

## **Schools Animal Ethics Committee Operating Procedure**

### **STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR SMALL SCALE POULTRY HOUSING IN SCHOOLS**

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been developed by the Schools Animal Ethics Committee (SAEC) to promote best practice in all schools when determining housing conditions, practices and procedures that will support optimal health and wellbeing for their poultry.

The first action for schools considering housing chickens is to check with the local council. Local governments often have restrictions on the number of chickens allowed to be kept, how close a chicken enclosure can be located to other buildings, type of flooring and other construction requirements. The design and structure of the chicken enclosure must comply with local government regulations.

When housing chickens, schools should have an enclosure that meets the following requirements:

- access to adequate shade, shelter, food and water;
- ability to clean;
- protection from predators;
- security, including after-hours; and
- sufficient area for behavioural and social requirements.

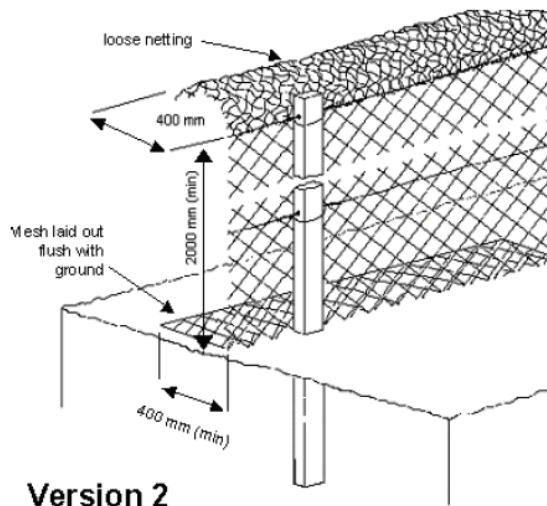
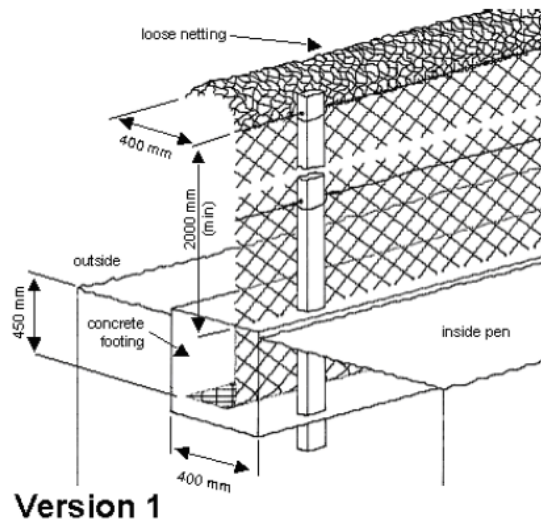
#### **Chicken housing**

Poultry of all types require housing that will protect them from the wind and rain as well as extreme heat and the effects of rapid changes in temperature. The chicken housing should encompass:

1. a chicken run that provides room for the chickens to roam but is covered in wire mesh and is secure from predators; and
2. a smaller, solid enclosure that incorporates the nesting boxes, is dry at all times and provides good ventilation while being free from draughts.

The SAEC advises that a school chicken enclosure and chicken run should comply with the following recommendations:

- The smaller, solid enclosure should have a floor made of concrete, a solid roof and a door that can be secured by a lock. The enclosure must be well ventilated but there should be no gaps that would allow vermin or predators to enter. The concrete floor should be covered in litter material such as straw or wood shavings to absorb dampness. The use of a deep litter method, layered with diatomaceous earth and turned over regularly is recommended.
- The chicken run should be entirely covered in heavy gauge wire mesh (25 to 50mm mesh) with solid cladding around the base of the enclosure up to a height of approximately 750mm.
- The floor of the chicken run should have measures to prevent foxes or other predators from digging under the walls of the run. Alternatives include having the lower sections of the walls covered in sheet iron that is extended 450mm into the ground, burying the bottom of the fence in a concrete footing as shown in Version 1 or running a skirt out along the ground as shown in Version 2.
- Gates should be lockable and have concrete slabs underneath to prevent predators digging under the gate.



Extract from: The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: *Wild dog facts: Poultry Fencing*.

### **Discouraging vandalism**

Occasionally, acts of vandalism and animal cruelty can occur and chickens are easy targets particularly out of school hours, on weekends and during holidays. The following recommendations may help to discourage vandals:

- Where-ever possible the chicken enclosure should be located within a fenced off area so that there is a second fence to discourage predators and vandals.
- Enclosures should not be located close to, or be visible from public roads.
- If possible chickens should be locked into their solid enclosure at night, providing that they will be able to be released into the chicken run again the next morning.
- Rosters for week-end and holiday care should be put in place to ensure that someone checks on the chickens every day. Rosters should include a method to check whether the rostered person turned up.
- Foster chickens out over long holidays.
- Locate the animals' enclosure within an area that is subject to after-hours monitoring. For example, some schools may have CCTV monitoring, security surveillance or motion sensor lighting designed to send an alert in certain

circumstances. Where this is not feasible, an imitation CCTV camera and signage may also deter criminal activity.

Any cases of animal cruelty must be reported immediately to WA Police or RSPCA WA (1300 278 3589) and signage to this effect may serve as an added deterrent.

Schools located in communities where vandalism is a serious issue or schools that are unable to ensure adequate security measures are in place should delay the decision to get chickens until the situation improves.

### **Feeding Chickens**

To combat the introduction and spread of exotic animal diseases there is a legal requirement that no animal matter, or other waste contaminated by animal matter, is allowed to be used as feed.

- Students should not be permitted to feed the chickens scraps from their own lunches.
- While it is okay to feed poultry with vegetable matter from the kitchen garden (where there is no risk of its being contaminated by animal matter) it must never be substituted for the birds' normal diet.
- Commercially prepared feed should be used as it supplies the correct balance of protein, vitamins and minerals necessary for the birds' health and maximum production.
- Poultry feeds are available from produce merchants in mash, crumbles or pellet form. Adding grain or bread to these diets is not recommended because it dilutes the daily amount of vitamins and minerals the bird receives.
- To help your fowls grind their food and digest it more efficiently, they should have an insoluble grit to pick at all the time. Shellgrit type supplements also help the hen build stronger egg shells.

### **Procedures**

It is recommended that schools have the following procedures in place:

- record keeping (when the chickens are checked, fed etc);
- procedures and rosters for week-ends and holiday care;
- health checks, veterinary procedures such as vaccinations and procedures in the event of disease;
- procedures for rodent control; and
- procedures in the event of an emergency eg. a fire or break-in.

### **Conclusion**

Where schools choose to keep poultry on site, the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* imposes a duty to ensure the health and welfare of the chickens in terms of their daily care, physical environment and access to veterinary services. In addition, every reasonable effort must be made to protect them from predators and persecution by people. To maximise the opportunities and educational benefits for students, schools should aim to teach and demonstrate best practice in the care of animals at all times.

### More information

Further information regarding the requirements of the Schools Animal Ethics Committee is available on the website:

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/animalethics/detcms/portal/>

The Department of Agriculture and Food WA:

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/livestock-biosecurity/keeping-backyard-chickens?page=0%2C0>

Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes 8<sup>th</sup> edition 2013: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/ea28>

### Acknowledgements

The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: *Wild dog facts: Poultry Fencing*: [https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/67107/IPA-Wild-Dog-Fact-Sheet-Poultry-Fencing.pdf](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/67107/IPA-Wild-Dog-Fact-Sheet-Poultry-Fencing.pdf)

The New South Wales Department of Primary Industry:

[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/195402/small-scale-poultry-housing-layers.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/195402/small-scale-poultry-housing-layers.pdf)

### Example poultry shed plan

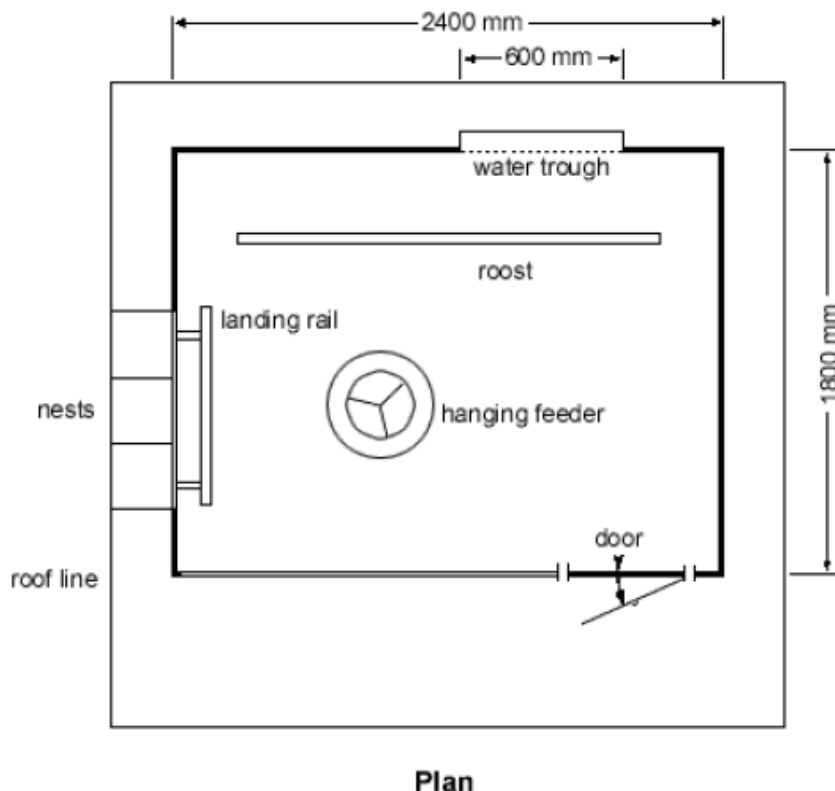


Figure 1. Small poultry shed plan

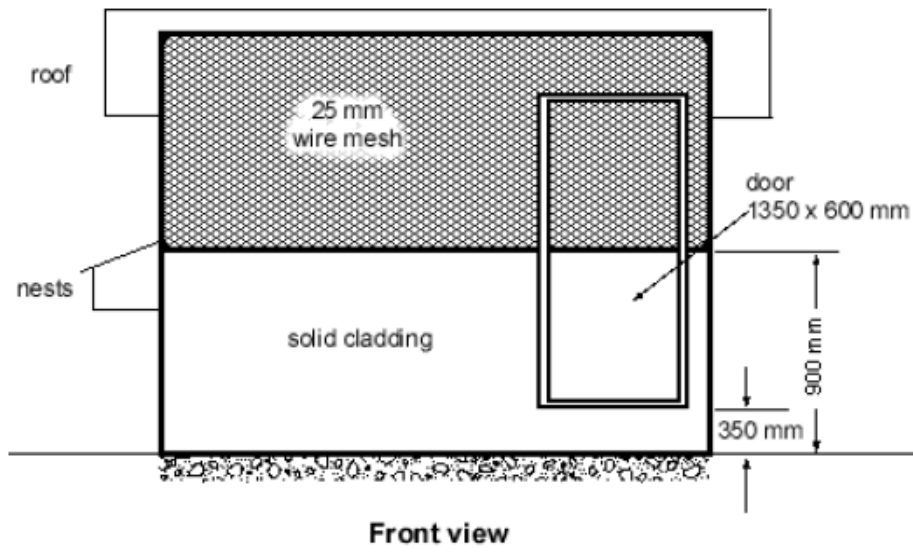


Figure 2. Small poultry shed – front view

Extract from: *Small-Scale Poultry Keeping – Housing Layers*, Primefact 603, November 2007, New South Wales, Department of Primary Industries