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Australiaâ??s Cattle Slaughter Rises 4.7% as Sheep and Lamb Processing Declines

25 November 2026 | News

During the Julyâ??September 2026 quarter, Australia slaughtered 2.49 million adult cattle, 4.93 million lambs and 1.34 million sheep



Australia’s cattle slaughter increased 4.7 per cent year-on-year during the first nine months of 2026, while lamb and sheep slaughter declined amid tightening supplies and rising carcase weights, according to the latest livestock products data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

During the July–September 2026 quarter, Australia slaughtered 2.49 million adult cattle, 4.93 million lambs and 1.34 million sheep. Average carcase weights increased across all three categories compared with the corresponding period last year, supporting meat production despite lower slaughter numbers in the sheep and lamb segments.

Beef production reaches record September-quarter level

Adult cattle slaughter reached 2.49 million head during the September quarter, up 0.6 per cent year-on-year, although 1.2 per cent lower than the June quarter.

Steer, bullock and bull slaughter increased 4.5 per cent to 1.21 million head, marking the highest quarterly total since March 1979. In contrast, cow and heifer slaughter declined 2.8 per cent to 1.28 million head.

The female slaughter rate fell to 51.2 per cent, compared with 55 per cent in the June quarter. Queensland accounted for 45.9 per cent of Australia's adult cattle slaughter, with 1.14 million head, representing a 6.3 per cent increase year-on-year.

Average adult cattle carcase weight rose 1.4 per cent to 311 kg, contributing to a 2.1 per cent increase in beef production compared with the September quarter of 2025.

For January–September 2026, cattle slaughter reached 7.31 million head, the third-highest total for the period in the ABS series. Beef production increased 6 per cent to 2.29 million tonnes, the highest January–September output recorded in the

series.

Lamb slaughter declines as carcase weights increase

Lamb slaughter declined 5.1 per cent year-on-year to 4.93 million head in the September quarter, representing a 6.7 per cent decrease from the June quarter.

However, average lamb carcase weight increased 6.8 per cent to 25.9 kg, supporting meat production of 127,791 tonnes, up 1.3 per cent from the corresponding quarter last year.

Victoria and New South Wales accounted for more than three-quarters of the national lamb slaughter, with 2.63 million and 1.23 million head, respectively. Both states recorded declines of more than 7 per cent year-on-year, while slaughter increased 5.6 per cent in Western Australia and 17.6 per cent in Tasmania.

During the first nine months of 2026, lamb slaughter fell 14.7 per cent to 16.05 million head, while lamb meat production declined 8.9 per cent to 419,354 tonnes.

Sheep slaughter falls 33.3 per cent

Sheep slaughter declined 33.3 per cent year-on-year during the September quarter, marking the third-lowest September-quarter result in the ABS series and the sixth consecutive quarter of annual decline.

New South Wales recorded a 45 per cent decline in slaughter to 407,900 head, while Victoria and Western Australia each reported decreases of 28.7 per cent. Tasmania was an exception, recording an 18.6 per cent increase.

Mutton production fell 27.1 per cent to 38,132 tonnes, the lowest September-quarter output since 2021. However, average sheep carcase weight increased 9.2 per cent to 28.5 kg, the highest level in the series.

For January–September 2026, sheep slaughter declined 37.3 per cent to 4.72 million head, while mutton production decreased 33.7 per cent to 124,060 tonnes.

The latest figures highlight contrasting supply trends across Australia's livestock sector. While cattle slaughter and beef production remain relatively strong, lower sheep and lamb processing volumes indicate tightening supplies. Higher average carcase weights across all three categories have partly offset the impact of declining slaughter numbers on overall meat production.