

26 August 2020

The Hon. Mark Banasiak MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Industry
New South Wales Legislative Council

By Email: PortfolioCommittee4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Banasiak

Question on Notice regarding evidence provided to Portfolio Committee 4 Meeting 11 August 2020 regarding the New South Wales Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animal Procedures) Bill 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further information to the Committee. I was asked by the Hon Mark Pearson:

With your experience, Dr Hood, if there was a fly season and there was serious concern about possible flystrike and the sheep have not been mulesed, how often should they be observed and checked for flystrike and then treated if they are struck?

While I provided broad information to the Committee, I indicated that I would like to take the opportunity to check if there was more specific information by way of a Question on Notice (QON). The information I have found supports my statement that the frequency of the need to check for flystrike depends on the risk presented to the sheep from a number of critical variables. Dr Kim Filmer, Chief Animal Welfare officer at NSW DPI, recommends :

In high risk situations, sheep owners should check on sheep for signs of strike at least every second day. The development and spread of maggots on fly blown sheep can occur very rapidly and serious damage can occur in a matter of 24-48 hours.

While there is no set requirement under legislation to check sheep for flystrike at any specified frequency, there is a duty to care for sheep (see PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS ACT 1979 - SECT 5- Cruelty to animals).Further:

In NSW, The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle and Sheep are prescribed guidelines under Section 34A of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979. This means that they are not mandatory, but can be used as evidence in proceedings under the Act or its Regulation. Commenced 15th December 2017¹.

¹ <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/sheep/>

*The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Sheep*² provides for minimum standards of care (Standards), which include:

S1.1 A person must take reasonable actions to ensure the welfare of sheep under their care.

For the Committee's convenience, I have provided supporting information below in Appendix A. If the Committee has any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Hood
BSc Hons BVMS PhD
Veterinary Director
Animals Australia

NOTE: Submission ends. **APPENDIX A** follows to assist the Committee

² <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/sheep/>

APPENDIX A

Evidence obtained to support the above statement includes:

1) The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Sheep³

1 The Principles for sheep welfare states:

Sheep in Australia are managed in environments that vary from extensive rangelands to intensively housed systems. In all cases, the people in charge of sheep are responsible for the welfare of the animals under their control. In achieving improved welfare outcomes envisaged by the standards, it is important that people responsible for animals have the necessary knowledge, experience and skills to undertake the various procedures and meet the requirements of the standards, in a manner that minimises the risk to sheep welfare. Adherence to good animal husbandry principles is essential to meet the welfare requirements of animals ...

This includes:

selection and breeding of sheep appropriate for the environment and the level of planned flock management to be provided

assessment of the need to undertake any husbandry procedures that may result in significant short-term pain against alternative strategies for the long-term welfare of the sheep

undertaking of any husbandry procedures required for planned flock management in a manner that reduces the impact of these procedures and minimises risks to sheep welfare.

1 Responsibilities provides:

Objective

A person knows their responsibilities for sheep welfare and is able to perform the required tasks to minimise the risk to the welfare of sheep.

Standards

S1.1 A person must take reasonable actions to ensure the welfare of sheep under their care.

Guidelines

G1.1 Elements of responsibility for sheep management should include:

³ <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/sheep/>

*identifying distressed, weak, injured or diseased sheep, and taking appropriate action ...
knowledge of local patterns of disease and disease prevention.*

3 Risk management of extreme weather, natural disasters, disease, injury and predation

Objective

Sheep are managed to minimise the impact of threats to their welfare, including extremes of weather, natural disasters, disease, injury and predation.

Standards

S3.1 A person in charge must take reasonable actions to ensure the welfare of sheep from threats, including extremes of weather, drought, fires, floods, disease, injury and predation.

S3.2 A person in charge must ensure the inspection of sheep at intervals, and at a level appropriate to the production system and the risks to the welfare of sheep⁴.

S3.3 A person in charge must ensure appropriate treatment for sick, injured or diseased sheep at the first reasonable opportunity.

Further, **Guideline 3.2** states:

Inspection of sheep should take into consideration:

feed availability

water supply

age

pregnancy status

weather

disease risk, including flystrike

predation risk

recent management procedures.

Also see:

⁴ Our emphasis in bold

G3.16 Where flystrike is a risk, preventive techniques that should be considered are:

- selecting replacement sheep with greater genetic resistance to flystrike*
- culling sheep with high wrinkle scores*
- culling previously struck sheep*
- tactical crutching/shearing during high prevalence periods*
- strategic chemical use*
- using an effective flock worm control program and/or grazing management to prevent scouring*
- selecting replacement sheep with correct tail length and/or breech modification*
- tail docking lambs*
- using clips and other appropriate new technologies*
- mulesing lambs⁵.*

The only reference to a mandatory specified time for checking sheep appears to be in:

9 Intensive sheep production systems

Standards

S9.2 A person in charge must ensure the daily inspection of all sheep in the intensive production system.

The **GLOSSARY** defines:

inspection

The visual check of the health and welfare of sheep on an individual or mob basis.

intensive production systems

An operation where sheep are confined for a period longer than four weeks for the purposes of wool, meat or milk production, and are dependent on the daily supply of feed and or water provided by human or mechanical means.

⁵ Please note the order of the recommended strategies

2) NSW DPI

Useful information is also supplied by DPI NSW, regarding the major blowfly species, *Lucilia cuprinia* :

Once mated, the females search for susceptible sheep. They will be attracted to sheep odours and particularly fleece-rot damage in damp fleece. Full-size flies may lay up to 250 eggs into the fleece. Flies have evolved to lay in groups to minimise desiccation of eggs. Depending on temperature, eggs hatch in 8–24 hours. Maggots crawl down the wool staple to the weeping skin surface or feed in lumpy wool or dags. The maggots feed for 3–5 days during which time they moult (shed their skin) twice as they grow. Newly hatched maggots are not capable of abrading a sheep's skin, but after the first moult (about 18 hours after hatching) are capable of aggravating the skin and causing nutritious serum to exude. Maggots nearing full size can cause large, red-raw strike wounds⁶.

The NSW DPI also provides advice to farmers via media:

Wet weather puts daggy sheep at risk⁷

11 Nov 2015

Sheep producers have been prompted by the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to take preventive action now to protect vulnerable sheep from flystrike.

DPI sheep development officer, Geoff Casburn, said recent rain combined with warm, humid weather has generated ideal conditions for flystrike.

"Sheep with dags or urine, birth and sweat stains are ideal targets for flies and are likely to be struck unless counter measures, such as crutching, are taken," Mr Casburn said.

"It is better to reach for the handpiece before problems begin and ensure your flock is not exposed to flystrike.

"Body strike is also likely in wet conditions as female flies lay their eggs on moist fleece caused by fleece rot, mycotic dermatitis, known as dermo, and grass seed contamination.

Mr Casburn said a chemical application to deter flies from laying eggs is an option for sheep where body strike is likely.

"There are a number of products on the market with different periods of protection, withholding periods and export slaughter intervals," he said.

"It is vital chemical label requirements are followed and producers select an appropriate product, especially on animals that could be sold for meat or are due to be shorn."

⁶ https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/289643/Sheep-blowflies.pdf

⁷ <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/media-centre/releases/2015/wet-weather-puts-daggy-sheep-at-risk>

Some products have as high as 180 days for wool withholding and 120 days for meat export slaughter interval.

Producers are advised to make sure chemical labels are thoroughly checked.

Information about registered chemicals is available on the back of National Vendor

Declaration forms and in DPI Primefact Chemicals registered to treat lice and flystrike on sheep from DPI offices or online

Sheep that are struck need to be treated quickly by removing the wool close to the skin and around the strike area, with the application of fly dressings to prevent re-strike.

Flystrike wounds are very sensitive and label directions should be followed closely to cause the least amount of stress and ensure the correct dose rate is applied.

After cleaning an active strike with a handpiece, crutchings should be placed in a sealed plastic bag and placed in the sun to kill maggots.

I also sought the advice of the DPI NSW regarding the QON, and received this helpful response dated 25 August 2020:

Dear Jenny

When I spoke to you earlier today we discussed the appropriate interval of time required to detect and treat flystrike in sheep. This is hard to determine exactly and depends on a number of factors. In my opinion as a vet and from growing up on a sheep farm, the interval would vary depending on risk factors such as warm temperature, high humidity, sheep body type, presence of skin wrinkles, presence of flies, diarrhoea/scouring, wool length and sheep breed etc.

***In high risk situations, sheep owners should check on sheep for signs of strike at least every second day⁸.** The development and spread of maggots on fly blown sheep can occur very rapidly and serious damage can occur in a matter of 24-48 hours.*

Regards

Kim

*Kim Filmer BVSc, GCMgt N3669 | Chief Animal Welfare Officer
Animal Welfare Unit*

*NSW Department of Primary Industries | Biosecurity and Food Safety
161 Kite Street | Orange | NSW 2800*

3) Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)

The MLA also provides the following useful information:

Act now: flystrike and worm warnings⁹

⁸ Our emphasis in bold

⁹ <https://www.mla.com.au/news-and-events/industry-news/act-now-flystrike-and-worm-warnings/>

04 February 2020

With heavy rainfall predicted in some regions in NSW and southern Queensland over the coming weeks, sheep producers are encouraged to be on high alert for flystrike and worm threats.

Here, veterinarian, sheep producer and Executive Officer of ParaBoss, Deb Maxwell, answers some commonly asked questions about what producers in high-risk areas (northern NSW, southern coastal NSW and southern Queensland) can do now to get prepared.

Q: How regularly do I need to check my sheep for flystrike and what should I be looking out for?

A: Regardless of treatment, monitor for flystrike every two days during the high-risk period¹⁰.

Body strike is more difficult to see early, compared to breech strike. Look for dark patches on the underline, and down from the neck, shoulder and flanks.

If pasture grows quickly, particularly where country is now understocked from drought, watch for chest and belly strikes in all sheep and pizzle strikes in wethers. Be particularly mindful of sheep that are continually walking through long, wet grass.

Ensure the sheep are in a paddock with low flood risk so that you can check up on them regularly and bring them fodder with no access issues.

¹⁰ Our emphasis in bold

