NLIS cattle: getting started for cattle producers

Alison McIntosh

NLIS Project Officer, Extensive Livestock Industries Development, Goulburn

The National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) is Australia's identification and traceability system for cattle. It is a permanent, whole-of-life system that allows cattle to be identified and tracked from birth to slaughter.

Cattle are identified with a machine-readable NLIS-approved electronic device – either breeder or post-breeder. Records of cattle movements are maintained on a central NLIS database, to provide complete traceability. Cattle producers can obtain direct access to the NLIS database to report the movements of their cattle.

The NLIS database is currently administered by Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA).

As a cattle producer getting started, there are a few things to consider.

Property Identification Code (PIC)

A property on which cattle are held must be identified with a property identification code (PIC). This code enables the property owner to purchase identification devices, identify the property for movement recording and enrol in industry quality assurance programs.

PICs are issued by your local Rural Lands Protection Board (RLPB). They are a fundamental part of the NLIS.

NLIS cattle identification devices

You will require a PIC to purchase NLIS devices. The PIC code is printed on the outside of the NLIS device, and must only be applied to cattle on that property.

You may order NLIS devices through either your Rural Lands Protection Board or a rural merchandiser.

There are two different types of NLIS devices approved for cattle:

1. ear device – applied as a tag to the right (offside) ear of the animal;

2. rumen bolus – inserted into the rumen/ reticulum of the animal. This device also comes with a corresponding management ear tag, applied to the right ear of the animal, which indicates it as a bolus identified animal.

NLIS devices are manufactured in two colours, which signify where the animal was born. The colours are:

1. white – referred to as 'breeder devices', and applied to animals that are born on the property (note: white devices can be used to replace lost devices for cattle born on the same property)

2. orange – referred to as 'post-breeder devices', and applied to animals not born on the property (note: orange devices can be used to replace lost or damaged devices for cattle introduced to a property).

If your property does not have a PIC or you require emergency supply of NLIS devices, you may contact your district RLPB to obtain a special identifier.
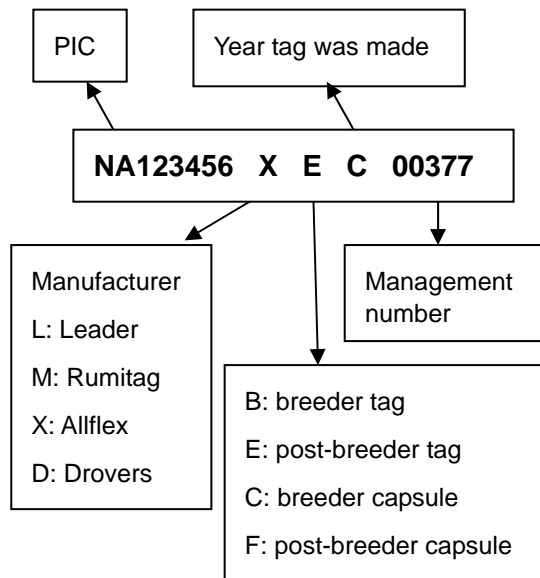
NLIS numbering system

NLIS cattle devices are individually referenced, both with an NLIS identification (visual) and a radio frequency identification (electronic) number.

NLIS (visual) ID

This number is printed on the outside of the NLIS device – either the ear tag or bolus management tag. The number sequence is as follows:

```
   ┌──────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
   │ PIC  │      │ Year tag was made│
   └──────┘      └──────────────────┘
       ↖               ↖
   ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
   │   NA123456  X  E  C  00377       │
   └─────────────────────────────────┘
      ↙            ↓            ↘
```

Manufacturer

L: Leader

M: Rumitag

X: Allflex

D: Drovers

Management number

B: breeder tag

E: post-breeder tag

C: breeder capsule

F: post-breeder capsule

Electronic or RFID

This is the number encoded on a microchip inside the NLIS device. It is a globally unique, random number that can only be read by an NLIS scanner. This number is formatted in the following sequence:

```
   ┌───────────────────┐
   │  982  000003273014 │
   └───────────────────┘
       ↙            ↘
```

Manufacturer's code:

951 = Leader

964 = Rumitag

982 = Allflex

900 = Drovers

Device number

Although there are two distinct numbers for NLIS devices (visual or RFID), the system links these numbers on the NLIS database, and either may be used to report cattle movements.

Do I need to know my NLIS device numbers?

Producers are required to ensure that all cattle are NLIS-identified prior to leaving a property, and that any movements between properties are reported to the NLIS database. Devices are registered to a PIC when manufactured. Producers can access a list of registered devices by obtaining an NLIS 'producer' type account.

Below are some examples of producer situations and their NLIS obligations.

- Cattle trader – a person who buys and sells cattle through a saleyard. A trader needs to ensure that animals are identified prior to trucking, and that the saleyard will manage the NLIS database transfers.
- Producer moving cattle between properties with different PICs. There are two options:
    1. If the properties are under the same management, consider amalgamation under a single PIC. Contact your RLPB to discuss this. Cattle movements between properties with the same PIC do not have to be reported.
    2. Movements between different PICs require reporting to the NLIS database.

Who is responsible for notifying the NLIS database of cattle movements?

The cattle owner or person in charge of the cattle is responsible for reporting cattle movements to the NLIS database. Transaction points (such as saleyards, abattoirs and feedlots) are required to notify these specific movements. As a purchaser of stock (privately or via a stock agent), you are responsible for reporting the cattle movements to the NLIS database. Check with your supplier beforehand.

A producer may also communicate with the NLIS database where:

- cattle are traded privately
- cattle are moved on agistment
- cattle are managed under a lease arrangement
- cattle are moved to or from a travelling stock route.

What is the time requirement for reporting cattle movements to the NLIS database?

In NSW, notification of 'property to property' cattle movements is required within 7 days. Be aware that under state-based regulations the reporting time may vary. Check with the relevant agency in that state. This is important if you are moving cattle interstate.
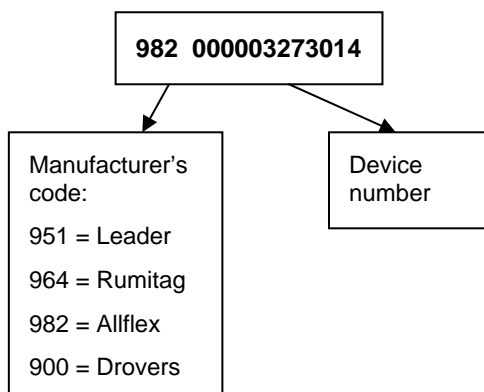
Quality assurance programs and vendor declarations

The Livestock Production Assurance® (LPA) scheme, which is responsible for cattle national vendor declarations (NVD), is distinct from NLIS.

NVD form numbers may be included in the records of a transaction on the NLIS database. LPA focuses on a declaration of the chemical residue status and husbandry of animals and the keeping of associated records.

Cattle producers are required to complete an NVD when selling cattle through a saleyard or to an abattoir. NVDs are essential for meat processors.

Further information

For further information on NLIS rules and regulations, phone the NSW Department of Primary Industries NLIS Hotline on 1300 720 405, or visit the website at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/nlis.

For assistance in using the NLIS database, phone NLIS Support at Meat and Livestock Australia on 1800 654 743, or visit the website at www.nlis.mla.com.au.

To order or obtain national vendor declaration forms, phone Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) on 1800 683 111.
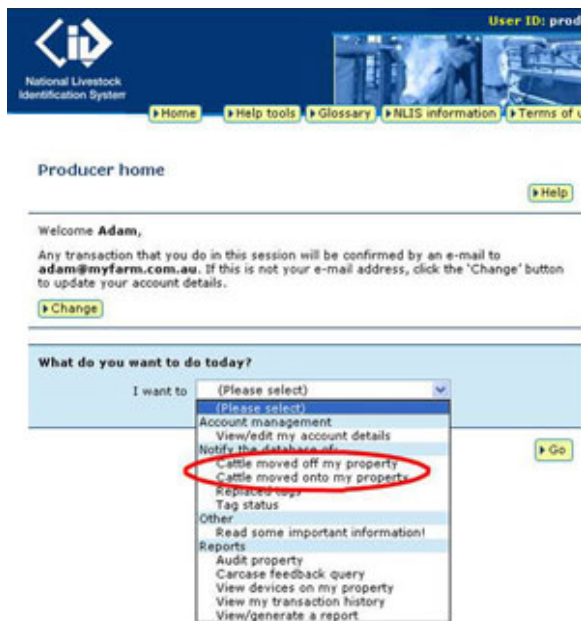

Figure 1. NLIS database home page

Figure 2. Rumen boluses and corresponding ear tags

Figure 3. Ear device

Figure 4. 'Breeder' tag (left) and 'post-breeder' tag

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (November 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Job number 8144