

# Assessing sheep body condition for transport or sale at a saleyard

This fact sheet assists a person responsible for sheep in meeting their animal welfare obligations when assessing whether sheep in poor body condition are fit for transport or sale at a saleyard.

## Sheep in poor body condition

Under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, it is a cruelty offence for a person in charge of an animal to fail to provide the animal with proper and sufficient food and water. It is not acceptable to leave animals in poor body condition, and they must never be allowed to starve to death. Before an animal reaches a body condition score (BCS) of 1.5, the person in charge of the animal must provide one or more of the following:

- supplementary feed (with a ration with sufficient energy density/nutrient balance for the class of livestock)
- sell, agist, feedlot or send to abattoir (only if the animal's body condition is fit-to-load and transport)
- humane destruction (euthanasia).

## Body condition score assessment in sheep (1 to 5 scale)

Body condition can be easily assessed using the BCS system. Key reference body sites (Image 1) are assessed visually **and** by touch. This assessment gives an overall score of between 1 and 5, where BCS 1 is extremely poor body condition and 5 is over-fat. Table 1 on page 4 provides more detail on how to assess sheep. **For the purposes of the Animal Welfare (Transport Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020 (Transport Regulations), sheep with a BCS of 1.5 or less are emaciated, and immediate intervention is necessary to protect their welfare.**

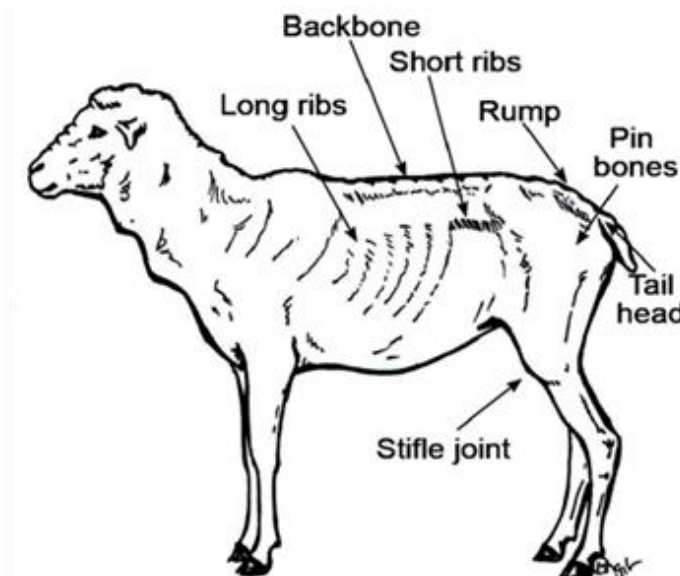


Image 1 – Key reference sites for assessing BCS in merino sheep

Wool breeds of sheep (e.g. the Merino or Merino type crossbreds) that are in half or full wool are much harder to accurately assess visually for BCS. It is strongly recommended that assessment for body condition score in sheep, should only be made after physically touching the reference sites on the sheep's body, especially the points of the short ribs.

For more information on how to body condition score sheep visit:

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/management-reproduction/condition-scoring-sheep>

## **Emaciated (BCS 1.5 or less) sheep 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 with a body condition score of 1.5 or less.**

Where sheep could become emaciated, the person responsible for the animal must make decisions early to move, sell, agist, feedlot, export or send to saleyards, private sale for restockers or sell to abattoir **before** they become emaciated, and options are limited.

Appropriate arrangements for emaciated sheep should be made at the first reasonable opportunity.

## **Appropriate arrangements for sheep that are not fit for transport or sale**

Appropriate arrangements means one or more of the following, depending on the condition of the sheep:

- 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.

### **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.

## **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 for transport, that are unfit to undertake the journey, whether from the property of origin, saleyard or other place.

Sheep 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/or transporter has 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 veterinary 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.**

## More information

- *Animal Welfare Act 2002*
- Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock; Livestock at Saleyards and Depots; Sheep
- Animal Welfare Factsheets
  - 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/management-reproduction/condition-scoring-sheep](https://agric.wa.gov.au/management-reproduction/condition-scoring-sheep)
- [agric.wa.gov.au/feeding-nutrition/supplementary-feeding-and-feed-budgeting-sheep](https://agric.wa.gov.au/feeding-nutrition/supplementary-feeding-and-feed-budgeting-sheep)
- [agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare](https://agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare)



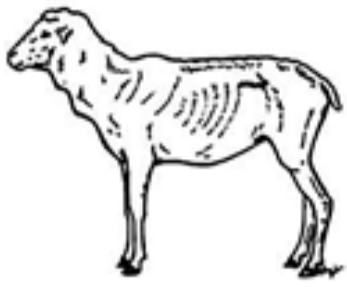
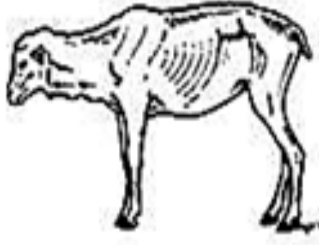

For more information and to view the suite of animal welfare factsheets, scan the QR code, or visit: <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/resources-and-publications>.

### Important Disclaimer

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**Table 1 – Welfare decisions for shorn merino sheep with BCS of 1.5 or less**

	BCS 1.5	BCS 1	<BCS 1
<b>Sheep condition</b>			
<b>Backbone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spines of backbone identifiable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spines of backbone easily identifiable</li> </ul>
<b>Short ribs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slightly visible individually, more so in Merino sheep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prominent and very sharp to touch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very prominent and easy to see individually</li> </ul>
<b>Inside pin bones</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slightly sunken</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sunken</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deeply sunken to the bone</li> </ul>
<b>Muscle wastage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rump muscle concave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rump muscle concave.</li> <li>Muscle wastage in loin and leg muscle evident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obvious over whole body.</li> <li>Rump and leg muscles deeply concave</li> </ul>
<b>Stifle joint</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not identifiable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not identifiable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifiable</li> </ul>
<b>Tail bones</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single bones not identifiable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single bones just able to be felt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single bones easily felt</li> </ul>
<b>Appearance and behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Animal looks 'narrow' when viewed from behind.</li> <li>Appears alert and mobile</li> <li>Will attempt to eat grass</li> <li>Head to the ground.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to stand but listless, dull.</li> <li>Sunken or humped back, head lowered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lacking energy, dull and listless</li> <li>May be recumbent and unlikely to stand</li> </ul>
<b>Mobility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normal gait</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobile, able to lie down and rise but may have some difficulty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsteady gait may drag feet or 'teeter', difficult to lie down and rise.</li> </ul>
<b>Health risks and prognosis for recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced reproductive performance likely, high possibility of lamb loss.</li> <li>At risk of death from cold, wet weather and other stress.</li> <li>Should recover with adequate feed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unlikely to conceive. If pregnant, at high risk of death during lambing.</li> <li>At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress.</li> <li>Able to recover in time if adequately fed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If pregnant, extremely unlikely that lamb and ewe will survive lambing.</li> <li>At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress.</li> <li>Slow recovery reliant on high-quality care</li> </ul>
<b>Fitness for transport and sale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Unfit</b> for transport except in accordance with veterinary advice.</li> <li><b>Unfit</b> for sale at saleyards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Unfit</b> for transport except in accordance with veterinary advice.</li> <li><b>Unfit</b> for sale at saleyards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Unfit</b> for transport except in accordance with veterinary advice.</li> <li><b>Unfit</b> for sale at saleyards</li> </ul>
<b>Actions required</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Must be</b> fed adequately immediately or humanely destroyed on farm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Must be</b> fed adequately immediately or humanely destroyed on farm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Must be</b> fed adequately immediately or humanely destroyed on farm. Very high level of care and nutrition required.</li> </ul>