



Sheep

SPCA Certified® Standards



SPCA Certified Standards for Sheep

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SPCA Certified Standards for Sheep

Overview of SPCA Certified

SPCA Certified is a certification programme designed to celebrate good farming and raise animal welfare above current legal requirements. The overarching goal is to improve the lives of as many animals as possible, through a process of increasing uptake and continual improvement over time. As such, SPCA Certified standards for sheep allow members to demonstrate that they apply a high level of animal welfare to their farming operations.

Certification is given to members, which may include farmers, distributors, food retailers, and companies, following a successful initial assessment and subsequent welfare audit against the standards.

SPCA Certified standards for sheep apply to sheep raised for meat and wool that are bred, grown, and cared for outdoors on pasture, where they have a degree of autonomy over diet selection, water consumption, and access to shelter and shade. Dairy sheep are covered by separate standards.

IMPORTANT: SPCA Certified does not permit the farming of sheep in feedlots.

In terms of the welfare outcomes they achieve, SPCA Certified standards are intended to go beyond the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and relevant Codes of Welfare. They are informed by animal behaviour and welfare science, consultation with stakeholders, and the values of SPCA. All farm staff, operators, and owners must be aware of, and compliant with, the standards as well as the legal requirements relating to the animals in their care.

SPCA Certified standards are intended to be used alongside existing industry programmes and practices on farm, and should be read in association with the following documents:

- [Animal Welfare Act 1999](#)
- [Animal Welfare \(Care and Procedures\) Regulations 2018](#)
- [Code of Welfare: Sheep and Beef Cattle 2018](#)
- [Code of Welfare: Painful Husbandry Procedures 2018](#)
- [Code of Welfare: Transport within New Zealand 2018](#)
- [Code of Welfare: Commercial Slaughter 2018](#)
- [Code of Welfare: Dogs 2018](#)

Framework of the SPCA Certified Standards

Animals are sentient¹, meaning they have feelings, perceptions, and experiences that matter to them. These can be positive as well as negative, thereby impacting on the animal's welfare and its overall quality of life.

The framework for the SPCA Certified standards has therefore been derived from the Five Domains model of animal welfare². The Five Domains model is a holistic animal welfare assessment tool which describes welfare as the balance between positive and negative experiences and feelings.

The Five Domains are:

- nutrition;
- physical environment;
- health;
- behavioural interactions; and
- mental state.

Each of the four physical domains contribute to the provision of opportunities for positive mental experiences, as evaluated in the fifth domain.



Accordingly, SPCA Certified standards not only aim to minimise avoidable negative experiences (e.g. fear, pain, and distress), but provide opportunities for positive experiences (e.g. comfort, pleasure) through engaging choices, free movement, and appropriate social interaction.

¹ In 2015, the Animal Welfare Act 1999 was amended to include a statement acknowledging animal sentience.

² [Mellor, D. J., Beausoleil, N. J., Littlewood, K. E., McLean, A. N., McGreevy, P. D., Jones, B., & Wilkins, C. \(2020\). The 2020 five domains model: Including human–animal interactions in assessments of animal welfare. *Animals: an open access journal from MDPI* 10\(10\): 1870](#)

To achieve this the following are necessary:

- caring, responsible, and forward-thinking management;
- trained, competent, and conscientious stockpersons;
- safe environment, facilities, and equipment for the animals; and
- low-stress handling.

Scope

SPCA Certified standards for sheep apply from the moment that the sheep/lamb arrives or is born on the farm, until the time that it leaves the farm or is killed/euthanised on farm.

Where contractors are brought onto the farm to work with sheep, it is the responsibility of the member/farmer to ensure the contractors comply with the law and the SPCA Certified Sheep Standards.

All transport, including transport to and from the farm, and all slaughter processes, are covered by the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and relevant Codes of Welfare.

Traceability and Integrity

SPCA Certified endeavours to inspire best practice animal welfare within the sheep industry and to ensure transparency in animal welfare. To protect the integrity of SPCA Certified and the participating farmers, distributors, food retailers, and companies who use the brand, it is important that all SPCA Certified members clearly demonstrate product traceability throughout their supply chains.

SPCA Certified also uses independent auditing, including unannounced audits, to maintain the integrity of the programme and ensure that members are meeting the standards. As a result, products carrying the SPCA Certified logo allow consumers to identify products that have come from sheep farmed to a higher standard of animal welfare than is currently required by law.

For more information about SPCA Certified, including types of membership, complaints, other procedures, and the independent auditing process, contact certified@spca.nz or visit the website (www.spcacertified.nz).

Any serious animal welfare complaints or Animal Welfare Act breaches on farm must be reported directly to the Ministry for Primary Industries animal welfare complaints hotline at **0800 0083 33** and SPCA Certified notified as soon as possible.

SPCA Certified Standards for Sheep

Important notes:

- Section titles and their accompanying descriptions are taken from the Five Domains Model.
- Unless stated otherwise, all standards apply equally to adult sheep (including hoggets, ewes and rams) and lambs.
- Information presented in ***bold italic*** type is either a standard explanation, a recommendation, an area of concern, or an indication of where a standard is likely to be reviewed in the future.
- To avoid unnecessary duplication, existing information/records from other sources on farm (e.g. farm management software) can be used to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the SPCA Certified standards. Electronic records are acceptable if they can be viewed by SPCA Certified during audits.
- SPCA Certified templates (e.g. health plan, biosecurity plan, contingency plan) can be requested from certified@spca.nz and may be used where current records do not exist.

Note on working dogs

All dog-related animal welfare regulations and the requirements of the Code of Welfare for Dogs (2018) apply to working dogs on the property and must always be followed. Farmers using dogs to manage sheep must ensure that the dogs are properly fed and watered, well exercised, kept in good overall condition, and provided with suitable accommodation that is kept clean, habitable, is of appropriate size, and which provides effective shade and shelter.

If working dogs are observed to be in poor condition or housing is deemed to be unacceptable during an assessment/audit, this will be noted and followed up by SPCA Certified. Failure to remedy the situation may lead to an unsuccessful application or removal from the programme.

Positive Mental Experience



Provide safe, congenial, and species-appropriate opportunities to have positive experiences.

The sheep icon  indicates those standards and recommendations that provide opportunities for positive mental experiences for sheep.

Good Nutrition



Provide ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

Feed

- N1 Pasture must be capable of providing for the nutritional and health requirements of sheep at all stages of life and production. At times when pasture is of low quality or quantity, feed supplementation is required.
- N2 A written plan to adequately manage feed supply is required for periods when there may be limited feed, such as during winter, dry summers, drought, and acute weather events (e.g. cyclones), and during different physiological stages of the life cycle (e.g. pregnancy, lactation).
- Where applicable, the plan must identify potential animal health and welfare risks of supplementary feed (e.g. crops, feed concentrates) and measures to minimise these risks. This includes measures to prevent animals being exposed to increasingly muddy conditions when fed on crops.
- N3 Where supplementary feed is provided, it must be:
- palatable;
 - fed in appropriate amounts;
 - introduced gradually (where required) and animals monitored for adverse effects;
 - fed alongside appropriate fibre sources (where relevant); and
 - provided in a way that prevents competition for access between animals.
- N4 Where feed is stored, practices must be in place to ensure that it does not become contaminated or unsuitable for sheep to eat.
- N5 A mineral supplementation programme must be implemented in consultation with a veterinarian or farm consultant, and appropriate monitoring must be in place. Records must be available for inspection.
- N6 Sheep body condition must be managed between BCS 3 - 4 (on a scale of 1 - 5). Where the body condition score of any sheep drops below 3, timely corrective action must be taken. Special attention must be paid to ewes prior to lambing to ensure BCS does not exceed 4.
- N7 Body condition scoring for all breeding sheep must be assessed and recorded at least three times each year (e.g. at weaning, 6 - 10 weeks prior to mating, and at pregnancy scanning (60 - 90 days prior to lambing)).

It is recommended that the farm establishes a good working relationship with a specialist in sheep nutrition.

To minimise health risks to sheep, any high-risk pastures (e.g. high facial eczema spore counts during late summer and autumn) should be regularly surveyed and sheep moved to low-risk pastures (e.g. other than rye grass) where necessary.

Optimal feeding of pregnant ewes, especially those carrying multiples, will help to ensure adequate lamb growth, colostrum and milk production, and minimise the risk of metabolic disease.

Sheep should be offered a variety of nutritious herbages so they can choose their preferred feed, meet their individual nutritional needs, and experience different tastes and textures. 

For a useful guide to body condition scoring sheep and for the Feedsmart Resource Book for feed planning, visit [Beef + Lamb NZ Knowledge Hub](#).

Water

- N8 All sheep, including unweaned lambs, must have easy access to sufficient clean, palatable drinking water at all times to meet their requirements.
- Snow and damp pasture are not considered a source of drinking water.
- N9 Water delivery systems must be sufficient in number and size and maintained to ensure water is freely available, preventing competition for access between animals, and meeting demand across all seasons including peak drinking times.
- N10 Troughs must be provided at a height that allows sheep and lambs to drink using a normal, comfortable drinking posture, but without the risk of lambs falling into troughs.
- N11 Portable electric fences, where used, must be placed so as not to discourage sheep from accessing troughs.
- N12 The area surrounding troughs must be actively managed to ensure that it does not become flooded or increasingly muddy.
- N13 Troughs must be cleaned to maintain clean, palatable water.
- N14 Primary water sources must be tested every three years for contaminants (e.g. salinity, bacterial load, and mineral content) that may be harmful to the health of sheep or prevent sheep from drinking. Water must be tested more frequently where indicated (e.g. change in sheep drinking habits, animal health issues, after an adverse event, change in water smell, clarity, or taste) to ensure it remains safe and palatable to drink.
- N15 Where a new water source is established that is not town water (e.g. dam or bore), it must be tested (see Standard N14) before sheep are given access to it.
- N16 An alternative source of water to the primary source must be available in the event of an emergency and identified on the emergency preparedness plan (see Standard E31).

Fostering and hand-rearing lambs

Note: While lambs are not routinely hand-reared on commercial farms, this may be necessary for some lambs (i.e. orphaned lambs and lambs removed from their dam for health or welfare reasons).

- N17 Where undertaken, fostering of lambs onto a suitable ewe must occur as soon as affected lambs are identified. A management plan for fostering must be in place and implemented.
- N18 For unweaned lambs younger than six weeks a hand-rearing management plan must be developed. The plan must be implemented for all affected lambs.

For best practice lamb-rearing guidelines see the [Ministry for Primary Industries Lamb Rearing Guide](#).

Good Environment



Provide shade/shelter, suitable housing, good air quality, and comfortable resting areas.

Site plans

- E1 A detailed site plan must be kept on farm, showing the layout and dimensions of:
- all buildings, yards, and pasture areas (including paddock numbers);
 - all natural and/or artificial shelter and shade provisions;
 - location of all water sources;
 - feed storage areas;
 - sanitary facilities for visitors/staff;
 - isolation/quarantine areas;
 - access roads and laneways; and
 - waste and carcass disposal areas.

Fencing

- E2 All fencing, including electric fences, must be designed, constructed, regularly inspected, and routinely maintained to minimise the risk of injury and unnecessary pain and distress to the sheep and to ensure that they are securely contained.
- E3 Barbed wire fencing is only permitted for boundary fences. It must not be electrified.

Shade and shelter

- E4 Sheep must have free access to effective shade and shelter at all times to let them manage their own temperature, to mitigate the risk of heat and cold stress, and to provide additional opportunities to express normal behaviours such as hiding, resting, and exploration. 
- E5 Sheep must be checked at least daily while weather warnings are in place to ensure that the shade and shelter provided remain appropriate.
- E6 Where signs of heat or cold stress (e.g. increased breathing rate or panting, sheep huddling together) are observed, immediate remedial action must be taken, and shade and shelter provisions reassessed to safeguard animal welfare going forward.
- E7 In weather conditions where yarding and moving sheep may lead to heat stress, these activities must be minimised. Risk mitigation measures must be in place to prevent heat stress or exhaustion from occurring where these activities cannot be avoided (e.g. rest breaks, access to water, effective shade, reduced stocking density).
- E8 Ewes close to lambing and those with newborn lambs must be provided with an environment that gives both ewes and newborn lambs comfort and adequate protection from adverse weather conditions that may negatively impact their welfare. This includes the provision of suitable shelter (e.g. trees, hedges, shrubs, reeds, tussocks, or artificial shelters) and suitable lying/lambing surfaces (see Standard B17).

Free access to shade and shelter is important for animals to manage their temperature and overall wellbeing. It can also provide comfort, health, and productivity benefits. Pending further research, future versions of this standard may set specific shade area requirements.

Air temperatures as low as 20°C, in combination with high humidity and solar radiation, and low airflow, can negatively impact sheep welfare.

Shade and shelter can include natural and artificial structures, including windbreaks, treed areas, shade sails, lean-to structures, and shelterbelts.

Newborn lambs, especially small multiples, are susceptible to heat loss and the provision of shelter is important for their survival and welfare. For example, hay bales arranged in a cross formation can help to reduce heat loss in newborn lambs.

Preparation for transport and transport

- E9 Before loading, sheep must be assessed to ensure that they are fit for transport and able to withstand the entire journey without suffering unnecessary or unreasonable pain or distress. The assessment must take into consideration the animals':
- health condition;
 - body condition score (i.e. above 2 (on a scale of 1 - 5));
 - age;

- the likely duration of the trip; and
- the likely weather/temperature conditions.

If there is any question about whether an animal is fit for transport or not, a registered veterinarian must be consulted and a record of the advice kept.

- E10 All sheep must be free from signs of injury or disease, including pink eye, to be eligible for transport. Any wounds or skin lesions identified must be fully healed and free from discharge. Sheep showing signs of respiratory distress must not be selected for transport.
- E11 Sheep that are unfit for transport must be given immediate remedial care, veterinary care, or be euthanised without delay.
- E12 The following timeframes must be adhered to when selecting pregnant or freshly lambed ewes and young or weaned lambs for transport:
 - no transport in the last third of pregnancy
 - no transport for at least seven days after lambing
 - no transport for at least seven days after weaning.
- E13 Where sheep have undergone a painful husbandry procedure (e.g. castration), they must not be selected for transport for at least three weeks after the procedure.
- E14 Holding and loading facilities must be designed to facilitate ease of movement and reduce handling stress for sheep and stockpersons.
- E15 Keeping sheep on concrete prior to loading must be limited to two hours.
- E16 Sheep must be provided with free access to clean water and hay until immediately before loading.
- E17 Sheep must be kept off green feed prior to transport, but not exceeding eight hours.
- E18 Holding yards must provide enough shade and shelter for all contained sheep. If signs of heat or cold stress are evident during yarding, immediate remedial action must be taken.
- E19 Holding yards must provide enough space to allow all sheep to be able to lie down, stand up, and move freely.
- E20 Mixing unfamiliar sheep prior to transport or during loading must be minimised.
- E21 Loading facilities, including ramps, must have surfaces that are non-slip and that are maintained regularly.
- E22 Where adjustable or portable ramps are used, they must be able to firmly attach preventing gaps between ramp and loading platform or transport vehicle, and preventing ramp movement during loading and unloading.
- E23 Sheep must be allowed to load at their regular walking speed, without unnecessary force or noise.
- E24 The owner or person in charge of the sheep must be present during loading.

- E25 When organising sheep to be sent for slaughter, the person in charge must request sheep to be sent to the closest suitable abattoir so that they are transported for the least amount of time and for no longer than eight hours.
- E26 Where the closest abattoir is not used, a reason for the decision must be recorded.
- E27 Transport of sheep between farms must be as short as possible and not exceed eight hours.
- E28 Where transport during hot, humid weather conditions cannot be avoided, the person in charge must discuss heat stress prevention with the transport operator before loading. Measures may include reduced stocking density, transport during the coolest part of the day, avoiding delays and long stops.
- E29 Accurate transport records must be kept on farm and must include the:
- name and address of the final destination;
 - name of the transport company used for each journey;
 - number and approximate age of the sheep being transported for each journey;
 - time sheep last had access to green feed;
 - time sheep were yarded and when they were loaded;
 - number of animals unfit for transport, reasons why, and their fate; and
 - time the vehicle left the farm.
- E30 A copy of contingency plans that outline how animal welfare will be protected in case of an emergency whilst being transported (e.g. vehicle delay, mechanical breakdown, major accident/weather event) must be requested from transport operators. Where available, the plans must be accessible for viewing.

Transport is a highly stressful experience for sheep, therefore careful planning is required to minimise the risk of distress and injury. The timing of moving sheep into the yards for transport to slaughter should be well planned between the farmer, transporter, and abattoir where possible to minimise waiting times.

It is recommended to provide a comfortable surface, such as a grazed-out paddock, to allow sheep to lie down and rest prior to transport.

The angle of the on-farm loading ramp should not exceed 20 degrees for adult sheep.

It is recommended that all stockpersons involved in the sheep transportation process have formal training in animal handling where available and that they use the [Fit For Transport mobile app](#).

Emergency preparedness

- E31 An emergency preparedness (contingency) plan must be available, and all staff must be familiar with it.

The plan must clearly set out everyone's roles and responsibilities and must detail how the risks to sheep health and welfare will be minimised in an emergency (e.g. drought, flood, fire, storm, earthquake, biosecurity breach).

Access to comfortable and dry lying areas must be considered alongside general provisions for feed, water, shade/shelter, and health.

- E32 The emergency preparedness plan must be reviewed annually and updated where major changes in management practices have occurred or where an emergency has occurred.
- E33 Sheep must be inspected as soon as possible after any event that may impact animal welfare, provided it is safe to do so.
- E34 If sheep are kept off paddock for any reason (e.g. lambing or rearing) this must be documented. Details must include:
- the dates and duration of being kept off paddock;
 - details of the facilities (e.g. location, size, type);
 - the number of sheep; and
 - the reason for keeping sheep off paddock.

SPCA Certified does not support keeping sheep off paddock long-term. However, there may be circumstances where it is necessary or advantageous for animal welfare to do so for short periods (e.g. weak pre-weaned lambs or lambs without their dams, injured/diseased sheep, emergencies, or during extreme weather conditions that are beyond the animal's normal coping ability).

Good Health



Prevent or rapidly diagnose and treat disease and injury, and foster good muscle tone, posture, and cardiorespiratory function, for a healthy animal.

Animal Health Plan

- H1 A farm specific, and seasonally appropriate, animal health plan must be created and maintained in conjunction with a registered veterinarian (who visits the farm and sights the sheep at least annually). The plan must include:
- A preventative disease and parasite management programme covering footrot and lameness, flystrike, facial eczema, worm egg counts, vaccination and drench programmes, identification of any endemic diseases on farm (e.g. Johne's disease), etc.

- A process for monitoring mineral status.
- Provisions for isolation and care of sick and injured animals.
- A process for checking and recording health details of incoming sheep.
- A plan for the management of ill-thrift and common diseases/disorders (e.g. lameness, acidosis, staggers).
- An antimicrobial stewardship plan, including confirmation that antibiotics will only be used where they have been prescribed by a registered veterinarian for the treatment of a specific, diagnosed condition, disease, or injury.
- Provisions for pain relief for painful husbandry procedures, shearing injuries, and all painful conditions including, but not limited to, lameness, footrot, flystrike, prolapses, dystocia, mastitis, and pink eye.
- A process for monitoring and addressing issues associated with parturition and reproduction (e.g. dystocia, prolapses, pregnancy toxaemia, milk fever), and lamb health concerns (e.g. bloat, scouring, and pneumonia).
- Details on the weaning process (e.g. weaning start and end dates, weaning method, weaning weights).
- An end-of-life management plan including early identification of cull animals (proactive culling).
- A euthanasia plan that describes the euthanasia process in detail (e.g. equipment used and staff who are permitted to conduct euthanasia).

H2 All farm records and corrective actions concerning animal health and welfare must be available during audits.

H3 The animal health plan must be updated at least annually, after any major health or welfare incidents (e.g. a disease outbreak), or following significant changes to the production system.

In the case of an exotic disease being confirmed on farm this must be reported to SPCA Certified as soon as possible after alerting Biosecurity New Zealand.

H4 Sheep identified with health and welfare concerns must be treated immediately, clearly identified, and monitored as often as necessary, but at least daily.

H5 Unexpected deaths must be investigated and the following details recorded:

- the animal's identification (if available);
- the time and date when the animal was discovered; and
- the cause of death (where known).

The animal health plan referred to in this document may come from various sources (e.g. farm diary, online management programmes) and is not intended to duplicate already existing information.

The antimicrobial stewardship plan should include protocols addressing the usage, storage, and monitoring of antimicrobial treatments and a strategy for the reduction of their use. Protocols should be in line with the recommendations of the New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA) policy on judicious use of antimicrobials.

The use of wearable or remote technologies for monitoring the health and behaviour of animals is encouraged by SPCA Certified. However, it is not a replacement for close monitoring of animals by experienced and competent farm staff.

Inspection of animals

- H6 Sheep must be inspected regularly, and as often as necessary, to detect health and welfare concerns, such as lameness, injury, disease, distress, abnormal behaviour, or low body condition, and to ensure timely remedial action is taken.
- H7 Ewes identified at pregnancy scanning as carrying multiple lambs must be prioritised for inspection from the lead up to lambing and through to weaning.
- These ewes must be brought closer to the farmyards to allow for rapid intervention at lambing if needed.
- H8 Inspections around the time of lambing must be carried out from a distance and with a minimum of disturbance.
- H9 Sheep must be inspected at least daily during high-risk periods including:
- within four days of the expected lambing date;
 - during the first week after lambing;
 - for at least a week after weaning; and
 - during adverse weather that may negatively impact animal welfare.

The impact of pre-lambing inspections can be reduced by getting ewes used to inspections for a week prior to the expected start of lambing.

Animal identification

- H10 Animal identification procedures must be performed using equipment that is
- clean and disinfected between animals;
 - well-maintained;
 - in full working order; and
 - appropriate for the task.

- H11 Ear marking/notching is not permitted unless it is done using pain relief (e.g. during marking; topical anaesthetic).
- H12 Branding is not permitted.
- H13 Only one tag (metal or plastic) may be applied to each ear. The exception is where an RFID or EID tag is used in addition to a conventional tag, in which case, two tags per ear are permitted.
- H14 Staff inserting ear tags must follow the manufacturer's guidelines, avoid cartilage ridges and major blood vessels of the ear, and place tags to allow for growth of the ear.
- H15 Tags must be of an appropriate size to minimise the risk of injury to the eye when the ear is flicked.
- H16 Temporary identification methods (e.g. paints, dyes, and wax markers) may be used if they are specially formulated for use on animals.

The use of EID tags is recommended for enhanced biosecurity and health and performance monitoring of individual sheep.

Pain relief should be provided when tagging sheep. Tagging during marking is recommended, as post-operative pain relief is already required during these procedures.

Tagging wounds can take a long time to heal. Ear tags should be inspected regularly for up to 12 weeks post-tagging to allow treatment of any obvious infections.

Ram management

- H17 Rams must be in good body condition prior to mating, with a recommended BCS 3.5 - 4 (on a scale of 1 - 5).
- H18 Rams must be checked by a veterinarian or experienced and competent stockperson no more than eight weeks prior to mating to ensure that they are fit and in good health.
- H19 Rams must be monitored regularly during mating to detect potential health and welfare issues. If any problems are observed (e.g. lameness, ill health, lesions, inflammation, abnormal behaviour during mounting, excessive aggression between rams) the affected ram/s must be removed, treated as required, and the corrective action documented.
- H20 Ram harnesses, if used, must be fitted well and must not cause discomfort or injury. Rams fitted with harnesses must be inspected regularly (see Standard H6) and harnesses adjusted where necessary or removed if causing injury or discomfort.

Breeding

- H21 All on-farm breeding must consider trait selection that improves animal welfare. For example, improved foot and udder health, lambing ease, resistance to facial eczema and worms, reduced dag susceptibility, and selecting for shorter tails, reduced breech wrinkles, or a bare breech.
- H22 Where animal welfare problems related to the breeding programme are encountered, they must be recorded and the programme revised.
- H23 Hoggets selected for mating must be well-grown (i.e. at least 65 % of adult ewe weight), fed to support both the weight gain required for pregnancy and their own continued growth throughout gestation, and carefully observed around parturition.
- H24 Breeds of pedigree sheep that require high levels of intervention at parturition are not permitted.
- H25 Use of horned breeds is not permitted.
- H26 Only natural breeding and laparoscopic artificial insemination are permitted. Laparoscopic artificial insemination must only be done using sedation and pre-and post-operative pain relief.
- H27 The use of equine chorionic gonadotropin is not permitted.
- H28 Electroejaculation of rams is not permitted.
- H29 Vaginal prolapses must be cleaned, carefully treated, and equipment designed for the purpose must be used (e.g. bearing retainers). Affected ewes must be monitored regularly to prevent or address any complications.
- H30 Ewes that have experienced a vaginal prolapse must not be bred from again.
- H31 Where lambing assistance is required, obstetric lubricant must be used, and ewes must be given non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs) pain relief.

It is strongly recommended to use breeds that do not require tail docking.

Pharmaceutical use

- H32 Pharmaceuticals must be administered in accordance with veterinary advice.
- H33 All pharmaceuticals must be kept in secure, lockable storage and an up-to-date list of all pharmaceuticals used on farm must be kept and made available for inspection.
- H34 Pharmaceuticals must be:
 - administered as per the manufacturer's guidelines on the label;

- in-date and safely discarded after the expiration date;
- licensed for use in New Zealand unless authorised by a registered veterinarian;
- dispensed at accurate dosages (i.e. accurate assessment of live weight is required); and
- administered with equipment that is fit for purpose.

H35 Up-to-date records must be kept for all treatments administered to sheep, including:

- pharmaceutical name, administration method, and dose rate;
- reason for administration and the result of treatment;
- name of prescribing veterinarian;
- date(s) administered;
- withholding period; and
- animal identification (if available).

Painful husbandry procedures

- H36 All sheep must be given appropriate pain relief to minimise pain and distress when performing painful husbandry procedures (i.e. dehorning, tail docking, and castration). Post-operative pain relief must be long-acting (i.e. at least 48 hours).
- H37 Staff undertaking painful husbandry procedures must only do so in accordance with the relevant animal welfare regulations and must be able to recognise the early signs of distress, injury, or ill-health in the sheep being handled.
- H38 Painful husbandry procedures must only be performed on lambs older than 24 hours to ensure they have established a secure bond with their dams, and where sheep can be expected to make a full recovery.
- H39 During painful husbandry procedures, sheep must be restrained carefully (see Standards B1-B3) and appropriately sedated (where required), so they do not injure themselves or other sheep.
- H40 All equipment used for painful husbandry procedures must be clean, well-maintained, in full working order, and appropriate for the procedure.
- H41 Once the painful husbandry procedure is completed, lambs must be able to mother up quickly (e.g. keeping animals in smaller paddocks immediately after the procedure).
- H42 Sheep must be visually assessed at least twice during the 24 hours following painful husbandry procedures and remedial action must be taken if problems occur.
- H43 Records must be kept of all painful procedures carried out. Records must include:
- the type of procedure performed;
 - the date performed;
 - the animal ID (if available);
 - the type(s) of pain relief provided; and
 - the initials of the person performing the procedure.

Horn removal

Note: While the use of horned breeds is not permitted under the SPCA Certified sheep standards, should any sheep grow horns, the following standards apply.

- H44 Horn tipping is only permitted where necessary to protect sheep welfare and only if cutting into the sensitive tissue of the horn can be prevented.
- H45 Where horn removal is deemed necessary (i.e. the horn is likely to cause injury or damage to the sheep itself and tipping is not an option), the procedure must be conducted by a registered veterinarian using sedation and pre- and post-operative pain relief (e.g. local anaesthetic and long-acting NSAIDs).

Castration

- H46 Castration is only permitted for lambs that are destined for slaughter after six months of age or after reaching sexual maturity.
- H47 Castration must only be done using rubber rings designed for the purpose or by shortening the scrotum. It must be done between two and six weeks of age, but preferably as early as possible and practical within that period.
- H48 Pre-and post-operative pain relief (i.e. local anaesthetic and NSAIDs) must be used for castrating lambs.
- H49 Surgical castration is not permitted unless undertaken by a registered veterinarian using sedation and pre-and post-operative pain relief.

Lambs should only be castrated when uncontrolled breeding cannot be prevented by any other management practices.

Tail docking

- H50 Tail docking must only be performed following prior discussion and approval by SPCA Certified.
- H51 Where permitted, tail docking of lambs must be done using either a hot iron or rubber ring specifically designed for the purpose. It must be done between two and six weeks of age, but preferably as early as possible and practical within that period.
- H52 Appropriate pain relief must be used when tail docking lambs.
- H53 Tails must be docked to an appropriate length, with the remaining tail stump fully covering the vulva in females and a similar length in males.

For more information around appropriate tail length see the MPI tail-docking leaflet [The bottom line on tail-docking](#).

Shearing, dagging, and crutching

- H54 Sheep must be shorn as frequently as necessary to mitigate animal health and welfare concerns, but at a minimum sheep must be fully shorn annually.
- H55 Shearing must be carried out with clean, well-maintained equipment.
- H56 All cuts or wounds resulting from shearing must be cleaned, disinfected, and treated as required to safeguard the welfare of the animal. Pain relief (e.g. topical anaesthetic, NSAIDs) must be provided.
- H57 A registered veterinarian must be consulted for moderate and major shearing wounds (see [Appendix 2](#) for more detail). Affected sheep must be monitored regularly to prevent complications.
- H58 A record of moderate and major shearing wounds must be kept and repeat occurrences must be investigated and remedial action must be taken to prevent further incidents.
- H59 Time off feed prior to shearing must be kept to a minimum and not exceed 24 hours except for lambs and pregnant ewes, where it must not exceed 12 hours.
- H60 Withholding water prior to shearing must be minimised and must not exceed 12 hours.
- H61 Sheep must be provided with free access to good quality feed, water, and effective shelter immediately after shearing.
- H62 Where weather conditions are such that shearing could compromise sheep welfare (i.e. cold, wet, and windy weather), winter or cover combs must be used and sheep must be provided with additional feed and appropriate shelter for at least four weeks after shearing to mitigate the loss of insulation from the shorn fleece.
- H63 Winter shearing must only be carried out following prior discussion with, and approval by, SPCA Certified.
- H64 Shearing is not permitted within six weeks of planned lambing.

It is the responsibility of the farmer to ensure that shearing contractors comply with the law and the SPCA Certified Sheep Standards. Members may consider the presence of an experienced farm staff member at shearing, or the installation of CCTV, for this purpose.

Farmers should review weather forecasts prior to shearing to ensure shorn sheep are not exposed to prolonged periods of adverse weather.

SPCA Certified does not permit shearing within six weeks of planned lambing (i.e. in late pregnancy) due to the negative impacts of fasting on the increased metabolic requirements of heavily pregnant ewes and their greater susceptibility to extreme weather conditions. However, mid-pregnancy shearing is permitted, as this can increase lamb survival and ewe welfare.

For best practice advice on shearing cuts visit the [Beef and Lamb NZ Knowledge Hub](#).

Hoof care

H65 A hoof care management plan must be in place to minimise prevalence of foot rot and to manage lameness at the flock level below 5 %.

The plan must set out:

- a monitoring schedule (i.e. regular foot scoring, monitoring for lameness);
- preventative measures (e.g. foot rot vaccination, footbaths);
- appropriate biosecurity measures to reduce spread of foot rot (e.g. isolation and treatment of affected animals);
- appropriate treatment of affected sheep;
- required actions where seasonal lameness exceeds 5 %; and
- a breeding and culling policy.

H66 Where sheep require treatment for lameness, this must be done as soon as possible to prevent unnecessary suffering.

H67 Routine hoof trimming (paring) to prevent footrot, and hoof trimming as a sole method to treat footrot, are not permitted.

H68 Where hoof trimming is deemed necessary for welfare reasons (e.g. addressing abnormal or excessive growth, treating abscesses, improving effectiveness of footrot treatments), it must be done:

- with equipment that is well-maintained and disinfected between each use to reduce potential cross-contamination between feet and animals; and
- only lightly so as not to draw blood or injure the hoof.

Foot scoring of sheep helps to identify problems and individuals requiring treatment, as well as to better target foot health interventions. Special attention should be paid to any sheep with 'sore feet', especially in relation to the possibility of footrot.

Regular monitoring for lameness, especially during high risk periods, will help to identify and treat affected sheep in a timely fashion.

Routine hoof trimming (i.e. regular trimming of sound hooves or trimming for cosmetic reasons) is not effective in preventing footrot. Trimming is also not effective in treating footrot and may increase the spread of footrot. Overtrimming increases the risk of lameness and injury.

The use of a footbath to treat Interdigital Dermatitis (ID) and other surface level infections is recommended, along with regular monitoring of foot condition to check for dry or cracked hooves as a result of treatment.

Euthanasia and planned on-farm killing

H69 Euthanasia must be performed where:

- there is likely to be an unacceptable delay in treating an animal's source of suffering;
- the animal is failing to respond to treatment;

- the source of suffering is unknown, untreatable, or severe; or
- transporting the animal for any reason would aggravate the condition or cause unnecessary pain or distress.

H70 There must be a robust process in place around the decision to kill/euthanise animals, including seeking veterinary advice on whether treatment is possible or if euthanasia is required where there is any doubt on how to proceed. Responsible staff must be named in the animal health plan.

H71 All sheep to be killed/euthanised must be handled and restrained (where required) with care, in a manner that does not cause unnecessary pain, fear, or distress.

Where there is no risk to human safety, animals to be euthanised must be killed where they are found and must not be dragged, pulled, lifted, or otherwise moved while still alive.

H72 Sheep must be immediately rendered insensible (i.e. achieve insensibility quickly and on first attempt) using either a penetrative captive bolt or shot to the head, which must be followed within fifteen seconds by a secondary procedure (e.g. pithing, bleeding out, secondary shot) to ensure death.

If an animal shows any sign of regaining consciousness, the above must be repeated immediately. (see [Appendix 3](#) for more details)

H73 The killing/euthanasia method chosen must be appropriate for the sheep (i.e. method may vary depending on factors such as age and sex).

H74 Blunt force trauma is not permitted.

H75 There must always be one person available to undertake euthanasia of sheep in a timely manner.

H76 All equipment used for killing/euthanasia must be maintained in correct working order and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Equipment, as well as relevant servicing reports (where appropriate), must be available for inspection.

H77 Staff killing/euthanising animals must remain with the animal until they can confirm that the animal is dead. The signs of death in sheep include:

- a complete lack of the corneal reflex;
- a complete lack of breathing for five minutes;
- a complete lack of heartbeat for five minutes;
- fixed and dilated pupils;
- no response when the nose is firmly pinched; and
- a change in the colour of the mucous membranes, from pink to grey.

H78 For on-farm killing and euthanasia, the details recorded must include:

- the animal's identification (if available);
- the reason for and method of killing/euthanasia, including any veterinary advice received;
- the time and date when the animal was discovered (where relevant), and when the animal was killed;
- the staff involved; and
- the method used to restrain animal (if required).

Nothing outlined in this section is intended to discourage the prompt diagnosis and treatment of any sick or injured sheep.

It is recommended that a minimum of two members of farm staff are trained and competent in appropriate euthanasia techniques and that a backup plan is in place should they be unavailable to ensure animals can be euthanised in a timely manner, preventing unnecessary pain and suffering.

It is recommended that all staff are familiar with the contents of the [NZ Merino and Beef and Lamb NZ Humane Slaughter Guidelines](#).

Biosecurity

- H79 Any new stock bought onto the farm must be quarantined for a minimum of 14 days before being introduced into the existing flock.
- H80 A detailed biosecurity plan must be available to view. Staff must be familiar with and able to access this information. As a minimum, the plan must address the following requirements:
- the identification of all farm visitors (e.g. visitors book, software and mobile Apps);
 - the provision of personal protective equipment for staff and visitors;
 - sanitary facilities (e.g. hand washing facilities, area to clean and disinfect boots, tools, machinery); and
 - the cleaning, sanitation, waste, and carcass removal procedures.
- H81 Pest control programmes must employ humane control methods, including (where relevant) physical exclusion and limiting access to food and nesting sites by maintaining sheds and the area around sheds in a clean and tidy condition.

Lethal control methods (i.e. traps and poisons) must only be used as a last resort, and in accordance with relevant legislation.

The extent of the pest problem must be assessed at least annually to determine if lethal control is still warranted.

To minimise the risk of disease, it is recommended that farms do not share pastures or facilities.

A plan to discourage non-targeted animals from engaging with traps and poisons, if used, should be in place.

Where lethal control is deemed necessary, traps that have passed standardised welfare performance testing should be used in preference to other traps and poisons. A list of traps that have passed standardised welfare performance testing is available on [Bionet.NZ](#) (under Welfare Performance of Animal Traps).

Appropriate Behavioural Interactions



Provide sufficient space, proper facilities, congenial company, and appropriately varied conditions.

Low-stress handling of sheep

- B1 All sheep operations must have access to equipment and facilities appropriate to the size of the sheep (e.g. age, breed) and for the safe handling, restraint, treatment, segregation, loading, and unloading of sheep.
- B2 Equipment and facilities must be fit for purpose and constructed, operated, and maintained in a way that minimises the risk of illness, injury, or distress to both sheep and stockpersons.

This includes, but is not limited to, non-slip surfaces, the ability of sheep to move freely and comfortably, and ensuring that noise from equipment and facilities (e.g. gates, latches, and swinging chains), as well as from people and dogs, is kept to a minimum during handling and movement.
- B3 Sheep must be handled, restrained, and moved in a calm and gentle manner, taking sheep behaviour into consideration. (see [Appendix 4](#))
- B4 Sheep must be moved at the pace of the slowest animal in the flock.
- B5 On arrival at the yards or handling facilities, sheep must be allowed enough time (at least 20 minutes) to settle before being drafted or before husbandry procedures are undertaken.
- B6 Sheep must only be held on their sides or back for a few minutes at a time, especially if the rumen is full or if they are heavily pregnant.

- B7 Handling sheep roughly or dragging/pulling, moving, or lifting them by their wool or any other part of their body is not permitted.
- B8 Dogs must be well-trained, always kept under effective control, and must not be permitted to cause physical injury to sheep.
- B9 Dogs must not be used with sick and injured sheep, ewes close to lambing, or young lambs.

Social environment

- B10 Sourcing and selling sheep at saleyards is not permitted.
- B11 Sheep must be kept in stable social groups throughout their lives, including, where possible, during weaning. 🐏
- B12 Where movement between social groups is necessary (i.e. to protect animal welfare), sheep must be moved in pairs or small groups.
- B13 Sheep that have to be isolated (e.g. due to injury/disease) must be kept with at least one companion or must be able to see, smell, and hear other sheep.

SPCA Certified would prefer to see all sheep produced under this standard only moved off the farm for slaughter. In other words, that they are born, raised, and live out their productive lives on the same property. Sheep moved to another property will no longer be covered under SPCA Certified unless the receiving farm is also an SPCA Certified member.

SPCA Certified does not permit sourcing or selling sheep through saleyards due to multiple loading and unloading events, an unsuitable environment (e.g. a lack of adequate space and shelter, mixing of unfamiliar animals), and restricted access to feed and water, all of which are particularly concerning in the absence of a Code of Welfare to specifically safeguard the welfare of animals at saleyards.

Weaning

- B14 Unless the survival of the ewe or lamb is at risk, lambs must be at least three months of age before being weaned off their dam.

If weaning occurs earlier, the reason must be recorded.
- B15 During weaning, lambs must be moved to an area they are familiar with and which has not been recently grazed out by other sheep. They must have access to shade and shelter and familiar high-quality feed.

It is strongly recommended that lambs are kept with their dams until natural weaning occurs.

Low-stress weaning methods (e.g. creep weaning, fence-line weaning) are recommended where natural weaning is not practised.

Physical environment

- B16 Sheep must be provided with sufficient space to perform normal behaviours including grazing, foraging, walking, lying in extended positions, grooming, separating for lambing, and withdrawing from aggressive interactions.

Space must also be sufficient to prevent competition for resources and to allow for synchronous behaviours (i.e. all sheep are able to graze or lie down at the same time).

- B17 Sheep must have access to soft, compressible surfaces that are dry (i.e. surfaces do not become increasingly muddy and are free from surface water), so they can lie and rest comfortably for as long as they choose to.

During winter, it is recommended that sheep are scored for cleanliness on a regular basis to ensure that their lying areas are comfortable and dry, and that remedial action can be taken if very dirty sheep are seen.

Behavioural enrichment

- B18 All pastures must contain suitable enrichment for sheep (e.g. trees, tree stumps, hedging, elevated areas).

Provision of physical barriers, including hay or straw bales, encourages sheep to perform normal behaviours, such as hiding, avoiding unwanted social interactions, and play.

Additional foraging material (e.g. fodder) can provide behavioural enrichment by allowing sheep to perform natural manipulation, browsing, and investigatory behaviours. The planting of trees, particularly natives, that are safe for sheep and can be used for fodder is recommended.

Managers, stockpersons, and other staff

- B19 Manager(s) must ensure that all staff directly involved with sheep have access to, are familiar with, and adhere to the relevant legislation, Codes of Welfare, and the most recent version of the SPCA Certified sheep standards.

- B20 Staff must have a good understanding of low-stress handling methods and sheep behaviour, and a good working knowledge of the health and husbandry of sheep.
- B21 Staff and external workers must only carry out tasks that they have been trained in and are competent in performing, including, but not limited to:
- body condition scoring;
 - flock inspections;
 - identification procedures;
 - administration of pharmaceuticals;
 - painful husbandry procedures (where undertaken);
 - shearing;
 - hoof care including trimming where necessary; and
 - killing/euthanasia.

A full list of relevant knowledge and competencies for stockpersons and other staff working with the sheep are listed in [Appendix 5](#).

- B22 Formal animal health and husbandry training (e.g. technical training programmes and workshops), where available and appropriate for the position, must be offered for up-skilling staff.
- B23 Staff who are undergoing training must work in conjunction with fully trained, competent, and experienced stockpersons until they are fully trained and competent themselves.
- B24 All staff training records must be available to view.
- B25 The farm must have a written animal welfare complaints policy or relevant information contained within staff contracts that:
- states the actions to be taken should an employee be found to be negligent in their role in relation to animal welfare; and
 - encourages employees to report any concerns they have regarding actions or situations that negatively impact sheep welfare.
- B26 Where a complaint is made under the animal welfare complaints policy, this must be investigated immediately, and any problems must be rectified without delay to safeguard animal welfare.
- B27 Owners, managers, stockpersons, and other staff working directly with the animals must not have had a conviction for animal welfare offences.

The initial and continued training of staff working with sheep is important in promoting a high standard of animal welfare, as is the ability to demonstrate and practise positive and compassionate animal handling.

Where available, formal animal welfare training, including low-stress handling methods, is recommended for all staff working with sheep.

Any serious animal welfare complaints or Animal Welfare Act breaches on farm must be reported directly to the Ministry for Primary Industries animal welfare complaints hotline at 0800 0083 33 and SPCA Certified notified as soon as possible.

<END OF STANDARDS>

Appendix 1:

Records required

Records	Standard	Description
Seasonal		
Body Condition Score	N7	Score at least three times a year. Note areas of concern and remedial action taken.
Annual		
Animal health plan	H1 & H2	Record: • Preventative disease and parasite management plans (e.g. vaccinations and drench programmes) • Monitoring of mineral status • Provision for isolation and care of sick and injured animals • Biosecurity precautions – incoming animals • Management of all common diseases/ disorders • Antimicrobial stewardship plan • Pain management plan • Monitoring and addressing issues associated with parturition, reproduction, lamb health, and weaning • Euthanasia plan Health and welfare records available at inspection.
Animal health plan	H3	Review annually and update as necessary (i.e. after major events).
Biosecurity plan	H80	Review and update as necessary.
Breeding plan	H21 & H22	Record impacts and revise as necessary.
Emergency preparedness plan	E31	Review and update as necessary.
Feed supply plan	N2	Review and update as necessary. Assess animal welfare risks regularly.

Hoof care management plan	H65	Review and update as necessary.
Mineral supplementation programme	N5	Review and update as necessary.
Pest control plan	H81	Review at least annually where lethal control options are used and update programme as necessary.
Every three years		
Water quality	N14	Salinity, bacteria, and mineral content. Retain lab reports for inspection.
Other		
Animal welfare complaints policy	B25	Policy in place.
Equipment servicing reports	H76	Report available for inspection where service undertaken.
Euthanasia & unexpected deaths (every occurrence)	H78 & H5	Record: • animal ID; • reason and method; • time and date; • time of death; • vet advice (if given); • staff involved; and • any restraint used. For unexpected deaths, record cause of death if known.
Keeping sheep/lambs off paddock (every occurrence)	E34	Record: • the dates and duration of being kept off paddock; • details of the facilities (e.g. location, size, type); • the number of sheep; and • the reason for keeping sheep off paddock.

Lamb fostering plan	N17	Plan in place and available for inspection.
Lamb rearing plan	N18	Plan in place and available for inspection.
Off-label drug use (every occurrence)	H33 & H34	Retain veterinary declaration for each off-label use.
Painful husbandry procedures (every occurrence)	H43	Record: • name of procedure; • date; • animal ID; • type of pain relief provided; and • initials of operator.
Pharmaceutical use (every occurrence)	H34 & H35	Record: • drug name; • prescribing veterinarian; • administration method; • dose; • reason for treatment; • date(s) of treatment; • result of treatment; • withholding period; and • animal ID.
Ram management	H19	Record corrective action taken for any ram with problems during mating.
Shearing injuries	H58	Record of shearing injuries available for inspection.
Site plan	E1	Must be available for inspection.
Staff training	B24	Record: • name of staff member; • date and type of training; and • any qualification received. Retain training records for inspection.
Tail docking (every occurrence)	H50	Retain copy of SPCA approval for inspection where applicable.

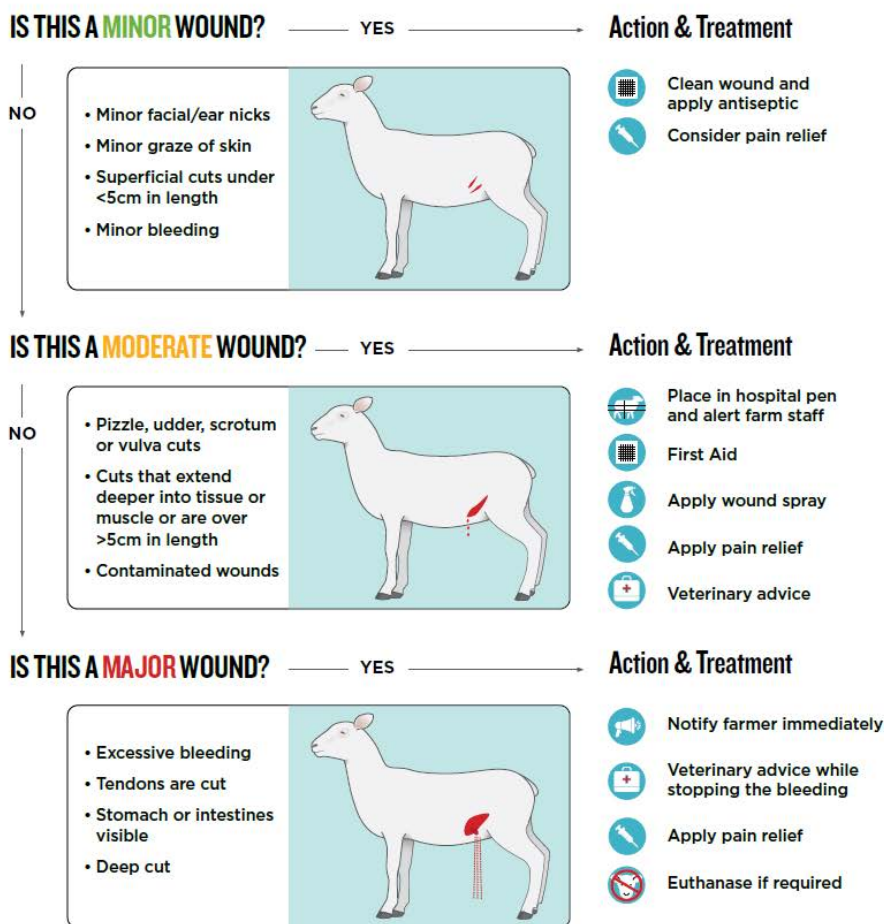
Transport contingency plan	E30	Requested from transport operator and copy for inspection if available.
Transport fitness consult	E9	Record of veterinary advice kept and available for inspection.
Transport records (every occurrence)	E29	Record: • name and address of destination/abattoir; • name of transport company; • number and age of sheep; • time when green feed was withdrawn; • time of yarding and loading; • number of animals unfit for transport (and reason why and their fate); and • time of departure.
Treatment records	H2, H4 & H42	Retain records for treatment and management of diseases, injuries, etc.
Water testing – new source	N15	Test every new source that is not town water before animals get access.
Weaning early	B14	Records available for inspection for each occurrence and reasons provided.
Winter shearing (every occurrence)	H63	Retain SPCA approval for inspection where applicable.

Appendix 2:

Sheep shearing wound protocol

Reproduced with permission from the NZVA Sheep and Beef Special Interest Branch Committee.

Please note that under the current SPCA Certified sheep standards (i.e. Standard H56), pain relief is required for all wounds, including minor ones.



Vet clinic contact details _____
Authorised pain relief _____
Wound spray products _____



Appendix 3:

Signs of insensibility

Both penetrative captive bolts and firearms need to be positioned correctly to be effective in inducing insensibility. For the optimum position for euthanasia using a free-bullet and captive bolt see the relevant section in the [Code of Welfare – Sheep and Beef Cattle 2018](#).

The operator needs to confirm the animal has been rendered insensible before bleeding out or pithing occurs to ensure the animal remains insensible until death.

The signs of insensibility include:

- immediate animal collapse;
- a lack of normal, rhythmic breathing or vocalisation;
- a lack of corneal reflex (no blinking when the eye is touched);
- no attempt to lift the head; and
- no attempt to regain an upright position.

Appendix 4:

Sheep handling while considering sheep behaviour

The 2015 UK publication, [Improving sheep handling for better returns](#), provides a useful summary of key sheep behaviour to consider when handling sheep and highlights the importance of animal-centred designs for facilities.

Appendix 5:

Relevant health and husbandry knowledge and competencies when caring for sheep

Specific to their area of work and responsibilities, staff must be able to demonstrate a good working knowledge of the health and husbandry of sheep.

This includes:

- having knowledge of sheep behaviour;
- recognising normal and abnormal behaviour, including fear and distress;
- recognising the signs of common diseases, understanding their prevention and control, and knowing when to seek management or veterinary support;
- recognising the signs of pain and injury in sheep and lambs, and knowing how to manage them appropriately and when to euthanise;
- being competent in performing euthanasia where required, including appropriately applying the method (e.g. placement, calibre used), ensuring its effectiveness in causing immediate insensibility, ensuring the animal does not recover, and killing the animal;
- having an understanding of lameness assessment;
- understanding low-stress handling and loading techniques including the use of appropriate facilities and equipment for moving sheep and lambs;
- understanding the principles of good nutrition for sheep and lambs and how to assess feed conditions;
- being able to assess pasture quality and quantity;
- understanding and being able to body condition score sheep;
- having knowledge of lambing, lambing issues, and the care of newborn lambs including the ability to identify risks associated with lambing; and
- having knowledge of painful husbandry procedures and appropriate methods used to reduce acute and chronic pain and suffering.



Contact

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