



**AtOne AGRI**  
HR & Compliance Solutions

# SAFETY & RISK COMPLIANCE IN AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE:

What is the Minimum You  
Need to Do?

PART 1



# Safety & Risk Compliance In Australian Agriculture:

## What is the Minimum You Need to Do?

### What This Article Is About

The purpose of this briefing is to give **Agribusinesses** a clear, practical overview of the **minimum Work Health and Safety (WHS) obligations** that apply to your business, and the real exposure that exists when these obligations are not clearly defined, documented and actively managed.

Many agricultural businesses know safety is important, but are unsure:

- What they are legally required to have in place.
- What level of documentation and systems are considered “adequate”, and
- Where real exposure exists if an incident or inspection occurs.

This document explains what **minimum compliance** looks like in practice for an agribusiness and why structured systems matter.

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## Why WHS Compliance Matters in Agriculture

Under the **WHS Act**, agribusinesses have a **primary duty of care** to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of:

- Workers (employees and casuals).
- Contractors and labour hire workers.
- Visitors, suppliers and service providers.
- Anyone affected by the work your business undertakes.

In addition, **Business Owners, Directors and Senior Managers** have personal legal obligations (known as “due diligence”) to ensure you have appropriate safety systems in place and that those systems are being actively used and operating effectively.

Agriculture remains one of the highest-risk industries in Australia, and government regulators expect farm businesses to actively manage known risks rather than rely on experience or informal practices.

## Common WHS Risk Areas

In agribusinesses, WHS risks commonly arise from:

- Livestock handling and cattle yard activities.
- Tractors, headers, augers and other plant and machinery.
- Remote and isolated work.
- Fatigue during planting, harvest and mustering periods.
- Hot work and maintenance activities.
- Chemical handling (spraying, fuels, fertilisers).
- Contractors performing specialised farm work.
- Visitors and third-party access to the property.

These risks are inherent to farming. Compliance is about **how risks are controlled**, not whether they exist.

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## What Happens When an Incident Occurs

If a Workplace Health & Safety regulator attended your business following an incident or complaint, they would typically examine:

- Whether you have a WHS framework appropriate to your operations.
- Evidence that key hazards have been identified and assessed.
- Whether Safe Work Procedures exist and are used for high-risk tasks.
- Whether workers and contractors are trained and competent.
- How incidents and hazards are reported, investigated and controlled.
- Whether Owners and Managers are actively involved in WHS oversight.

The greatest exposure typically arises where risks are well known but **not formally managed or documented**.

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## WHS Penalties & Personal Exposure

Under WHS legislation, penalties can apply even where no injury occurs. Depending on the severity of the breach, consequences may include:

- **Very significant financial penalties** for the business (in the millions for serious breaches).
- **Personal fines and potential imprisonment** for owners and officers.
- Improvement Notices requiring urgent remedial action.
- Prohibition Notices stopping work immediately.
- Enforceable undertakings and ongoing regulatory oversight.

Importantly, WHS liability does not sit only with the business entity, Owners and Managers can be personally pursued where due diligence obligations are not met.

## What “Minimum WHS Compliance” Looks Like

To meet the minimum compliance safety standards you need to document, understand and actively apply the following elements:

### 1. WHS Governance

- A current WHS Policy manual endorsed by Owners and Senior Managers within the business.
- Clear allocation of safety responsibilities flushed through employment documentation.
- Evidence that Management review safety risks and reports.
- Evidence that Management consult with the workforce.
- High level Risk Assessments developed and reviewed.
- Risk Controls established and implemented into day-to-day activities.

### 2. Hazard Identification & Risk Management

Identification of hazards relevant to:

- Livestock management.
- Machinery operation.
- Travel and remote work.
- Fatigue and seasonal pressures.
- Chemical applications and usage.
- Both Physical and **Psychosocial** risk identification.

### 3. Safe Work Procedures (SWPs)

SWP's for high-risk activities, such as:

- Cattle handling and yard work.
- Machinery operation.
- Working alone and in isolation.
- Working at Heights.
- Confined spaces.
- Hot work and repairs.
- Chemical handling.
- Procedures that reflect actual work, not theory.

## 4. Training, Competency & Records

- Structured induction for all workers and contractors.
- Evidence of competency for machinery and high-risk tasks.
- Training records maintained centrally and accessible.

## 5. Contractor & Third-Party Safety

- Contractor safety expectations defined before work commences.
- Contractor onboarding includes verification of competency.
- Ongoing oversight during engagements.
- Controls for visitors and third-party access.

## 6. Incident & Hazard Management

- A clear process to report incidents and hazards.
- Investigation of incidents, near misses and corrective actions documented.
- Learnings fed back to workforce and then implemented into risk controls.

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## What Happens when these Systems are Missing

When WHS systems are informal or inconsistently applied, consequences often include:

- Enforcement notices requiring immediate changes to operations.
- Prohibition Notices stopping work.
- Investigation and prosecution after incidents.
- Increased insurance scrutiny or premium adjustments.
- Personal exposure for Owners, Directors and Managers.
- Escalation from “education” to enforcement after an incident.

In agriculture, regulators often find that incidents arise from **known risks that were not adequately controlled**, rather than unforeseeable hazards.

# Practical WHS Compliance Checklist

Use this checklist as a sense check:

## Governance

- WHS Policy tailored to agricultural work.
- Clear WHS responsibilities assigned to workforce.
- Regular WHS review at management and owner level.

## Risk Management

- Key hazards identified and Risk Assessed.
- Seasonal risks identified and addressed (fatigue, harvest, mustering etc.).
- Risk controls reviewed and implemented into daily work.

## Safe Work Procedures

- SWPs exist for machinery operation and high-risk farm tasks.
- Staff trained in SWPs.
- Procedures updated when work changes.

## Training & Records

- Induction processes documented for workers and contractors.
- Competency tracked for workers and contractors.
- WHS records stored and accessible.

## Incident Management

- Incidents and near misses reported.
- Investigations documented.
- Corrective actions tracked and implemented.

If items cannot be confidently ticked, they represent WHS exposure rather than minor gaps.

## This Article is Part of the Minimum Compliance Series

This article is one of a three-part **Minimum Compliance Series for Australian Agriculture**, designed to clearly explain the **baseline legal requirements** agribusinesses should meet.

Each article focuses on a specific area of regulatory risk where informal practices most commonly expose farms and agribusinesses to enforcement action:

- **WHS & Risk Compliance in Australian Agriculture.**
- **Wage Compliance in Australian Agriculture.**
- **Contractor Management Compliance in Australian Agriculture.**

The purpose of this series is not to promote unnecessary complexity. It is to help agribusiness operators understand **where the legal line sits**, and what regulators expect to see evidence of if that line is tested.

In an industry where practical realities often drive informal arrangements, **clarity, consistency and defensible records** are what separate compliant businesses from exposed ones.

### Final Thoughts

#### How AtOne AGRI Supports Farmers & Agribusinesses

AtOne AGRI supports farmers and agribusiness operators **by helping them meet minimum compliance requirements in a practical, agriculture focused way.** The emphasis is on visibility, consistency and defensible records, supporting agribusinesses to demonstrate compliance across Safety, Wages and Contractor Management without unnecessary complexity.

**That is where AtOne AGRI offers protection and peace of mind for Agribusiness Owners, Directors and Managers.**