



Falkland Islands Veterinary Department
Stanley, Falkland Islands

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Sheep

Contents

1. Food and Water
 - 1.1 Food
 - 1.2 Water
2. Protection from Climatic Extremes
3. Supervision
4. Handling Facilities
 - 4.1 General
 - 4.2 Handling and Restraint
5. Management Practices
 - 5.1 General
 - 5.2 Shearing
 - 5.3 Mating
 - 5.4 Lambing
 - 5.5 Orphan Lambs
6. Husbandry Procedures – Surgical
 - 6.1 General
 - 6.2 Castration
 - 6.3 Tail Docking
 - 6.4 Identification – Ear notching and tagging
 - 6.5 Horn Trimming
 - 6.6 Feet Trimming
7. Health
8. Euthanasia
 - 8.1 Culling for flock management, for home slaughter or for disease and injury
 - 8.2 Clubbing
9. Amendments

Under the **Animals (Welfare and Protection) Ordinance 2016 (section 55)** the following practical guidance for the welfare of sheep is issued:

1. Food and Water

1.1 Food

Sheep should have access to a diet which is nutritionally adequate to maintain health, including the physiological requirements for growth, pregnancy, lactation and to withstand cold exposure. They should not be deprived of food for periods in excess of 24 hours and **MUST** not be deprived of food for more than 48 hours.

In all systems of management, continual assessment should be made of the needs of the sheep in relation to the amount, quality and continuity of the food supply.

Management practices should ensure that sheep are unable to access toxic plants and other substances that are dangerous to their health.

1.2 Water

Under normal circumstances sheep should have *ad lib* access to drinking water in quantities sufficient to meet their needs. Water should be of a quality to maintain health and not contain levels of salts or toxic substances that adversely affect health. In all management systems, regular assessment should be made of the quality, quantity and accessibility of drinking water.

When yarded or housed inside for husbandry practices to occur, sheep should not be deprived of drinking water for a period of more than 24 hours (under normal climatic conditions), and no more than 12 hours in hot weather (apparent temperature more than 24°C). This is particularly important in lactating ewes and heavily woolled sheep.

Containers or mechanical equipment controlling the delivery of water should be maintained in good working order and be inspected regularly, and frequently in hot weather (apparent temperature more than 24°C) or when freezing conditions mean pipes or ponds may have frozen.

When sufficient good quality water cannot be provided, the sheep should be moved to other areas where an adequate supply is available.

2. Protection from Climatic Extremes

All reasonable precautions should be taken to minimise the effects of weather that produces cold stress in sheep. Farmers should listen to the local weather forecast and, in particular, the Sheep Chill Factor report before deciding to proceed with shearing, moving or other husbandry practices.

Confined sheep must not be allowed to remain in areas where they may suffer from heat stress (apparent temperature more than 24°C).

It is essential that adequate feed, water and shelter be available continuously, particularly in early-lambing flocks or freshly shorn sheep, and particularly when climatic extremes are expected.

3. Supervision

Owners and managers, including absentee owners and managers, should ensure that sheep are inspected with sufficient frequency to give reasonable confidence that they are in sound and healthy condition, and to allow timeous action if problems are evident.

The frequency and thoroughness of inspection should be related to the likelihood of risk to welfare of the sheep. Inspection frequency should be rationally determined after reasonable consideration of the density of stocking, availability of suitable feed, reliability of water supply, animal ages and pregnancy status, climatic conditions and management practices.

4. Handling Facilities

4.1 General

It is a requirement when owning sheep that there is access to appropriate facilities for handling and shearing them.

All troughs, sheds, holding pens, yards, ramps and other areas where sheep are handled should be constructed and maintained so as to minimise stress and injury to the animals. Sharp projections must be avoided.

Yard and shed designs should avoid poor lighting, narrow passages, sudden changes in floor level and awkward or 90 degree turns. Yard pens and races should be lamb proof.

Holding pens should be only populated in numbers that would allow all contained animals sufficient space to lie down, stand up, turn around, and manoeuvre to access water and feed sources.

4.2 Handling and Restraint

Sheep should be handled and moved quietly with the minimum of stress and physical contact. The use of sticks and dogs should be limited to the minimum necessary to complete the procedures. Electric goads should not be used. Dogs that bite should be effectively muzzled while working and restrained when not working

Restraint used on sheep should be the minimum necessary to efficiently carry out the required procedures. Using force to the extent of causing injury, breakage or dislocation is unacceptable. If drafting facilities are not available, sheep may be caught - but not pulled - by one leg. If carrying is necessary, sheep should not be lifted by the fleece.

Precautions should be taken to prevent smothering of closely confined sheep. Lambs and weaners are at particular risk.

5. Management Practices

5.1 General

Management procedures carried out on sheep should be performed by competent persons or under the direct supervision of an experienced operator. Where teams of workers are used for a function, management should ensure that adequate instruction is given so that individuals work effectively and with consideration for welfare issues.

Procedures and practices that cause pain should not be carried out if painless and practical methods of husbandry can be adopted to achieve the same management result.

Any injury or distress observed should be managed at the earliest opportunity. Management may involve procedural changes, treatment or euthanasia. If the stockperson is unsure of the best treatment then veterinary assistance should be sought promptly.

5.2 Shearing

All sheep should be shorn annually (from a maximum of 18 months of age).

Shearing is permitted from 15th September until 31st March.

Shearing using standard combs is permitted from 1st November to 28th February (29th February in a leap year).

Outside of these dates cover combs must be used.

The only exempted shearing permitted outside these periods will be of animals which are slaughtered off the shears. The slaughter should take place within 2 hours of shearing if the animals are not penned in a shelter, and in any case not later than 24 hours post shearing.

Any farm wishing to undertake normal shearing outside of these dates, including with the use of handshears, must first seek permission from the Veterinary Services, and provide information, in writing, about the reason for wanting to shear, the number of sheep to be shorn, and the dates on which shearing is planned. At least 15mm of fleece must be left on the animals after such shearing. The Veterinary Service must provide a written response in a timely manner.

Additional limited shearing actions such as crutching and wiggling are allowed throughout the year.

Heavily pregnant sheep (within 3 weeks of lambing) should not be shorn. If belly clipping is carried out to improve lamb access to the udders of milking ewes, this should happen before this time frame. Ewes with lambs at foot should not be shorn for 6 weeks post lambing.

Because shearing is stressful, managers should attempt to avoid undue handling and post-shearing exposure to adverse weather. Sheep should be returned to food and water as soon as possible after shearing, and certainly not spend longer than 24 hours without water, and preferably food as well.

Sheep should be handled sympathetically during shearing by a competent shearer. Owners and managers have a duty to make it clear to shearers that the use of excessive force is not permitted.

Where circumstances indicate, shearing cuts should be treated to prevent infection and fly strike.

5.3 Mating

Rams should be kept in a securely fenced area away from ewes, to prevent unseasonal or unplanned mating. Rams should only be introduced to female animals as part of a managed and defined breeding season. It is generally undesirable for lambs to be born any earlier than mid-September given climatic conditions and available pasture. Thus the earliest that fertile rams should be introduced to ewe flocks is mid-April.

Ewes should be mated only when they have reached a sufficient size and maturity (ideally more than 40kg, or older than 18 months).

Female sheep should not be mated to rams whose lambs are likely to be too large to be born without difficulty.

Artificial insemination procedures may only be carried out by a Veterinary Surgeon or a trained inseminator. Embryo transfer procedures may only be carried out by a Veterinary Surgeon.

5.4 Lambing

Lambing camps should have adequate shelter and sufficient quality and quantity of food to last the flock for the duration of lambing. Ewes going into this camp for lambing should be strong and healthy enough to be reasonably expected to lamb unassisted.

If these criteria are not able to be met beforehand, or if there are significant risk factors increasing the chances of lambing difficulty, then flocks of lambing ewes should be checked on a more frequent basis, preferably daily or more often. Lambing risks are increased by factors such as poor condition and health of ewes, inadequate nutritional levels available, ewes that have been mated to an oversized ram, ewes mated when immature or undersize, and double-fleeced ewes.

Ewes that are recognised to be having lambing-associated difficulties should receive immediate attention with treatment intervention or euthanasia as appropriate. The same applies to newborn lambs that are weak, malformed or otherwise compromised. If the stockperson is unsure of the appropriate intervention then veterinary assistance should be sought promptly.

5.5 Orphan Lambs

Lambs must have colostrum, ideally from their dam, within 12 hours of birth, and ideally within less than 6 hours. Weak lambs with very little chance of survival, or orphans that will not be cared for, should be destroyed humanely and not left to die. Artificially reared lambs should be given milk or milk substitute until they are at least six weeks old. Roughage should be introduced into their diet from one week of life as should a good quality concentrate mix. Water should be available *ad lib*. Shelter from harsh

environmental exposure should be provided. The earliest a hand-reared lamb can be considered independent enough to survive with a flock of animals in a free-range environment is from 12 weeks of age.

6. Husbandry Procedures - Surgical

6.1 General

Surgery is the invasive use of instruments on living bodies to carry out procedures intended to repair damage, address disease, or modify anatomy. Surgical procedures cause pain and stress, but this can be reduced through appropriate techniques, considerate restraint and competent operators. All surgical procedures must be carried out by a Veterinary Surgeon or under the direct supervision of a Veterinary Surgeon, apart from procedures listed below, with accepted techniques:

- Castration of sheep
- Tail docking
- Ear notching
- Ear tag application
- Surface wound or disease treatments
- Horn trimming
- Feet trimming

Strict attention should be paid to the suitability of the work area in which the procedure is to be performed, the catching facilities and the type and amount of restraint. Instruments should be adequately maintained and disinfected or sterilised prior to use. Proper hygiene should be practised and the animals given adequate aftercare with regard to drug therapy, shelter and activity.

6.1 Castration

Castration by knife, rubber ring or burdizzo is acceptable within age constraints. Castration without the use of local anaesthetic should be confined to animals less than fifteen weeks of age. However, animals undergoing castration under the age of fifteen weeks may also benefit from local anaesthetic or systemic pain relief medications.

For lambs from the age of 24 hours to ten weeks old, castration is permitted by rubber ring and/or burdizzo, or surgical castration where the tip of the scrotum is cut with a sharp knife and the testicles removed.

For lambs from the age of ten weeks to fifteen weeks old, castration may only be carried out using rubber ring and/or burdizzo methods.

Surgical castration techniques involving incision into the body, where necessary in animals over fifteen weeks of age, may only be carried out by a Veterinary Surgeon, who will use appropriate local anaesthetic and systemic analgesic techniques.

6.2 Tail Docking

Tail docking should be carried out as early as management practices allow, preferably before ten weeks of age. Animals of all ages undergoing tail docking procedures will benefit from local anaesthetic or systemic pain relief medications.

For lambs up to fifteen weeks of age, tails can be removed by the rubber ring, sharp cut or gas hot-iron methods. The gas hot-iron is the recommended method of tail docking.

For animals over 15 weeks of age these procedures may only be carried out with local anaesthetic, by a Veterinary Surgeon or by an operator who has undergone an effective veterinary training programme.

6.3 Identification – ear notching and tagging

Ear notching and tagging instruments should be sharp, with the cutting edges undamaged, so as to prevent tearing of the ear. Careful technique should be employed.

6.3 Horn Trimming

The horns of rams, and some wethers, may need to be cut back to avoid injury from an ingrowing horn. The amount of horn removed should be limited to avoid damage to soft tissue and associated bleeding. If bleeding does occur, this should be addressed with cautery or topical medications to reduce the likelihood of ongoing blood loss, infection or fly strike.

6.4 Feet Trimming

Sheep with poor hoof conformation, or habitually on soft ground, require regular foot paring to prevent overgrowth and deformation of the hoof.

7. Health

Animals that are recognised as being potentially sick, injured or diseased should be treated promptly and appropriately, or be humanely slaughtered. If the stockperson is unsure of the best course of action then veterinary advice should be sought.

8. Euthanasia

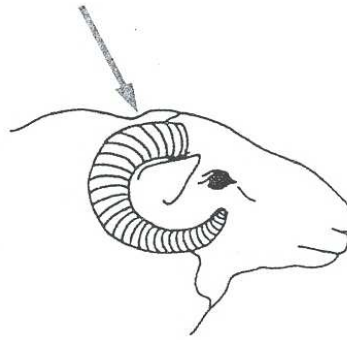
Euthanasia is the term for humane killing of an animal, where accepted techniques are used to rapidly end life in as pain- and stress-free a manner as possible.

8.1 Culling for flock management, for home slaughter or for disease and injury

The preferred method of euthanasia for controlling flock size, for slaughter for home consumption, or because an animal is diseased or injured, is shooting in the head using a free bullet or captive-bolt pistol, followed immediately by bleeding-out. The position of the shot is shown below:



Hornless sheep



Horned sheep and all goats

An animal stunned with a captive-bolt pistol must have bleeding-out commenced within 15 seconds after the stun. Blood lost must be rapid, profuse and complete. There are two effective methods:

- 1) Chest stick – the knife is inserted in the mid-line of the neck at the depression just in front of the breast bone. This will sever all blood vessels arising from the heart and is the preferred method.
- 2) Throat cut – the throat must be cut, near the head, from ear to ear so that both left and right carotid arteries and jugulars veins are severed.

The operator should take care to avoid injury to self or others from the animal's involuntary leg movements.

In certain conditions when a firearm is not readily available, exceptions to the recommended practices may be necessary. In such cases, adequate restraint with throat cutting is permissible when there is genuine concern for the animals' immediate welfare situation. The cut must be made with a sharp knife and cause the most rapid bleeding-out possible.

If bleeding-out methods are not carried out, for example in a mass cull situation with free bullet killing, then it is essential that a careful check is made to ensure that each animal is, in fact, dead. In any animal where there is any degree of uncertainty it should be shot again. Complete dilation of the pupils and the absence of regular breathing movements are useful indicators of death.

8.2 Clubbing

Lambs less than 1 month of age may be stunned by a strong blow from a heavy blunt instrument to the back of the head, to render them unconscious, followed immediately by bleeding-out.

9. Amendments

Date	Amendment
July 2022	ZF/PVR: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) reduced maximum age of castration and tail docking without pain relief to 15 weeks from 20 weeks (following consultation started in 2019)2) added in temperature of 24C beyond which sheep are at increased risk of heat stress3) added in max age before first shearing and recommended age for orphan lambs to be returned to flock4) Amended layout by adding contents page and streamlining content.