

# COUNTING THE COST OF WORK-RELATED INJURIES AND DISEASES IN POULTRY FARMING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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This article describes the extent of, and trends in, work-related injuries and diseases in poultry farming in NSW, using new major claims data from the Workers' Compensation Scheme over a nine-year period (1991–1992 to 1999–2000) for the analysis. Poultry farming, which includes industries that produce poultry for meat and poultry for eggs, was the fifth largest rural industry in NSW in 1999–2000, employing about 3700 workers or three per cent of the total workforce in the rural industry sector.<sup>1</sup> New major claims are claims where the result of injury was death, permanent disability, or temporary disability with five or more days being paid for total incapacity, and which have been entered into the insurer's database in the relevant year.

## BACKGROUND

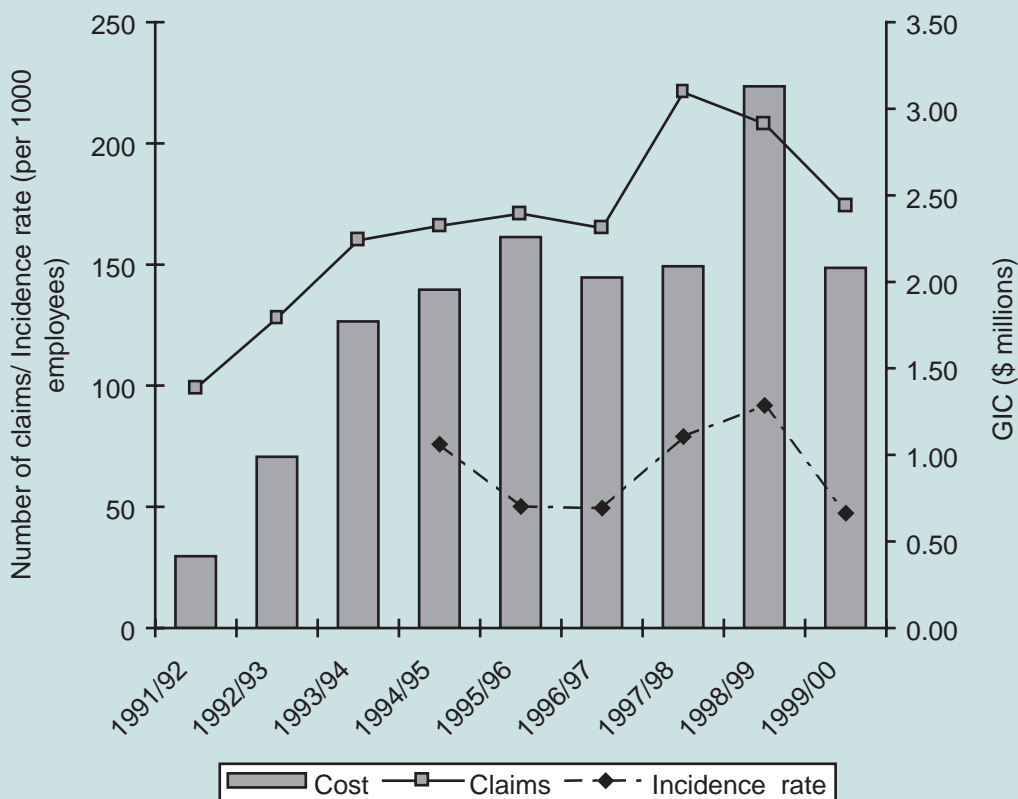
Unlike other rural industries, a large proportion (96.5 per cent) of the poultry farming workforce are employees who are covered by the Workers' Compensation Scheme. This presents an opportunity to investigate the full range and extent of occupational health and safety risks within the poultry farming industry, using the data available in the Workers' Compensation database. For the purpose of this analysis, selected data fields were extracted for the period 1991–1992 to 1999–2000. The data represent new major claims for work-related injuries and diseases; and include the number, severity, nature, and mechanisms of injury–disease, as well as costs.

## Extent and severity of injury–disease

From an occupational health and safety perspective, poultry farming is a high-risk industry. In 1999–2000, it ranked second among rural industries, with an incidence

**FIGURE 1**

**NUMBER OF CLAIMS, INCIDENCE RATE, AND GROSS INCURRED COST, NSW, 1991–1992 TO 1999–2000**



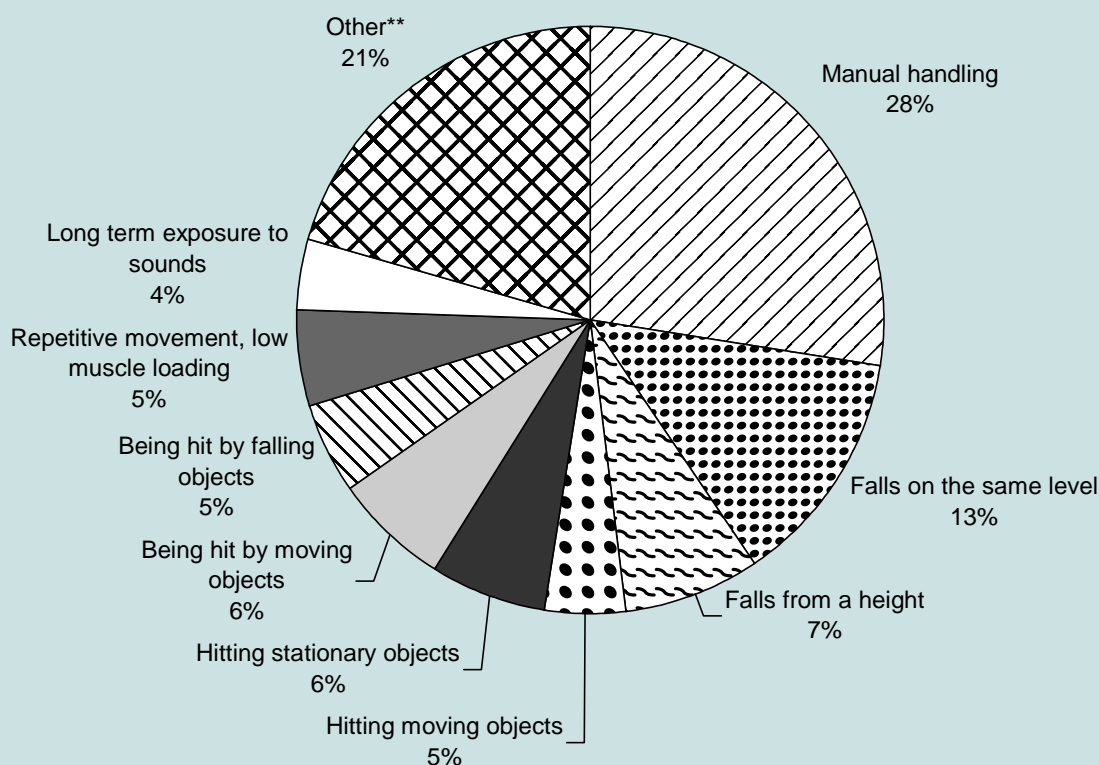
**TABLE 1**

**SEVERITY OF INJURY–DISEASE IN POULTRY FARMING EMPLOYEES, NSW, 1999–2000**

Severity	Number of claims	% of total claims	Gross incurred cost (\$)		
			Total	% of total	Median
Permanent disability	46	26.4	1,377,023	66.2	26,674
Temporary disability—six months or more off work	11	6.3	169,333	8.1	10,873
Temporary disability—less than six months off work	117	67.2	534,697	25.7	1,946
Total claims	174	100	2,081,053	100	3,471

**FIGURE 2**

**MECHANISMS OF INJURY–DISEASE IN POULTRY FARMING EMPLOYEES, NSW, 1999–2000**



\*\*Other includes 21 other mechanisms

rate of 47.4 claims per 1000 employees. This was slightly lower than the incidence rate for the highest risk industry, dairy farming (47.8 per 1000), but higher than the rural industry average (36.6 per 1000) and higher than the average for all industries in NSW (19.5 per 1000).<sup>2</sup> As shown in Figure 1, the number of claims increased from 99 in 1991–1992 to 221 in 1997–1998 and then declined to 174 in 1999–2000. The incidence rate, for which data are available from 1994–1995, increased from 50.2 per

1000 in 1995–1996 to a maximum of 91.8 in 1998–1999 but declined to 47.8 per 1000 in 1999–2000. Despite the high incidence rate, this declining trend in 1999–2000 suggests that, overall, poultry farming is becoming a safer workplace.

There were three fatalities reported in the nine years to 1999–2000. The distribution of claims by severity of injury–disease and their associated cost are typified by

the statistics for 1999–2000 (Table 1). The majority of the claims (67 per cent) were related to temporary disability with less than six months off work. Permanent disability, on the other hand accounted for 26 per cent of all claims. The data also revealed a nine-fold increase (from five to 46) in the number of claims for permanent disability in the past nine years.

#### **Cost of injury–disease**

During the period under review, the total Gross Incurred Cost (GIC) through workers' compensation claims increased from \$415,321 to \$2.1 million, with a peak of \$3.1 million in 1998–1999 (Figure 1). Gross Incurred Cost is the sum of payments plus an estimate of future liability if the claim is still open at the end of the relevant financial year. This peak coincided with an increase in the number of permanent disability claims, which accounted for 70 per cent of the total GIC. The median GIC also doubled from \$1,743 to \$3,471.

As shown in Table 1 permanent disabilities made up 26 per cent of all claims and accounted for 66 per cent of the total cost. Temporary disability with less than six months off work, on the other hand, made up 67 per cent of the claims but only 26 per cent of the cost. These statistics reflect the general pattern of the severity and costs of injury–disease within the entire rural industry sector.

#### **PROFILE OF INJURY–DISEASE**

Manual handling was the leading mechanism of injury–disease in poultry farming (Figure 2). As a percentage of the industry total, manual handling claims showed a

steady increase from 28 per cent in 1991–1992 to a maximum of 41 per cent in 1995–1996, before declining to 28 per cent in 1999–2000. The key agency associated with manual handling injuries–diseases was fastening, packing, and packaging equipment (38 per cent).

Most injured workers suffered from sprains and strains (53 per cent) affecting the upper limbs (37 per cent) and the upper or lower back (25 per cent).

The occupations most at risk of sustaining an injury or contracting a disease were Trades Assistants and Factory Hands (32 per cent) followed by Agricultural Labourers and Related Workers (24 per cent).

#### **CONCLUSION**

Work-related injuries and diseases are still a major concern in poultry farming in NSW, despite a notable reduction in the incidence rate and costs in the past year. The statistics revealed that the incidence rate remains higher than the average for all rural industries and for all industries combined. In addition, most of the cost is due to injuries–diseases resulting in permanent disabilities. The results of this analysis will be of interest to major stakeholders in the industry.

#### **REFERENCES**

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Labour Force, NSW and ACT, Quarterly Reports from September 1999 to June 2000*. Canberra: ABS, 1999 and 2000. Catalogue No. 6201.1
- 2 WorkCover NSW. *Statistical Bulletin 1999–2000 and Workers' Compensation Statistical Bulletin*. Sydney: WorkCover NSW, 2001.