS database of all cattle being sold. Abattoirs will be required to notify the database of all cattle slaughtered.
- From 1 January 2006, all movements of cattle between properties must be notified to the NLIS database.

Bobby calves and mature bulls consigned to slaughter are exempt from these requirements.

What are my participation options?

Producers have several options available to them in preparation for the introduction of the NLIS

Option 1: In its simplest form, NLIS only requires participants to identify cattle with an approved NLIS tag or rumen bolus/tag combination. Participants wishing only to identify cattle with NLIS devices do not need a reader, computer nor do they need to interact with the NLIS database. A third party, the producer's agent, saleyard or processor can do this.

Option 2: Using NLIS as an on-farm management tool

NLIS technology, when used as an on-farm management tool, can deliver a range of time saving and data accuracy benefits due to automated electronic data recording.

Using individual animal identification and the right software, accurate records may be efficiently created. Examples include treatments, weighing cattle, withholding periods, movement, purchases and sales.

In addition to identifying cattle with an NLIS device, there are a range available that assist participants in getting the most out of the technology.

Option 3: Using NLIS to its full potential

NLIS offers the ability to link individual animal performance data to carcass feedback provided by processors. Participants have the option to view or download carcass feedback from the NLIS Database. The combination of this information can help fine tune customer specification compliance, which can ultimately increase herd value. Carcass feedback will become available once Tasmanian abattoirs install NLIS compliant systems.

In addition to identifying cattle with an NLIS device and choosing from a range of equipment options, participants will need to interact with the NLIS Database. The national database is designed to record changes in residence of cattle during their lifetime against the NLIS identifier number.

When buying cattle that already have an NLIS identifier, do I remove that identifier and replace it with my own identifier?

No! Do not remove an existing NLIS identifier.

It is an offence to remove an existing NLIS identifier.

What is a PIC?

A PIC is a unique eight-character number assigned by the Department of Primary Industries Water and Environment to a property or number of properties with livestock. Your PIC is the same as your tail tag number, and if you already have a tail tag number, you don't have to apply for a PIC.

I do not have a PIC. Do I require one?

Yes. To apply for a PIC you will need to contact the Registrar of Brands (see contact details) or an application form can be downloaded. You will be required to provide the property identification number that is located on your rates notice and information on previous owners that may have ran cattle on that property.

I have more than one property. Can I amalgamate my properties under one PIC?

A 'property' is defined as one or more parcels of land in proximity that are worked as a single property. A number of properties can be amalgamated under the one PIC and this can be done by contacting the Registrar of Brands (see contact details).

If I own two properties, am I required to put identifiers on stock and record movements on the database between these properties?

Yes (from 1 July 2006), if the properties have different property identification codes (PICs)

No, if the properties have the same PIC.

I lease/rent or run cattle on agistment. Will I need to identify my cattle?

Yes, you will need to NLIS identify all calves born from July 1 2004 and all cattle will be required to be identified from July 2005 before moving to or from agistment. The NLIS device must have the PIC for the land on which the cattle where grazing at the time they are identified.

You will need to obtain NLIS devices from the land owner, or obtain their permission to order devices with their PIC. Where the properties are leased it is possible to add these to your current PIC with approval from the land owner by contacting the Registrar of Brands.

Which devices are NLIS identifiers?

Approved devices have the NLIS logo printed on them. It is illegal to use an unapproved device. Currently there is a total of four approved types of ear devices and rumen boluses.

Are there different identification devices for different cattle?

Yes. There are two types and colours.

- *White breeder devices are used on cattle born on that property
- *Orange post-breeder devices are used on unidentified cattle brought from another property.



Both types are available as either ear devices or rumen boluses.

How do I obtain NLIS identification devices?

If you wish to purchase Leader or Allflex NLIS tags, you may obtain an application form from a livestock or rural merchandising agent. Most agents will be able to supply these forms. You should return the completed form to your agent, who will then forward it to the Registrar of Brands for approval. If the application is in order, the Registrar will endorse it and forward an order on to the suppliers. Your agent will invoice you for any tags you order.

Animalife NLIS tags can be purchased by using order forms available from the Registrar of Brands (see contact details).

Who is responsible for notifying the database of movements?

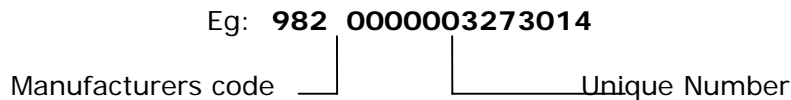
From 1 July 2005, the saleyard or agent is required to notify the database if cattle are sold through a saleyard. If cattle are slaughtered at an abattoir, the abattoir must notify the database.

From 1 July 2006 if cattle are moved directly between properties for any purpose, the owner or person in charge of the cattle at the destination property must notify the database, if this is not already occurring.

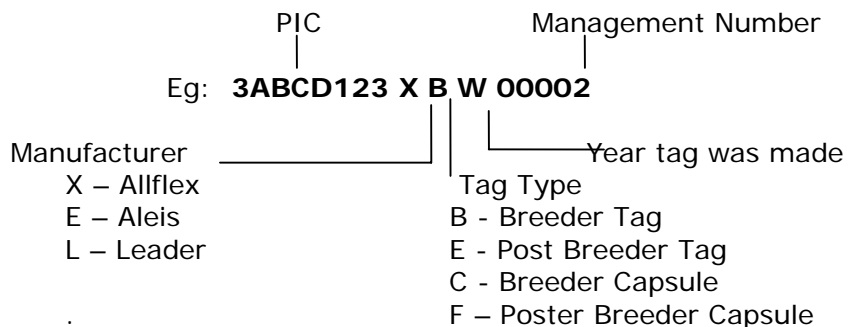
What does the NLIS number mean?

An approved NLIS device has two numbers:

- *RFID (Radio frequency identification device) number – an electronic number within the microchip. This electronic number includes a code for the manufacturer and a unique number for that device.



- *NLIS number – a visual number printed on the ear device or, for a rumen bolus, on the matching management tag.



Do I need a reader?

This is optional; you don't have to have a reader. If you purchase stock only through saleyards, you are unlikely to ever need to use a reader.

From 1 January 2006, it will be mandatory for the national NLIS database to be notified after cattle are brought on to a property. Where cattle are bought through saleyards, the saleyard will do this.

If you buy cattle privately, move cattle between your own properties (with different PICs) or move cattle to or from agistment, then you will have to notify the database of the movement yourself, or arrange for someone else to do it for you. This can be done by visually reading and reporting the NLIS number printed on each ear device, or by keeping a list of NLIS or microchip (RFID) numbers for each mob of cattle.



Readers are available for loan from the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, and will become available through the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment. Some stock agents also have readers available for their clients use.

Purchasing a reader may make it easier, and will provide other benefits for your herd recording and management.

What are the on-farm benefits of the NLIS?

1. Carcase Feedback

Carcase feedback is one of the major benefits of adopting NLIS. In the past carcase feedback has often been difficult to obtain or can be limited to whole cattle lot reports. The NLIS offers producers the ability to link individual animals to carcase feedback through the NLIS database.

Carcase feedback can be used to modify management practices. This may help a cattle producer supply livestock that better meet the market specifications.

2. NLIS Tags for on-farm identification and management

Each NLIS tag is printed with a unique number called the NLIS number.

The following is an example of an NLIS number that might appear on an NLIS Breeder Tag issued for use on a Tasmanian Property – **3ABCD123 X B W 00002**. The serial number in this instance is '00002'. Serial numbers on NLIS Tags can be used for on-farm record keeping and stock identification purposes and can be specified by the producer when ordering NLIS Tags. This gives producers the opportunity to maintain the numbering they already use for herd identification.

Beef producers have the option of placing a large management tag in the left ear of their cattle, printed with a number matching the serial number on the NLIS Tag they have used. The NLIS Tag can then act as a back up if the management tag is lost.

Producers can attach NLIS Tags to the cattle that they breed at any time before they leave their property of birth. Convenient times to attach an NLIS Tag on beef properties are at marking or weaning. Producers who identify their calves at a young age get the benefit of the NLIS Tag as an on-farm management tool until the cattle are sold.

3. Accurate identification

NLIS Tags contain microchips that can be read electronically in a fraction of a second by producers who have a suitable reader. Importantly, with electronic reading, transcription errors can be eliminated.

Hand held readers are available from \$900. Panel readers start at around \$1750 and can have a read distance of over one metre and can be used to automatically read the NLIS Tags on cattle moving along a race. Both hand held and panel readers can be linked to modern scale heads to allow accurate identification and weighing of stock.

NLIS technology can be used on beef properties for the maintenance of herd and pedigree records, to better utilise carcase feedback information down-loaded from the NLIS database, and when used in conjunction with a suitable scale, to accurately and quickly identify and weigh cattle.

4. Using NLIS identification to maximise market value and access

International markets

A number of important beef importing countries are moving to introduce a requirement that local producers permanently identify their cattle and register all movements on their respective national databases. It is likely that these countries will impose a level of traceability on imported beef equivalent to the lifetime traceability being demanded for locally produced beef. In 1999, the European Union (EU) became the first significant market for Australia to impose a 'lifetime traceable' requirement.

Domestic Markets

There is an emerging market preference for NLIS identified cattle, reflected as a discount in terms of the relative value of non-NLIS identified animals. It doesn't matter whether cattle are being sought for domestic or export processing, for fattening or as breeding or milking stock.

If you were a buyer of store or prime cattle and had the option of purchasing one of the following pens of cattle, all identical in specification and number, which would you choose?

- *Pen One* – Cattle that only have tail tag identification allowing reliable trace back to the vendor's property until the tail tags fall off, or
- *Pen Two* – cattle that have been identified with NLIS devices and where every ownership change has been registered on the NLIS database enabling full and accurate trace back, if required, through to the property of birth.

Lost and Stolen Cattle

Once cattle are NLIS identified, a link is established between the tagged animal and the producer's property. This assists in ensuring that stray cattle are promptly returned, and deters livestock thieves.

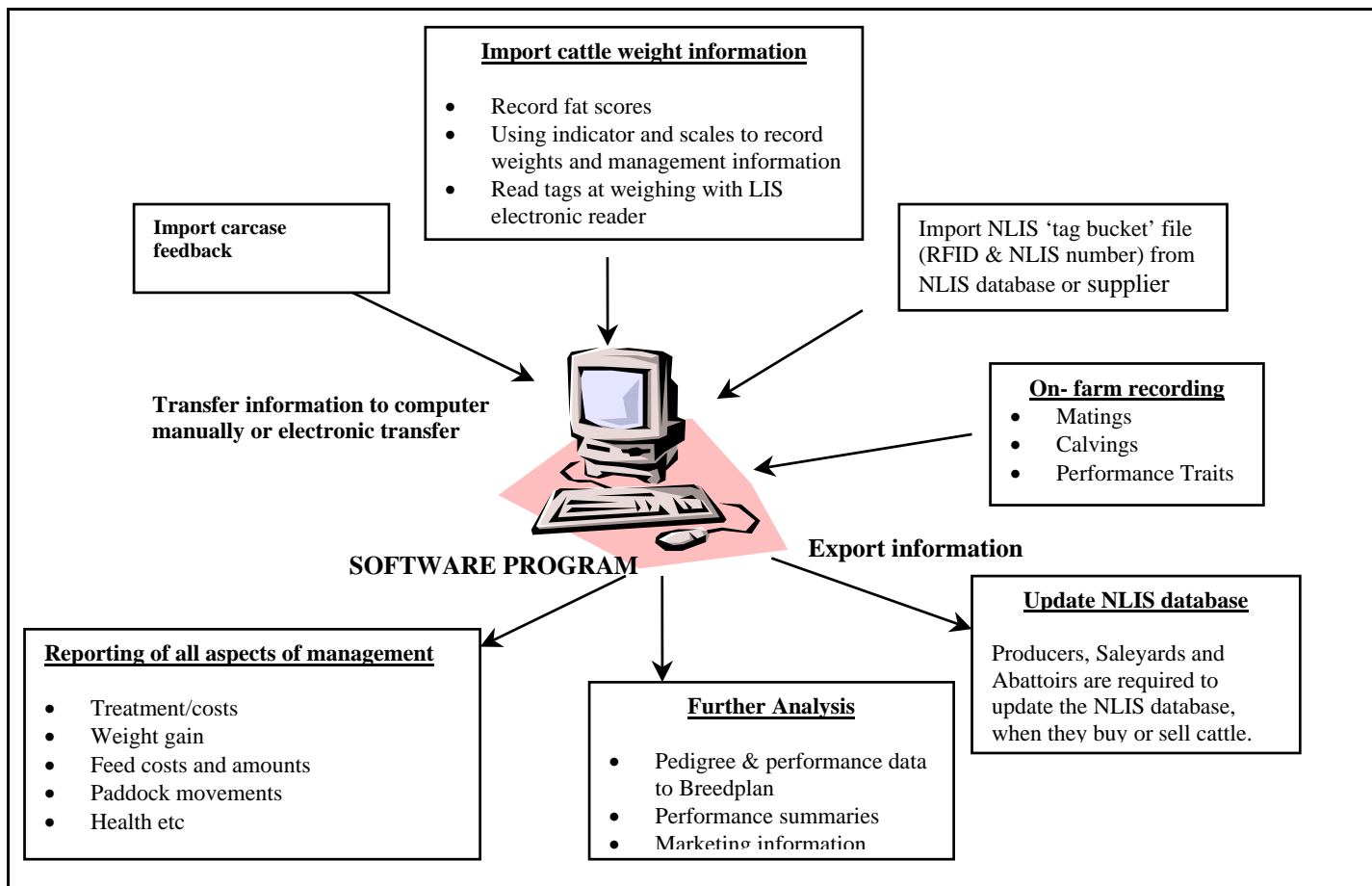
If an NLIS identified animal is lost, the owner is able to report this to the NLIS Database who will assign a 'lost status' to the cattle. If the cattle are subsequently scanned at a saleyard or abattoir, the NLIS database will generate a report and the person who requested that the cattle be registered as 'lost' will be advised.

If a producer believes that NLIS identified cattle have been stolen, they should report the incident to the police, including relevant NLIS Tag numbers.

If a 'stolen status' animal is scanned at an abattoir that is routinely scanning NLIS identified cattle, the message 'Stolen cattle - hold carcass' will be displayed on the abattoir computer. This is designed to alert the abattoir that the animal should not be slaughtered, or if slaughtered, that the carcass should be held and the police alerted. If a 'stolen status' animal is scanned at a saleyard, the NLIS database administrator will be alerted when the saleyard registers the transaction and the relevant State/Territory authorities will be notified.

5. On-farm management

The following diagram illustrates the various ways that software and the NLIS technology can be used for on-farm management.



Further Information

Contact: Registrar of Brands

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Registrar of Brands
13 St Johns Avenue
NEW TOWN TAS 7008
Phone: 03 6233 6885 or 1300 368 550
Fax: 03 6233 3843
Email: Brian.Koerbin@dpiwe.tas.gov.au

Contact: NLIS Technical Officer

Kiowa Fenner
NLIS – Technical Officer
167 Westbury Road
PROSPECT TAS 7249
Phone: 03 6336 5254 or 0428 361 111
Fax: 03 6344 9814
Email: Kiowa.Fenner@dpiwe.tas.gov.au

NLIS Helpdesk

Meat & Livestock Australia Limited
Locked Bag 991
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059
Phone: 1800 654 743
Email: nlis.support@mla.com.au
Website: www.mla.com.au

Additional Resources

To obtain your FREE NLIS publications you may either [download an order form](#) and fax to (02) 9463 9136, email your request nlis.support@mfa.com.au or download here (you will require [Acrobat Reader](#) to open these):

- What is the NLIS for cattle?
- How do I participate?
- A guide to using NLIS approved ear tags and rumen boluses
- NLIS – a guide for producers
- NLIS equipment compatibility guide for producers