

Voluntary Code of Practice for managing sheep in Tasmania without prescription under the *Animal Farming (Registration) Act 1994*.

Background

Sheep management in Tasmania has been influenced by legislation to varying degrees but in recent times a philosophy of minimal legislative controls has prevailed. This means that responsibility and ownership for issues such as lice control are placed on the sheep owner rather than a third party. Sheep management in Tasmania is currently influenced by the following four Acts:

Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1995 (No. 106 of 1995)

Animal (Brands and Movement) Act 1984 (No. 14 of 1984)

Animal Farming (Registration) Act 1994 (No. 11 of 1994)

Animal Health Act 1995 (No. 85 of 1995)

All contemporary legislation needs to comply with the *Competition Principles Agreement* as well as delivering a net benefit to the community whereby any negative impacts are minimised and justified as being unavoidable to meet the objective of the regulation.

After considerable stakeholder consultation and professional advice it has been concluded that prescription of sheep breeds under the *Animal Farming (Registration) Act 1994 (No. 11 of 1994)* does not comply with contemporary legislation best practice. As a consequence the Minister for Primary Industries and Water has agreed to progress legislative changes that will remove all sheep breeds from prescription under the above legislation. As part of the consultation process it was agreed that a voluntary code of practice would be developed to guide the management of sheep on Tasmanian properties.

Principles

The principle of this code is to minimise the risk of any one sheep enterprise negatively impacting on another. The code therefore does not address issues associated with individual animal or flock production, or matters (such as animal health and welfare) covered by the above legislation or other codes of practice such as the *Australian Model Code of practice for the Welfare of Animals – Sheep 2006*.

As this is a voluntary code of practice, there is no legislative incentive for it to be adopted. There is however a moral incentive to ensure the activities and pursuits undertaken by a business do not negatively impact, within the bounds of free market economics, on the ability of another business to undertake its desired direction. In essence it is all about individuals taking responsibility for their decisions as well as recognising and addressing the risks of impacting on others.

Elements of the Code

1. Fundamentals

Effective communication, taking personal responsibility and planning are fundamental components of any business.

i. **Communication**

Sheep managers and owners recognise that effective communication between neighbours and other appropriate parties such as livestock agents is fundamental to minimising business risks.

Sheep managers and owners will make every effort to inform prospective purchasers of their sheep of the existence of this Code of Practice.

ii. **Responsibility**

Sheep managers and owners have an obligation to undertake due diligence on the breed or cross-breed of sheep that they intend to farm, and to ensure that they are fully aware of the various characteristics of the breed(s) or cross-breed(s) in their sheep enterprise.

Sheep managers and owners recognise that they must take responsibility for ensuring the risk of their sheep enterprise negatively impacting on that of a neighbour or another business is minimised. They also recognise that responsibility for ensuring the risk of another sheep enterprise negatively impacting on their business is also minimised by them adopting the appropriate strategies.

iii. **Planning**

Planning is a fundamental component of managing risk. This may be as simple as planning sheep movements so the time a flock shares a boundary with a neighbouring flock is minimised, to developing a whole farm biosecurity and risk management plan.

2. Specifics

i. **Breeds**

Sheep owners will communicate to their immediate neighbours the breed(s) of sheep being farmed on their property to minimise any potential for individual business risk.

ii. **Boundary fences**

Property boundary fences must be maintained in a sheep-proof condition as a joint responsibility of neighbours under provisions of the ***Boundary Fences Act (1908)***.

iii. **Pests and diseases**

Sheep owners and managers will notify neighbours of potentially communicable ovine pests and/or diseases of concern as soon as practical following their identification.

iv. **Escaping stock**

Sheep owners and managers will notify the person responsible for sheep that have incurred onto a property as soon as practical following their discovery. The incurring animals can then be dealt with according to a mutually agreed policy.

v. Meaningful breed descriptions

Sheep owners will provide sufficient information in sale descriptions and vendor declarations so the breed of the animals can be clearly determined. Indefinite descriptors such as 'crossbred' will not be used.

vi. Wool description

All wool offered for sale will be described and placed in bales branded according to the ***Code of Practice for Preparation of Australian Wool Clips*** to accurately reflect the risk it poses as a source of dark and medullated fibre contamination. Wool producers are encouraged to use the Dark and Medullated Fibre Risk (DMFR) scheme.

vii. Buyer beware

Whilst open and honest disclosure of characteristics of sheep offered for sale is encouraged, it is recognised that it is the responsibility of prospective purchasers to undertake the due diligence necessary to enable them to make an informed purchase decision.