

Management of sheep and cattle with ingrown horns

Current as of March 2023.

This factsheet assists a person responsible for sheep and cattle in meeting their animal welfare obligations when assessing if the animals have ingrown horns and evaluating if they are fit for transport or sale at a saleyard.

Ingrown horn

An ingrown horn is defined in the Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020 (Transport Regulations) as a horn (other than its base) that has penetrated or is in contact with any part of the livestock animal's eyelid, eye or any other part of the animal's body. See ingrown horn examples (Images 1, 2 and 3).

In serious cases of ingrown horn, the horn may continue to grow and penetrate areas of face including skin and eyes. If a horn penetrates the skin, the animal is likely to suffer pain from the pressure and damage to nerves and tissues of the face. Failure to take reasonable steps to alleviate harm caused by an ingrown horn is an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*.

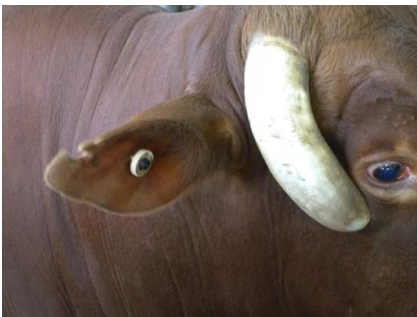


Image 1 – Ingrown horn on Bos indicus bull. Source: DPIRD

Image 2 – Ingrown horn on a merino ram. Source: Animals' Angels Australia

Image 3 – Horn touching eye. Source: Animals' Angels Australia

Preventing ingrown horn

Preventing ingrown horns is the best practice. Options to do this include:

- breeding for polled sheep or cattle i.e. select livestock for the polled gene so they do not grow horns
- disbudding calves or dehorning cattle under 6 months old
- regularly monitoring horn growth and perform the appropriate horn tipping procedures.

Treating ingrown horn

Where a horn is ingrown, the part of the horn that is touching or penetrating the body must be removed, and the wound assessed and treated appropriately. Veterinary advice must be sought where penetration of the body has occurred. In remote areas, it may be valuable to take photos of the horn penetration and text or email them to your veterinarian for advice. In many cases the insensitive tip of the horn (last 4 to 5cm in cattle and merino sheep) is all that may need to be removed.

Horn tipping

Horn tipping refers to the removal of **only the insensitive tip of the horn**. If cutting into the horn draws blood, the cut has entered the sensitive corium of the horn and is considered dehorning for the purposes of animal welfare legislation.

Removal of the insensitive tip of the horn without the need for appropriate pain relief is allowed under the legislation by persons competent in performing the procedure. Horn tipping in adult cattle and sheep, usually involves the removal of no more than the last 4 to 5cm of the horn. This distance may slightly vary for different breeds of sheep as it will depend on their individual horn growth characteristics. Seek veterinary advice on the length of insensitive tip for different sheep breeds. Image 4 shows the cross section of horn in cattle.

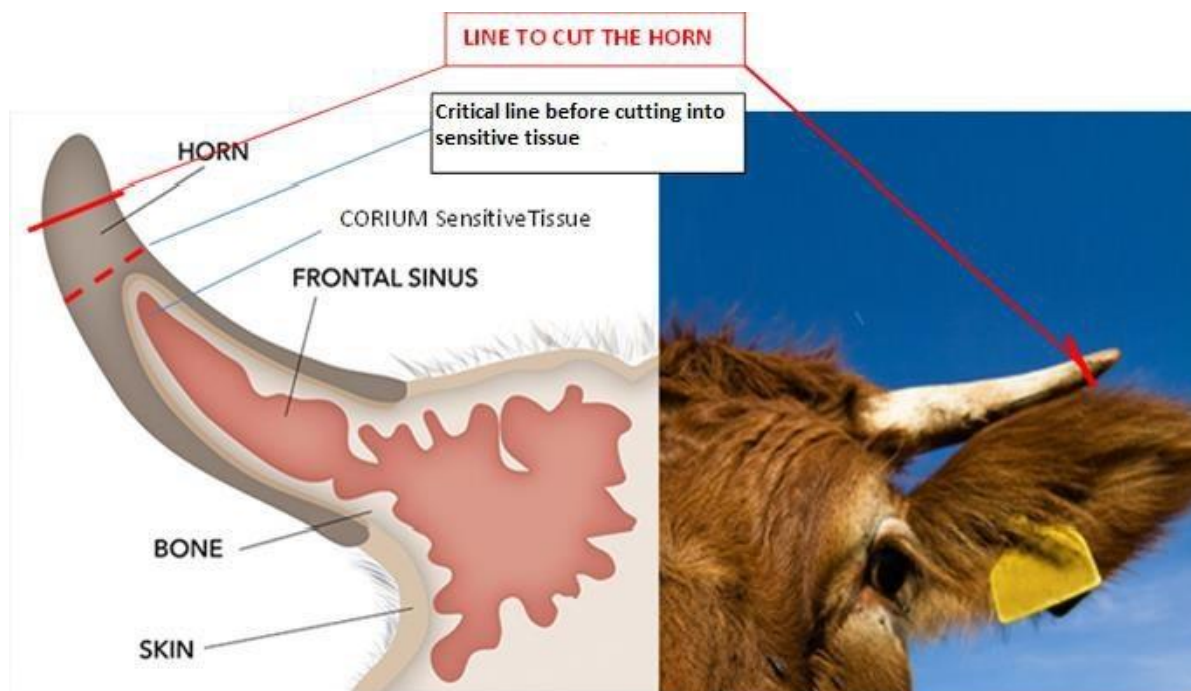


Image 4 – Cross section of the skull of cattle showing the insensitive horn tip and the sensitive corium. Source: DPIRD

Instruments for removing ingrown horns

A range of instruments can be used to tip ingrown horns in cattle and sheep. Choose the most appropriate instrument to remove the horn tip on each individual basis (Image 5).

These include:

- horn saw
- parrot teeth tippers
- embryotomy wire – saw wire connected by two stainless steel handles.



Image 5 – Instruments for horn tipping. Horn saw (top left), embryotomy wire (top right), parrot nose horn tippers (middle), guillotine dehorner (bottom). Guillotine dehorner will not fit over an ingrown horn therefore unsuitable. Source: Meat and Livestock Australia.

NOTE: Read and follow the manufacturer's label for correct and safe use.

Dehorning

Cutting into the sensitive corium of the horn (i.e. cutting that results in the horn bleeding) is, for the purposes of the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, dehorning.

Cattle and sheep can have the partial or full horns removed by cutting into the sensitive tissues (the corium) only under the following conditions.

Table 1 - Conditions for partial or full horn removal	
Cattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be performed by a person who has the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to do the procedure competently (a competent person) or under the direct supervision of a competent person. • If cattle are 6 months old or older, the procedure must be undertaken with appropriate pain relief (i.e. use of a local or topical anaesthetic and an analgesic). Pain relief for cattle under 6 months of age is not mandatory, but best practice is to use appropriate pain relief in accordance with the advice of your veterinarian.
Sheep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can have partial (or full) horns removed by cutting into the sensitive tissues (the corium) only if undertaken by a veterinarian or a person authorised under the <i>Veterinary Practices Act 2021</i>, with appropriate pain relief.

Failure to meet these requirements may be an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* and *Veterinary Practices Act 2021*.

Animals where the sensitive corium has been cut cannot be transported or offered for sale until the wound (cut) is no longer bleeding or discharging.

Sheep or cattle with ingrown horns must not be transported or offered for sale at a saleyard

Under the Transport Regulations you must not supply for transport, load on a transport vehicle, or offer for sale at saleyard, sheep or cattle that have any of the following conditions:

- **an ingrown horn**
- **are suffering from a condition, injury or disease that is likely to cause increased pain or distress to the animal during transport.**

Livestock must be fit for the journey

Under the Transport Regulations, it is an offence for all persons involved in the process to consign or load sheep or cattle for transport, that are unfit to undertake the journey, whether from the property of origin, saleyard or other place.

Sheep and cattle that have been assessed as not fit for transport cannot be sold at a saleyard. If an animal is considered borderline for its fitness to undertake the journey, consider whether the animal's condition will deteriorate during the journey and/or at the saleyard rendering them unfit for sale or further transportation. Animals will be assessed at a saleyard before sale and again before consigning and loading on the transport vehicle for the outward journey.

Exemption

An animal that is unfit to undertake a journey may be loaded and transported only under the following conditions:

- the consignor and transporter have advice from a veterinarian that the animal can undertake the intended journey
- the transporter ensures that the animal is loaded and transported in accordance with the veterinarian's advice
- the transporter ensures the animal is transported the shortest distance necessary either to another property or abattoir.

A copy of the veterinary advice should accompany the animal to the final destination.

It is strongly recommended the advice is provided in writing. It is up to the consignor and/or the transporter to prove the veterinarian advised the animal could undertake the journey and was loaded and transported in accordance with the advice of the veterinarian.

Animals transported under veterinary advice must not be sent to a saleyard as they cannot be offered for sale or sold.

Animals with ingrown horns or ingrown horns that have been recently removed and have left a wound must not be transported until any wounds have healed.

Appropriate arrangements for livestock that are not fit for transport or sale

Appropriate arrangements must be made for livestock that are not fit for transport or sale at the first reasonable opportunity.

Appropriate arrangements mean one or more of the following, depending on the condition of the animal:

- separating the animal from any other animal and resting it until it has recovered
- treating the animal as appropriate to its condition, including seeking veterinary advice
- destroying the animal using a method of humane destruction.

If the person responsible for the animal elects not to treat an animal with ingrown horns, it must be humanely destroyed on farm.

At the first reasonable opportunity

At the first reasonable opportunity means that the appropriate arrangements for the animal are undertaken without delay except where a reasonable delay is caused by a significant reason relating to resources, skills, safety or the immediate welfare of other livestock.

More information

- *Animal Welfare Act 2002*
- Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020
- *Veterinary Practices Act 2021*
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock; Livestock at Saleyards and Depots; Sheep; Cattle
- Animal Welfare Factsheets:
 - Horn Tipping of Cattle
 - Horn Tipping of Sheep
 - Are your livestock fit to load?
 - Are sheep and cattle fit to be sold at a saleyard?
 - Humane destruction of sheep and cattle
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Consignors and Transporters
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Saleyards
- [agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare](https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare)



For more information and to view the suite of animal welfare factsheets, scan the QR code, or visit: <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/resources-and-publications>.

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