

Animal welfare

Ensuring all animals receive appropriate care



July 2017

Welfare decisions for sheep

In circumstances such as drought, sheep may be subject to dramatic loss in body condition due to reduced feed intake. A sheep's general health, fertility and ability to rear a lamb will suffer as it loses condition. There is also a substantial decline in carcass and wool value.

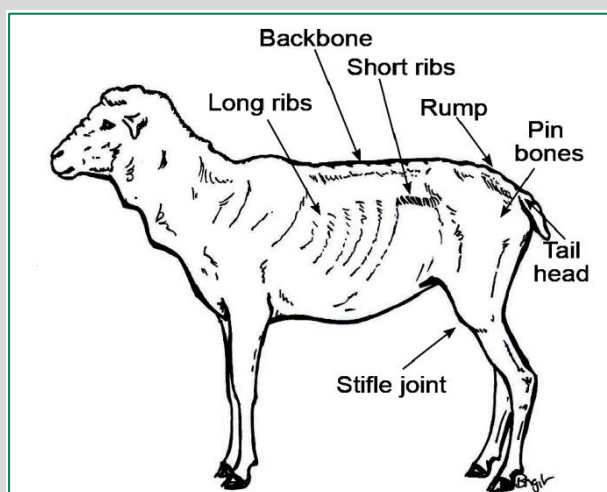
As animals fall to body condition score 1.5 or less, their strength and ability to withstand the rigours of transport are greatly reduced. If they lose condition further they are at risk of dying. **Weakened animals cannot be transported.**

It is not acceptable to leave stock in poor condition. Decisions must be made on future feeding, suitability for transport or sale, or in extreme cases whether humane destruction is required.

Making decisions on what to do next can be difficult and stressful. These guidelines can help assess the condition of affected sheep, and decide what action to take.

Assessing animals

The diagram below shows the key sites for assessing an animal's condition. Use Table 1 over the page to decide which category the animal fits into and what action needs to be taken.



Criteria for destruction on property

Some sheep may require humane destruction on property. They should be destroyed if they are in poor or very poor condition as described in Table 1 (see over page) and meet any of the following conditions:

- they fall down or are knocked over easily
- they are unable to stand without assistance
- they have an unsteady gait
- adequate good quality feed cannot be provided
- adequate good quality water cannot be provided
- it is uneconomic or not possible to transport, sell or feed due to circumstances.

Condition score 1 sheep may also need to be destroyed when treatment, transport or feeding is not possible.

Sheep must not be allowed to starve to death.

More information

This information sheet is based on Animal Welfare Codes of Practice and applicable Standards and Guidelines. For up-to-date Codes of Practice, and Standards and Guidelines, visit:

- agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare
- animalwelfarestandards.net.au

References

Welfare scoring nutritionally deprived beef cattle, dairy cattle and their crosses, sheep and horses - NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2013 (dpi.nsw.gov.au)

Important disclaimer

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.

Copyright © Western Australian Agriculture Authority, 2017

Table 1. Welfare decisions for sheep based on animal condition

Sheep condition	At risk	High risk	Extreme risk
Backbone	Visible	Spines of backbone visible	Spines of backbone seen easily
Short ribs	Slightly visible individually, more so in Merino sheep	Prominent and very sharp to touch	Very prominent and easy to see individually
Inside pin bones	Slightly sunken	Sunken	Deeply sunken to the bone
Muscle wastage	Rump muscle concave	Rump muscle concave. Muscle wastage in loin and leg muscle evident	Obvious over whole body. Rump and leg muscles deeply concave
Stifle joint	Not identifiable	Not identifiable	Identifiable
Tail bones	Single bones not identifiable	Single bones just evident	Single bones easily felt
Appearance	Bright, alert	Able to stand but listless, dull	Lacking energy, dull and listless, may be recumbent
Mobility	Normal gait	Mobile, able to lie down and rise but may have some difficulty	Unsteady gait, may drag feet or 'teeter'. Difficult to lie down and rise
Transport, sale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable for transport and sale but with minimum time off feed • Suitable for transport to agistment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsuitable for transport over long distances or sale through saleyards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not fit for transport
Actions required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed adequately to prevent extra weight loss • Supervise and be ready to assist during lambing — supervise lamb after birth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be fed adequately immediately to prevent weight loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high level of care and nutrition required, or destroy on farm
Lambing requirements and risks associated with lambing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate pregnant animals • Individually care and feed a high energy supplement • High possibility of losing lamb during birth or on first day after birth • High possibility of pregnancy toxaemia and/or hypocalcaemia • Seek professional advice on adequate feeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will need a lot of assistance — ewe and lamb may not survive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely unlikely that lamb and ewe will survive lambing