RSPCA NSW

NSW Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animal Procedures) Bill 2019

Parliamentary Hearing 11 August 2020 – Questions on Notice

27 August 2020

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You might have to take some of these questions on notice. How many instances or times has the RSPCA lodged a breach or infringement against POCTA for untreated flystrike in a flock?

Since 2009, there has been a single charge under section 5 of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 relating to fly strike in a sheep. That matter remains before the court.

How many times have there been infringements around animal welfare breaches arising from the mulesing procedure?

Nil.

The Hon. Mark Pearson asked a question about the industry being on notice for 20 years. What dialogue has the RSPCA had the industry more broadly over those 20 years, especially with some of the investment that the Australian Wool Innovation [AWI] has made over that time as well around mulesing and trying to develop an industry-led position and investment to deal with the problem at hand? What is the RSPCA's involvement, if any, in our process over the last 20 years?

RSPCA Australia has engaged with Australian Wool Innovation on the topic of mulesing and flystrike prevention since at least 2006. We have been members of the AWI Animal Welfare Forum since its inception in 2009 (the purpose of the Animal Welfare Forum is to update animal welfare groups on AWI's key research activities relevant to breech flystrike prevention). We have also attended AWI's biennial RD&E Updates the purpose of which is to inform wool industry stakeholders of progress with AWI's breech strike prevention program.

We were strongly supportive of AWI's investment in seeking viable and humane alternatives to mulesing as well as supporting the wool industry's commitment to phasing out mulesing by 2010. At the same time, we have been urging AWI and the wool industry generally to invest in, and in more recent years, promote, the breeding of plainer-bodied sheep who do not require mulesing. We have urged AWI to make on-farm extension to facilitate the rapid adoption of breeding solutions a priority for the wool industry.

RSPCA Australia has always made it clear to AWI and the wool industry that mulesing with pain relief and any other breech modification procedure (e.g. clips, intradermals, sheep freeze branding) should be considered interim solutions until such time as flystrike can be managed solely through breeding and integrated animal husbandry and farm management practices that aim to prevent and control flystrike. Our position on mulesing was repeatedly emphasised during our involvement in the development of the sheep Standards & Guidelines as member of the Stakeholder Advisory Group and again in our public submission to this process.

Our position on this issue is communicated to the public via the RSPCA Australia Knowledgebase in the following articles and a research report which are updated in line with emerging evidence:

- https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-rspcas-view-on-mulesing-and-flystrike-prevention-in-sheep/ (last updated 30 April 2020)
- https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/why-is-it-important-to-declare-mulesing-status-on-the-national-wool-declaration/ (last updated 22 April 2020)
- Research Report: Prevention and control of blowfly strike in sheep (first published in December 2009; updated in January 2019)

Dr ARNOTT: …… There is a position paper on painful husbandry procedures and there are also livestock policies that have a higher level intention as to how animals are treated in livestock production.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Would it be possible to get a copy of that position paper?

https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PP-B4-Invasive-farm-animal-husbandry-procedures.pdf

and attached (**PP-B4-Invasive-farm-animal-husbandry-procedures)**

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Did you just say 70 per cent of beef animals are polled?
Dr ARNOTT: Yes, according to the literature. I think that was in the industry's report on sustainability.
The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Would that be British breeds?
Dr ARNOTT: Yes. I understand that with Bos Indicus it is harder to achieve but I think that was a report on the whole population. I can have a look for you.
The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes, because American breeds are very horny.

Australian Beef Sustainability ANNUAL UPDATE 2020
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"Dehorned livestock are less likely to hurt themselves, other livestock, and human handlers. 73% of the industry are genetically polled, which is progressively increasing the percentage of polled cattle within the herd."

https://www.sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au/58735/widgets/299337/documents/172555

I have a quick question on notice because we have run out of time. Has the RSPCA been involved with, witnessed or observed the freezing technique—the new procedure for removing wrinkle around the sheath area? If so, what are the RSPCA's views and opinions around that procedure?

RSPCA Australia has not been involved with, witnessed or observed the sheep freeze branding technology.

The freeze branding technique involves the application of liquid nitrogen to excess skin on the lamb's breech and tail. The excess skin is first tightly clamped and liquid nitrogen is then applied to the clamped skin until it is fully frozen. The clamp is then removed and treated skin eventually falls off. The only published research on this technique is by Small et al (2018) which found the method to be painful and having no benefits in terms of reduced pain over mulesing regardless of whether pain relief was provided (Small A, Lee C 2018 Welfare assessments of analgesic options in female lambs for surgical mulesing and its alternatives. AWI Project Summary Report ON-00026 29 May 2018. Australian Wool Innovation Limited, The Rocks, Australia).

RSPCA Australia understands that the technology has been refined and that further research on the animal welfare impact is in the pipeline but not yet published in the peer reviewed literature.

We publicly communicated our view on the technique via the RSPCA Australia Knowledgebase in an article first published on 15 January 2020:

- https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-steining-or-sheep-freeze-branding-and-is-it-an-acceptable-alternative-to-mulesing-sheep/

Invasive farm animal husbandry procedures

(adopted 07/12/09)

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 This position paper must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policy:

- Policy 4.6 Invasive farm animal husbandry procedures

1.2 RSPCA Australia defines an invasive farm animal husbandry procedure as any action, either surgical or non-surgical, that alters or removes a specific body part of a farm animal and that has the potential to cause pain, suffering or distress.

1.3 RSPCA Australia is opposed to any invasive animal husbandry procedure for which there is no established need, which only benefit the human handler of the animals concerned, or that is performed to overcome the adverse effects upon animals of the production system they are in (Policy B4.6.1).

1.4 If an invasive procedure is to be performed, it must be undertaken at the earliest age possible, be performed by an accredited operator and be accompanied by appropriate pain-relieving and/or pain-preventing products (Policy B4.6.2).

1.5 RSPCA Australia is opposed to the technique of electroimmobilisation to prevent voluntary movement of fully conscious animals. RSPCA Australia supports the use of alternative, humane restraining devices that do not cause injury, suffering or distress to the animal concerned (Policy B4.7.1).

2 General principles

2.1 RSPCA Australia strongly supports the development and uptake of new or alternative products/treatments/practices that preclude the need for an invasive procedure or eliminate or significantly reduce the pain, suffering and distress caused by such procedures.

2.2 Before performing any invasive animal husbandry procedure, it must be established that there is a need for such a procedure to be performed. Reference must be made to the type of farming operation, the geographical location of the farm, and the welfare benefits to the animal expected from the husbandry procedure.

2.3 Invasive animal husbandry procedures should only be carried out for the purpose of benefiting the animal or the group of animals involved.

2.4 Operators must be competent in the procedure being performed. Where operator accreditation exists for a particular procedure, the operator must also be accredited and their competency regularly assessed.

2.5 Equipment used to perform procedures must be well maintained, clean and in good working order. Knives and other cutting instruments must also be sharp and disinfected.

2.6 Animals must be restrained in a manner that is appropriate to the age and size of the animal, as well as to the procedure being performed. The

method of restraint must minimise pain and not cause unnecessary distress to the animal.

2.7 All painful animal husbandry procedures must be accompanied by anaesthetics and/or pain-relieving products (appropriate to the species) before, during and or after the procedure. Anaesthetics (general or local) should be used where effective restraint and pain relief is not possible. Appropriate post-operative care, e.g. confinement, restricted activity, dressing of wounds, and monitoring of the animal(s) post procedure, must also be considered.

2.8 The use of muscle relaxants without anaesthesia and appropriate restraint (see 2.6) is cruel and unacceptable on humane grounds. Muscle relaxants must only be used on anaesthetised animals that are provided with effective analgesia before the administration of the muscle relaxant.

3 Beak trimming of poultry

Beak trimming is routinely performed on poultry in egg production systems to avoid, or mitigate, the effects of feather pecking and cannibalism.

3.1 The preferred options for the management of feather pecking and cannibalism are the selection of less aggressive bird strains and use of alternative flock management practices (including rearing and husbandry practices and the provision of environmental enrichment devices) that will eliminate the need for beak trimming.

3.2 Beak trimming as a means of curbing feather pecking or cannibalism, should only occur as a last resort and under veterinary advice.

3.3 Where beak trimming is deemed necessary, a once-off trim in the first ten days of life of the birds should be carried out with trimming limited to tipping of the beak. Beak trimming must be carried out by a competent operator (see 2.4).

See also—RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Standards – Layer hens

4 Castration

Castration is carried out to reduce aggression and subsequent injury of male animals.

4.1 RSPCA Australia believes that castration must only be undertaken where there is a clearly established need. There is no such need to castrate animals which are destined for slaughter prior to sexual maturity e.g. piglets, lambs or calves.

4.2 It is strongly advised to castrate animals at an earlier age than the maximum age indicated, provided the testicles have descended.

4.3 The use of pain relief and anaesthesia for castration should reflect the method used. Surgical methods of castration are the most painful at the

time of application while recovery from rubber ring castration is more prolonged.

4.4 The castration of deer, donkeys, horses and camelids of all ages is considered a major surgical procedure and must only be performed under anaesthetic by a veterinary surgeon.

4.5 **Juvenile males**

Acceptable methods of castrating juvenile males of all species (i.e. calves less than four months, lambs less than 10 weeks, goats less than 6 weeks, pigs less than 4 weeks) are:

- *Rubber rings* (these are unsuitable for calves over 2 weeks of age, pigs and goats). A pain-relief product is required. Vaccination against tetanus should be given. In very young lambs, i.e. less than 1 week of age, the combined use of an emasculator (an instrument that clamps and crushes the spermatic cord and blood vessels) and rubber ring is more humane than the use of rubber rings alone.

- *Blade*. An anaesthetic and a pain-relief product are required. The animal must be appropriately restrained (see 2.6), and adequate post-operative drainage is essential.

4.6 **Older males**

a. Castration of older farm animals is considered a major surgical procedure and must only be performed by a veterinary surgeon.

b. Where castration is necessary, it should be done in a location that is suitable for the implementation of hygienic methods and the animal should have adequate pre-operative preparation and pain management. General anaesthesia, or sedation plus local anaesthesia, together with appropriate restraint of the animal are required (see 2.6).

c. Post-operative monitoring, pain management and care must be implemented to minimise the possibility of complications.

5 De-antlering of deer

De-antlering of deer is performed to help protect other animals and handlers from injury. However, antlers are also removed in the production of antler velvet which is used for medicinal purposes. Antlers in velvet are growing antlers with a covering of fine soft hair both of which are rich in nerves and blood supply. Hard antlers have ceased growing and no longer have a functional nerve and blood supply.

5.1 **Antlers in velvet**

a. RSPCA Australia is opposed to the removal of antlers in velvet for commercial sale as a medicinal or other product, as the procedure offers no direct benefit to the animal concerned, nor its conspecifics (Policy 6.3.2). However, RSPCA Australia acknowledges that removal of antlers in velvet as an agricultural enterprise occurs, and whilst

the industry exists the following best practice guidelines are proposed.

b. The only acceptable method for the removal of antlers in velvet is for the animal to be appropriately restrained (see 2.6), and then either of the two following anaesthetic techniques utilised:

- local anaesthetic using a high dose ring-block technique, plus xylazine sedation where appropriate (depending on the species of deer), performed by an experienced veterinary surgeon or an accredited lay operator under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon (see 2.4); or
- general anaesthesia performed by an experienced veterinary surgeon.

c. Once anaesthesia is established, the antlers are removed above the coronet using appropriate means to control blood loss and prevent postoperative infection and fly-strike. Post-operative analgesia must be administered and the animals monitored regularly for the first 48 hours.

5.2 **Hard antlers**

Hardened antlers may be trimmed above the pedicle at any time provided that the animal is appropriately restrained (see 2.6) after the application of suitable tranquillising drugs to minimise shock or fear in the animal.

6 Disbudding, dehorning and horn trimming

Disbudding is the removal of the horn bud before it attaches to the animal's skull, whereas dehorning is removal of the horn once it has attached to the skull. Horn trimming or tipping is the partial removal of the upper, insensitive part of an animal's horn. Disbudding, dehorning or horn trimming of cattle, sheep and goats is performed in many parts of Australia to reduce the incidence of bruising and potential injury to other animals.

6.1 RSPCA Australia strongly supports the breeding of poll (hornless) animals to preclude the need for disbudding, dehorning or horn trimming.

6.2 It is unacceptable to disbud or dehorn an animal using caustic chemicals or tools such as axes and hammers.

6.3 **Cattle**

a. For young calves less than 8 weeks of age or before the horn bud attaches to the skull, acceptable methods of disbudding are:
   - hot iron (preferred method)
   - physical removal of the horn bud, using a dehorning knife.

The calf must be appropriately restrained (see 2.6). An anaesthetic and a pain-relief product are required. Appropriate precautions must be applied to avoid damage of the surrounding tissues, post-operative infection, and fly-strike.

b. For calves from 8 weeks to 6 months of age or after the horn bud attaches to the skull. Acceptable methods of dehorning are:

1. dehorning knife at 2-3 months old
2. scoop dehorner at 2-6 months old.

The animal must be appropriately restrained (see 2.6). Appropriate pre- and post-operative procedures, including pain relief and anaesthesia, must be applied as with younger calves.

c. Animals over 6 months of age must only have the upper, insensitive part of the horn tipped/trimmed, unless dehorning is under the direction of a veterinarian using pain relief and anaesthesia.

6.4 Sheep

a. The disbudding and dehorning of sheep causes injury, suffering and distress and is an unnecessary procedure when horn trimming will suffice in meat and wool production systems.

b. Trimming or tipping the upper, insensitive part of the horn is acceptable and does not require the use of analgesics.

6.5 Goats

a. To avoid damage to underlying tissue, extra care must be taken with kids as their skull is much thinner than that of calves. Also, the horn bud lies shallower and is more diffuse.

b. General anaesthesia or heavy sedation is required for all disbudding/dehorning procedures in kids. This is necessitated by the profound state of shock likely to be encountered in this species, and the unsuitability of local anaesthesia arising from the deep and complex nerve growth of the horn.

c. For kids less than 8 weeks of age or before the horn bud attaches to the skull, an acceptable method of disbudding is a white-hot iron. The kid must be appropriately restrained (see 2.6).

d. For kids more than 8 weeks of age or after the horn bud attaches to the skull, an acceptable method of dehorning is a scoop dehorner. The kid must be appropriately restrained (see 2.6).

e. The upper, insensitive part of the horn may be tipped or trimmed using embryotomy wire without the use of analgesics.

7 Induced cryptorchidism

Induced cryptorchidism (crimping) involves applying a rubber ring to a male animal's scrotum so that the testes are held against the abdomen. This increases the testicular temperature which results in the animal becoming infertile while still producing the male hormone testosterone. The technique is used because it results in animals achieving higher growth rates than castrates.

RSPCA Australia does not support induced cryptorchidism as it offers no benefit to the animal concerned. Induced cryptorchids continue to display masculine behavioural patterns and, because of the constant risk of aggressive encounters, the animals may suffer chronic stress. Cryptorchids require closer management than castrates to ensure that their aggressive behaviour does not result in injury to other animals. Injury to the poll area as a result of aggressive interactions, for example, results in cryptorchids' greater susceptibility to poll strike.

8 Laparoscopic insemination of sheep

Laparoscopic insemination involves the penetration of the abdominal cavity and deposition of semen directly into the uterus of a ewe in oestrous. In addition, gas is inserted into the abdominal cavity through a second abdominal penetration to assist insemination. Laparoscopic insemination is carried out by stud breeders with the main aims of breeding stud rams and improving the genetic merit of progeny.

8.1 Laparoscopic insemination must not be conducted routinely on the same ewe. Where laparoscopic insemination is conducted, adequate anaesthesia, pre- and post-operative analgesia must be provided and the following requirements met:

a. Sterile instruments, surgical preparation of the skin surface and aseptic technique are used to minimise the risk of infection.

b. Sufficient time is allowed per ewe to minimise stress and discomfort to the ewes.

c. The procedure is performed by a veterinary surgeon (trained in the technique) or an accredited operator supervised by a veterinary surgeon who is also experienced in the technique.

8.2 Synchronisation of oestrous of ewes which are to be inseminated must be under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon.

9 Mulesing of sheep

Mulesing is the removal of wool-bearing skin from part of the tail and breech area of sheep used in wool production and is performed to reduce the incidence of fly-strike in the breech area.

9.1 Mulesing should not be performed if alternative safe and humane management procedures can overcome the danger of fly-strike. Radical mulesing, in which all skin is removed from the tail and the cuts of the

tail and crutch operations join so that no wool grows between them, must never be performed as it causes considerable pain and suffering and exposes the skin and perineal area to sunburn which increases the risk of cancer.

9.2 Until mulesing is phased out, routine mulesing of lambs must only be performed where it has been established for a particular geographical location that only by this animal husbandry procedure will the probability of fly-strike be minimised.

9.3 Mulesing must only be performed by an accredited person on an appropriately restrained lamb less than 10 weeks of age (see 2.6) and using a pain-relieving product on the wound immediately after mulesing.

9.4 Mulesing of older lambs is considered a major surgical procedure and must only be performed under anaesthetic by a veterinary surgeon. Analgesia and appropriate post-operative procedures must be instituted to ensure rapid healing.

9.5 RSPCA Australia strongly supports the selection and breeding of fly-strike resistant sheep and other alternatives to mulesing as a means of reducing the incidence of fly-strike in the breech area.

9.6 Lambs which will be sold at an early age for meat must not be mulesed.

10 Nose ringing

10.1 **Pigs**

Pigs must not be nose ringed to prevent them from rooting and foraging as the nose ring unreasonably restricts their normal behavioural patterns. Instead, pigs should be provided with alternative substrate to allow foraging behaviour while at the same time preventing adverse effects on the environment.

10.2 **Bulls**

Nose ringing for the purpose of controlling bulls is only acceptable when performed by a veterinarian. The ring should be smooth and well-fitting and must not inflict pain. The procedure requires appropriate restraint (see 2.6), the use of local anaesthetics, and proper post-operative procedures to aid healing without infection. The proper use of a removable show lead as an alternative to the nose ring is recommended as, once removed, it allows the bull freedom of movement thereby significantly reducing the risk of injury.

11 Spaying of cattle

Cattle spaying is performed to avoid unwanted pregnancy of animals, often in extensive pastoral areas where females cannot be segregated from males.

11.1 In extensive pastoral areas, spaying is often performed using the Willis dropped ovary technique, which involves cutting the ovaries away from their attachments in the abdomen and allowing them to drop within the

cow's body cavity where they remain. The technique requires entry through the vagina (per-vaginal method) and involves a high level of skill.

11.2 RSPCA Australia advocates the development of inexpensive and easily applied hormonal implants to control pregnancy of animals in extensive pastoral areas.

11.3 It is unacceptable to use flank spaying or webbing (removal of the fallopian tubes) as a method to control pregnancy.

11.4 Where spaying is deemed necessary, the procedure must only be performed by a veterinary surgeon (trained in the technique) or a competent operator experienced in the technique (see 2.4). Spaying must be performed using appropriate restraint (see 2.6), pre- and post-operative pain relief and aseptic technique.

11.5 Post-operative monitoring and care must be implemented for a period of at least two weeks after the operation to minimise the possibility of complications.

12 Surgical embryo transfer in sheep

Surgical embryo transfer involves the collection and transfer of embryos from genetically superior ewes to donor ewes. Embryo collection requires penetration of the abdominal cavity and flushing of the oviducts. The collected embryos are then transferred to donor ewes by laparotomy (surgical) or laparoscopic technique which also requires penetration of the abdominal cavity. Embryo transfer is carried out as a means of producing a greater number of genetically improved progeny than can be achieved through conventional breeding.

12.1 Embryo collection and transfer must not be conducted routinely on the same ewe. Where surgical embryo transfer is conducted, adequate anaesthesia, pre- and post-operative analgesia must be provided and the following requirements met:

a. Sterile instruments, surgical preparation of the skin surface and aseptic technique are used to minimise the risk of infection.

b. Sufficient time is allowed per ewe to minimise stress and discomfort to the ewes.

c. The procedure is performed by a veterinary surgeon (trained in the technique) or an accredited operator supervised by a veterinary surgeon who is also experienced in the technique.

12.2 Synchronisation of oestrous of ewes which are to undergo the procedure must be under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon.

13 Tail docking

13.1 The docking of the tails of any farm animal species must only be carried out under veterinary advice on the grounds of an individual animal's health.

13.2 **Dairy cows**

a. RSPCA Australia does not support the docking of the tails of dairy cows as a management strategy to improve the safety of dairy staff. The loss of the tail prevents the cow from reducing fly bites and the procedure itself causes acute and sometimes chronic pain.

b. Switch trimming of dairy cows is an acceptable alternative means of preventing the problems associated with dirty tails.

13.3 **Lambs**

a. Tail docking of lambs must only be carried out when consistent with the principle of planned flock health management to reduce the incidence of fly-strike in the breech area of wool-producing sheep.

b. Lambs which are to be killed at an early age, before flystrike is a potential problem, must not be tail-docked.

c. Tail docking must be performed by an experienced and competent person (see 2.4) on an appropriately restrained lamb of less than 10 weeks of age (see 2.6).

d. Acceptable methods of tail docking young lambs are the hot docking iron (preference) or rubber ring (more painful). Pain relief is required.

e. The length of the docked tail must at least cover the vulva in female lambs and the anus in male lambs.

f. The tail docking of lambs older than 10 weeks of age, or other species where the tail has been irreparably injured or diseased must only be performed by a veterinary surgeon. The procedure requires appropriate restraint (see 2.6), the use of sedatives plus local anaesthesia, and proper post-operative procedures to aid healing without infection.

14 Teat clipping

Dairy calves and dairy goat kids may be born with extra teats on the udder, called supernumerary teats. These extra teats are non-functional and not harmful but may leak during milking or, occasionally, become infected. In the dairy industry, supernumerary teats are usually removed.

14.1 The clipping/removal of supernumerary teats of dairy calves and kids must not be performed for aesthetic reasons only.

14.2 Should it be necessary (for therapeutic reasons only) to remove supernumerary teats, the procedure must take place before the calf or kid is 3 months of age and the animal must be appropriately restrained (see 2.6). An effective local anaesthetic is required, the area should be disinfected and any bleeding following the removal of the supernumerary teat with clean, sharp scissors should be stopped.

15 Teeth clipping, grinding or trimming

15.1 Piglets

Teeth clipping of piglets is performed where aggression between piglets is causing unacceptable injury to littermates and the sow's udder.

a. Teeth clipping must not be conducted routinely. Alternative husbandry and management procedures (e.g. selective breeding of less aggressive sows) should be investigated wherever possible. These may include the maintenance of regular feeding regimes, provision of environmental enrichment and more frequent observation and assessment of each litter.

b. If aggression between litter mates is identified as a problem, the need for teeth clipping should be assessed on a litter-by-litter basis. If teeth clipping is required, it must be carried out within the first 3 days of birth by a trained and competent operator (see 2.4).

15.2 Sheep

Teeth grinding (also known as the Caldow method), trimming or clipping in sheep is sometimes undertaken as a corrective procedure to improve the health and well-being of animals.

Teeth grinding, trimming or clipping must not be performed as it causes significant pain and distress and there is the potential for suffering chronic pain post-operatively. Moreover, there is a lack of demonstrated benefit to the health and production of the animal.

16 Tusk trimming of boars

Tusk trimming of boars is carried out to protect other animals from injury.

16.1 Tusk trimming must only be performed by a veterinary surgeon with the boar under heavy sedation. No anaesthetic is required as the tusk lacks sensory nerves.

16.2 An acceptable method of tusk trimming is using embryotomy wire. The boar must be appropriately restrained (see 2.6). Appropriate precautions must be applied to avoid damage to surrounding tissue and prevent post-operative infection.

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