SHEEP

Code of practice for sheep in Western Australia

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PREFACE

The **Code of practice for sheep in Western Australia** is based on *The Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals-Sheep* and has been adapted for use in Western Australia. The original *Model Code* was prepared for the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management (SCARM) and endorsed by the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ) for use as a national code. It was prepared in consultation with the relevant industry organisations and state agencies.

This code has been prepared to assist all persons handling or using sheep in Western Australia, and reference to this code is made in Regulations provided under Section 25 of the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* for the purposes of a defence against cruelty. It is not intended to be used for either audit or compliance purposes.

This Western Australian version of the code is supported by the livestock industries and the Department of Agriculture. It is based on current knowledge and technology. It will be reviewed in the future on a needs basis, to take account of advances in the understanding of animal physiology and behaviour, technological changes in animal husbandry and their relationship to the welfare of animals.

For anyone using animals for scientific purposes, as defined in the Animal *Welfare Act 2002*, this code should be read and used in conjunction with the "scientific use code".

Further copies of this code are available from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development or from the internet at: http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au

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1. INTRODUCTION

This code should be read in conjunction with other relevant state codes of practice.

The code is intended as a guide for all people who handle and manage sheep. It aims to achieve humane husbandry throughout all types of sheep enterprise. Assistance and specific advice on management and disease control in sheep should be obtained from qualified advisers, whose services are available through government and private agencies.

Sheep are kept in situations which vary from extensive grazing to close confinement and housing. Whatever the form of husbandry, owners, agents, managers and handlers of sheep are responsible for the health and well-being of the animals under their control.

The importance of sound animal husbandry principles cannot be over emphasised as an essential ingredient to meet the welfare requirements of animals. This code outlines sound sheep husbandry practices, but is not prescriptive because good stockhandlers need to be flexible in their approach to caring for their animals.

The basic physiological and behavioural needs of sheep are considered. The recommendations in this code are appropriate to sheep under all production systems and their observance will help to ensure that the welfare of the stock is safeguarded.

Amongst the most important factors affecting welfare in a flock are the behaviour and attitude of the manager. Important skills of the competent manager include the ability to anticipate situations in which welfare may be at risk and to recognise early signs of distress or ill-health in animals, so that appropriate preventive or early remedial action may be taken.

The basic requirements for the welfare of sheep are:

(i) A level of nutrition adequate to sustain good health and vigour.
(ii) Access to sufficient water of suitable quality to meet physiological needs.
(iii) Social contact with other sheep; but with sufficient space to stand, to lie down and stretch their limbs.
(iv) Protection from predation.
(v) Protection from pain, injury and disease.
(vi) Protection from extremes of weather which may be life threatening.
(vii) Provision of reasonable precautions against the effects of natural disasters e.g. firebreaks and fodder storage.
(viii) Handling facilities which under normal usage do not cause injury and which minimise stress to the sheep.

2. FOOD AND WATER

2.1 Food

Sheep should have available a diet which is nutritionally adequate to maintain health and meet the appropriate physiological requirements for growth, pregnancy, lactation and to withstand cold exposure.

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 feed supply.

Sheep should be excluded, as far as possible, from toxic plants and other substances suspected of being deleterious to their health.

2.2 Water

Sheep should have access to water; regular assessment should be made of the quality and quantity of water supply. Watering points should be of sufficient capacity and allow safe access.

Mechanical equipment controlling the delivery of water (including windmills and bores) should be inspected regularly, and frequently in hot weather, and kept in good working order.

The quality of water provided should be adequate to maintain sheep health. Drinking water which contains potentially toxic levels of salts, or other deleterious substances, should be monitored and managed to minimise deleterious effects.

Where sufficient good quality water to maintain health cannot be provided, the sheep should be moved to other areas where an adequate supply is available. Alternatively, they should be sold or humanely slaughtered on site. As a guide, sheep should not be deprived of water for more than 48 hours. This period should be reduced in the event of hot weather.

3. DROUGHT

Drought is defined as a severe food and/or water shortage following prolonged periods of abnormally low rainfall. It is not a normal seasonal decline in the quantity and quality of food available.

Government policies for the relief of drought may not always be compatible with the welfare of the affected livestock; governments, and their advisers, should consider animal welfare as a major issue in their development of drought relief strategies.

Property strategies for drought management should be prepared well in advance and progressively implemented. Owners or managers with limited or no previous experience of drought management should seek advice from qualified advisers. Where drought feeding is the preferred option, it should be started before paddock feed runs out.

Sheep being fed for survival should be observed carefully at feeding times. Weak animals may require segregation for special treatment.

Sheep should not be allowed to starve to death. Where minimal water and food requirements cannot be met they should be agisted, sent for slaughter or humanely destroyed on the property. Drought affected sheep are highly susceptible to stress and require careful handling:

(i) if they are unable to rise and walk they should be humanely destroyed on site;

(ii) if they go down after limited exercise they are not fit to travel and should be humanely destroyed on the property;

(iii) if they are still able to walk they should be agisted or sent directly to the nearest abattoir. They should not be consigned through saleyards.

4. PROTECTION FROM CLIMATIC EXTREMES, NATURAL DISASTERS AND PREDATION

All reasonable precautions should be taken to minimise the effects of weather that produce either cold stress or heat stress in sheep. Freshly shorn sheep and newborn lambs are particularly susceptible. Windbreaks to reduce the effects of cold may be provided in the form of scrub or planted trees, long grass or artificial shelter.

Sheep should be attended to promptly in the event of fire, flood, injury or disease. Where predation is known to occur, reasonable precautions should be taken.

5. PROTECTION FROM DISEASE

Sick, injured or diseased sheep should be given prompt and appropriate treatment or humanely slaughtered. Advice should be sought from qualified advisers.

Appropriate preventative measures should be used for sheep for diseases that are common in a district or are likely to occur in a flock.

Medication, including vaccines, drenches and dips, should be administered in strict accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, or under veterinary supervision.

6. INTENSIVE SHEEP SYSTEMS

Feedlotting is a situation where sheep are kept in outdoor yards or housed in sheds and hand-fed for various purposes, including live export, meat lamb production or fine wool production.

The design, location and construction of a feedlot should take account of topography, climate, age and size of animal, space and feed requirements, and labour and management skills available. Adequate provision should be made for cleaning, drainage and waste disposal.

All sheep should have adequate access to feeding and watering facilities, which should be maintained in good repair and clean condition.

Special requirements for selection, health, environment, floor space and food and water are included in Appendix 1 "Special requirements in intensive sheep systems".

7. SHEEP HANDLING FACILITIES

Well designed sheep handling facilities, and the ease with which animals flow through them, have important implications for the welfare of the sheep. When new sheep yards are to be constructed, or existing yards modified, expert advice should be sought.

Sheds and yards should be constructed and maintained to minimise the risk of injury and disease.

Passageways, races, entrances and exits should be designed to take advantage of the behaviour patterns of sheep.

The floors of sheds and yards should have surfaces that minimise the risk of injury and disease and allow sheep to stand and walk normally.

Where sheep are held in yards for extended periods their requirements for food and water should be met.

8. SUPERVISION

Owners and managers, including absentee owners and managers, should ensure that sheep are inspected sufficiently often to maintain them in sound and healthy condition.

The frequency and thoroughness of inspection should be related to the likelihood of risk to the welfare of the sheep in relation to food, water, protection against natural disasters, predators and the likelihood of diseases, e.g. flystrike.

Housed sheep should be checked by an experienced stockhandler at least once each day for signs of injury, changes in food and water intake, illness or distress.

Sheep grazing under more extensive conditions require variable supervision according to the density of stocking, availability of suitable feed, reliability of water supply, age, pregnancy status, climatic conditions and management practices.

9. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

9.1 General

A large number of husbandry/management practices are required in any sheep farming enterprise. The consequences of not performing certain husbandry procedures may result in far more pain and distress to the animal than the procedure itself, when it is performed quickly and competently.

Restraint used on sheep should be the minimum necessary to efficiently carry out the required procedures.

Practices that cause pain should be applied in such a way as to minimise pain and should not be carried out if practical alternatives can be used to achieve the same results.

Management procedures carried out on sheep should be performed by competent persons or under the direct supervision of an experienced operator.

Relevant hygienic precautions should be undertaken.

9.2 Handling and movement

There are times when sheep need to be handled for close inspection or shifted to another place. It is essential that the catcher handle the sheep gently to reduce stress to individual sheep and to other sheep nearby.

If drafting facilities are not available, sheep may be caught, but not pulled, by one leg. If carrying is necessary, they should not be lifted by the wool.

Sheep should be moved quietly through yards with the minimum of force by dogs or people. Care should be taken with gates to avoid injury to sheep.

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

The use of dogs and goading devices for handling sheep should be limited to the minimum needed to complete the procedures. Dogs that bite should be effectively muzzled while working and restrained when not working.

9.3 Shearing

It is normal practice to shear sheep annually. Additional limited shearing in the form of crutching, wigging and ringing may be required at other times of the year to reduce the risk of fly strike, minimise impairment of vision, and the incidence of stained wool, respectively.

Because shearing is stressful, managers should attempt to avoid undue handling and exposure to adverse weather. Sheep should be returned to food and water as soon as possible after shearing.

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

9.4 Dipping

Dips or showers should be constructed, maintained and operated in a manner that minimises injury, disease and stress to sheep.

9.5 Paring of feet

Sheep with poor hoof conformation, or grazed on soft ground, may require regular foot paring.

Sheep affected with foot disease may need to have diseased tissue pared away by a sharp instrument. The paring should be kept to the minimum necessary to remove affected tissue and should not result in severe lameness.

Paring may not be indicated in sheep with feet affected by foot abscess.

Control or eradication procedures, in accordance with the Department of Agriculture guidelines, should be adopted if there is evidence of foot rot.

9.6 Horn trimming

The horns of rams, stags and some wethers may need to be cut back to avoid injury from an ingrowing horn, injury to other sheep and to allow free movement through handling races. The amount of horn removed should be limited to avoid damage to soft horn tissue and associated bleeding.

9.7 Lambing

Ewe flocks lambing under grazing conditions should be disturbed as little as possible. However, the flocks should be under adequate surveillance to ensure that ewes having difficulty are given attention and to ensure that other problems, such as pregnancy toxaemia and predation, are not occurring.
Access to a sheltered paddock is recommended for lambing ewe flocks, if the risk of bad weather at lambing is high.

9.8 Orphan lambs

Where orphan and stray lambs can be identified they should either be humanely killed or given attention. Fostering is a realistic option; especially on small farms. Some will need colostrum or colostrum substitutes, then milk on a regular basis. Warmth and shelter should be provided. Weak lambs with very little chance of survival should be destroyed humanely.

10. HUSBANDRY PROCEDURES –SURGICAL

10.1 General

Surgical procedures may cause pain and stress, but this can be reduced with minimal restraint and competent operators.

Strict attention should be paid to the suitability of the work area in which the operation is to be performed, the catching facilities and the type and amount of restraint. Instruments should be adequately maintained and sterilised prior to use. Proper hygiene should be practised and animals given adequate after care.

Stock managers should be trained in all surgical husbandry procedures or employ experienced operators.

When tetanus is known to be a risk, a vaccination programme against tetanus should be considered to prevent the risk associated with surgical procedures.

10.2 Tail docking

Tail docking is a recommended practice for blowfly control. It should be performed on lambs as early as management practices will allow; preferably between two and twelve weeks. Animals over six months require an anaesthetic.

Acceptable methods of tail docking, without anaesthesia, are cutting with a sharp knife, rubber rings applied according to the manufacturer's recommendation, or a gas flame heated searing iron used according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

The docked tail should be just long enough to cover the vulva in female sheep and be of similar length in the male.

10.3 Castration

Castration may be unnecessary if all lambs are to be marketed for slaughter prior to puberty, which generally occurs at an age of 3-6 months.

Where castration is required it should be performed on lambs as early as management practices will allow, preferably before 12 weeks. Animals older than six months require an anaesthetic.

Acceptable methods of castrating male lambs, without anaesthesia, are:

(i) Cutting. The lamb should be properly restrained and the knife (cutting; instrument) kept clean and sharp. Good post-operative drainage of the WOLHICI is reduircd.

(ii) Rubber rings applied according to the manufacturer's recommendation,

10.4 Mules operation

The removal of wool bearing skin from part of the breech area of the sheep (mulesing) provides a high degree of life time protection against fly strike in the breech area.

The Mules operation, in which a V-shaped piece of woolled skin is left on top of the tail, is recommended until a more acceptable solution is found and is preferred to the more severe operation used in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Information should be sought from State Departments of Agriculture on the most effective technique in a given area.

Mulesing should be performed as soon as possible after 2 weeks of age and where possible in conjunction with other lamb marking operations. After mulesing, lambs should be observed from a distance, until the wounds have healed, for signs of fly strike of the wound. Animals with infested wounds should be quietly caught and treated without delay.

Where circumstances indicate, application of insecticidal wound dressings is recommended.

10.5 Identification

When it is necessary to mark sheep for permanent identification, the ear may be tattooed, tagged, notched or hole-punched. Electronic methods may also be acceptable.

Ear marking instruments should be sharp, with the cutting edges undamaged, so as to prevent tearing of the ear.

Ear tagging can cause some tearing of the ears if not conducted properly; careful technique will avoid this.

In horned sheep, the horn may be hot branded provided care is taken to ensure that the branding does not predispose the animal to infection and does not burn sensitive tissue.

10.6 Pizzle dropping

Pizzle dropping is sometimes performed to reduce pizzle rot, wetting of the belly wool by urine and resultant fly-strike in the region of the pizzle. The need for this operation should be considered according to the risk of pizzle rot and pizzle strike and information should be sought on the correct procedure from the Department of Agriculture. This operation can only be considered when there is strong justification.

10.7 Teeth grinding/trimming

Corrective dental procedures conducted on individual sheep may be beneficial to their health and well-being. However there is no current scientific evidence that either teeth grinding or trimming performed on a flock basis has beneficial effects on health, well-being or productivity.

Both teeth grinding and teeth trimming have the potential for causing acute and chronic pain in some animals. In the absence of sound evidence on the benefits of teeth grinding and teeth trimming, they cannot be recommended as routine flock management procedures.

11. EUTHANASIA OF SHEEP

Effective and humane methods of euthanasia which cause a quick and painless death include either shooting with a firearm or stunning with a captive bolt stunner followed by bleeding. Other methods include clubbing of lambs with a heavy object followed by bleeding, or simply, bleeding.

11.1 Firearms

A suitable firearm for euthanasia is a .22 calibre rifle or .32 calibre humane killer pistol used at short range but not placed directly on the head.

Disadvantages of the use of a firearm are hazards to human safety and the possibility of not being legal on public property.

11.2 Captive bolt penetrating stunner

A suitable weapon is a captive bolt penetrating stunner which uses blank cartridges, colour coded for the amount of power required for the species of animal being destroyed. The stunner is placed firmly against the skull before firing. The frontal approach is preferred as recent evidence casts doubts on the humaneness of the poll approach. The concussion stunner (non-penetrating) is not recommended.

The main advantage of captive bolt is the safety factor.

Animals stunned with a captive bolt pistol must be bled out immediately.

The positions and direction of the line of fire for either polled or horned sheep are shown in Appendix 2.

11.3 Clubbing

Lambs (but not adults) may be stunned by a heavy blow to the back of the head to render them unconscious. This should be followed immediately by bleeding out.

11.4 Bleeding out

Bleeding out by a skilled person using a sharp knife is an acceptable on-farm method of slaughter for individual animals.

The method is to lay the animal on its side, draw the head back quickly and cut transversely to the spine just behind the jaw bone.

As the animal will remain conscious for a few seconds attempts to sever the spinal cord or dislocate the neck are not recommended.

APPENDIX 1 - SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR INTENSIVE SHEEP SYSTEMS

1. Selection of sheep

Sheep should be carefully observed and those found to be unsuited to the system should be released to paddock grazing.

2. Preventive health management

2.1 Treatment for internal and external parasites may be required before entering intensive systems.

2.2 Vaccination with 6 in 1 vaccine against Clostridial diseases and Caseous Lymphadenitis is recommended.

3. Environmental requirements

3.1 The site should not be subject to flooding, away from fire hazards and relatively protected from adverse weather.

3.2 Sheep should not be kept in, or exposed to, any environment where the air is so contaminated with dust or noxious chemicals as to be detrimental to their long term welfare.

3.3 Sheep houses should be designed either for effective natural ventilation, or with mechanical ventilators to assist in the removal of excessive heat, moisture, carbon dioxide, dust, noxious gases and infectious organisms from the environment. Internal distribution of air is required in a manner appropriate to the location of the animals and the design of the building.

4. Floor space requirements

Overcrowding should be avoided. The suggested minimum space allowances for intensively managed sheep are:

	Space allowance (m^2/head)
4.1 Intensive indoor feedlots	
(a) Single pens	
Lamb	0.6
Wether or dry ewe	0.9
Ram, pregnant ewe or heavy wether	1.0
Ewe with lamb(s)	1.5
(b) Group penned	
Less than 8 sheep	0.9
9–15 sheep	0.8
16–30 sheep	0.6
31, or more	0.5
4.2 Outdoor feedlots (shipping assembly)	
Lambs up to 41 kg	1.0
Adult sheep	1.3
Heavy wether (fat score 5)	1.5
Ewe and lamb(s)	1.8

5. Food

5.1 Sheep being introduced to an intensive feeding system, particularly high starch diets, should be given time to adjust both to the new dietary regime and the troughing. As a guide, conversion to a grain based diet can be achieved by gradually replacing roughage over a period of 7-14 days. Where sheep are being introduced to a diet containing more than 60% cereal grain, the roughage should be gradually withdrawn over a minimum of 3 weeks.

5.2 Adequate trough space should be provided. Where sheep are being fed in groups on an ad-lib basis, or where the trough contains food for up to 15 hours per day, a minimum of 2 cm of trough space per sheep is appropriate. Where smaller amounts of food are offered at set feeding times, up to 20 cm of trough space, to allow all sheep to stand and feed at the same time, is needed to reduce adverse feeding competition.

5.3 Close monitoring, and identification and treatment of shy feeders should remain one of the manager's major concerns throughout the feedlotting period and especially during the introduction of sheep to a new type of fodder.

6. Water

6.1 Fresh drinkable water in clean troughs should be available in sufficient quantities at all times. Sheep in feedlots may drink up to 6 litres per day during hot weather.

6.2 Where nipple drinkers or automatic drinkers are used in group penning systems, one drinking nipple should be provided for every 15-30 sheep, with a minimum of two per pen. One watering bowl is required for each 60 sheep. Sheep may need to be trained for a few days to use nipple drinkers.

6.3 Where water troughing is used, at least 1.5 cm per sheep is recommended, provided inlet pipe sizes and water pressure are sufficient to keep water in the troughs under all circumstances. Poor water pressure, small inlet pipes or thirsty sheep may be reasons for the trough length to be increased. A minimum trough length of 30 cm, plus 1.5 cm per sheep is recommended for mobs of up to 500.

6.4 Drinking equipment must be inspected daily (or more often in hot weather) to ensure its correct operation and to ensure that pipes, taps and ball valves are not blocked. Troughs should be equipped with drain plugs to assist cleaning. Where grain is fed, troughs should be cleaned at least daily.

6.5 When an intensive sheep husbandry enterprise is first established or a new water source is used the water should be tested for minerals and organisms which may be toxic and advice obtained on its suitability for sheep. Information on water testing can be obtained from the Department of Agriculture.

APPENDIX 2 - RECOMMENDED POSITION AND DIRECTION OF FIRE IN SHEEP

1. Using a firearm

Hornless sheep and rams

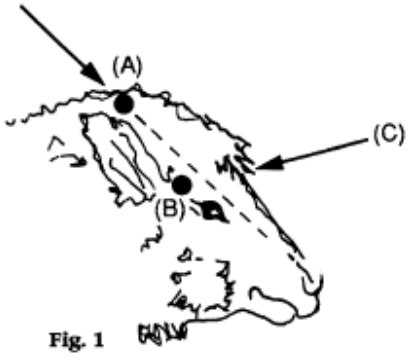

Fig. 1

Either:;

- *aim just behind the poll in the direction of the animal's muzzle (A);*
  or
- *aim from the side of the head at a point midway between the eye and the base of the ear (B);*
  or
- *aim at a point in the middle of the face just above the level of the eyes while aiming along the neck (C).*

Horned sheep and rams

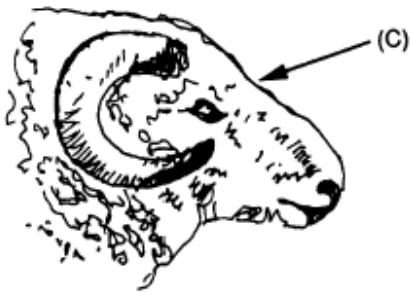

Fig. 2

Aim at point in the middle of the face just above the eye while aiming along the neck (C).

2. Using a captive bolt stunner

Hornless sheep and rams

Fig. 3

Horned sheep and rams

Fig. 4

Place captive bolt stunner firmly on top of head aiming behind the poll in line with the animal's muzzle.