

Animal Welfare Guidelines for Animals in Poor Condition – Sheep and Cattle (March 2012)

NT Fact sheet last updated: 1 July 2012

Animals may be in poor condition because of drought, poor season, neglect or other reasons. Drought or poor seasonal conditions will usually affect many properties whereas neglect or mismanagement will usually involve only one property at a time. When feed supplies are not limiting, individual animals may be in poor condition for various reasons. Although the following guidelines apply primarily to drought or poor seasonal conditions, they can also be applied to other circumstances such as mismanagement or neglect that result in animals being in poor condition.

Agency response

In the event of a widespread or prolonged dry season, the State or Territory agency responsible for agriculture, together with industry representatives, needs to mount a targeted extension campaign to meet the information needs of livestock producers. This should include as a minimum; management options, feed and water requirements, animal welfare information and sources of further information including counselling services. Planning and early action are key issues.

Animal welfare

- It is the responsibility of property managers to ensure the welfare of their livestock as seasonal conditions deteriorate.
- It is essential that plans are in place to adequately manage the welfare of livestock in deteriorating seasonal conditions.
- Transport of livestock should be undertaken before animals' body condition deteriorates to a stage where their welfare would be endangered during the transport.
- Where feed and water requirements for livestock are not being met due to a poor season, owners must (i) supply supplementary feed, and/or (ii) agist or sell stock that are fit to travel, and (iii) humanely destroy stock that are unfit to travel and cannot be treated.

Allowing animals to lose condition to the point where their strength is significantly impaired could constitute an offence under animal welfare legislation.

It is not acceptable to allow animals to starve to death.

Criteria for destruction on property

Where other reasonable management options have been carefully considered, some animals may require humane destruction on property. It is strongly recommended that animals are humanely destroyed if they are in high risk categories as described in tables 1 and 2, and they 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;
- The animals cannot be closely monitored;
- It is uneconomical or not possible to transport, sell or feed due to circumstances.

Only load fit animals

Livestock should be transported before their condition deteriorates to the extent that transport may compromise their welfare. When deciding to agist or sell stock, first assess whether or not they are fit to transport. Do not transport livestock if they are not fit for the intended journey. Owners or transporters who load unfit animals could face prosecution for cruelty under animal welfare legislation.

Managers must plan the journey carefully and make suitable allowances for drought affected stock. Managers must adequately prepare stock prior to transport. For stock in poor condition this may involve time on good quality feed to bring their strength and vigour to a suitable level. Truck drivers may have to load at lower densities to suit the condition of the stock.

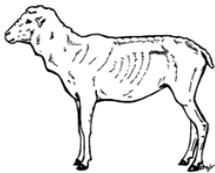
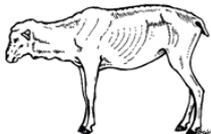
Before loading any animal for transport, ensure that it:

- √ can bear weight on all legs
- √ is not severely emaciated
- √ is not visibly dehydrated
- √ is free from visible signs of severe injury or distress
- √ is free from conditions that are likely to cause increased pain or distress during transport
- √ can see out of at least one eye
- √ is not known to be, or visually assessed to be within 2 weeks of parturition unless the water deprivation time and journey is less than 4 hours duration

If you are not sure whether the animals are fit or not, do not load them. If animals are assessed as being unfit for transport, owners must either feed on site until they are stronger or humanely destroy them.

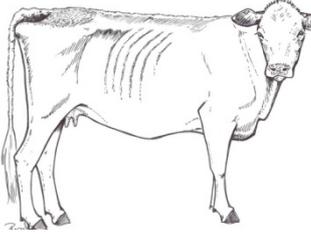
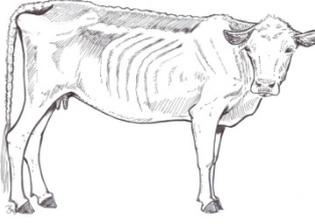
The pocket guide, *Is it fit to load?*, outlines some of the conditions that make an animal unfit to load. This guide is available free from www.mla.com.au. The Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals: Land Transport of Livestock is at www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/

Table 1: Welfare decisions for sheep

Sheep condition	At risk	High risk 1	High risk 2
			
General description	Lean but strong and healthy, with limited muscle wastage. Reduced reproductive performance likely.	Significant muscle wastage. Unlikely to conceive. At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress. Recovery is dependent on high quality care.	Weak with extremely low body reserves. Animal is recumbent. At point of death.
Backbone	Visible.	Spines of backbone identifiable.	Spines of backbone easily identifiable.
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	Stifle joint not identifiable.	Stifle joint not identifiable.	Stifle joint identifiable.
Tail bones	Individual bones not identifiable.	Individual bones just able to be felt.	Individual bones easily felt.
Appearance	Bright, alert.	Able to stand but listless, dull.	Lacking energy, dull and listless, recumbent, may not be able to raise head off the ground.
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
Critical issues			
Lambing requirements & risks associated with lambing	Some assistance required, high possibility of losing lamb during birth or on first day after birth. High possibility of pregnancy toxaemia and/or hypocalcaemia. Separate pregnant animals within this condition score range and care for and feed a high energy supplement separately. Necessary to seek advice on adequate feeding from a professional (e.g. veterinarian, Development Officer).	Will need a lot of assistance – ewe and lamb may not survive. Very high possibility of pregnancy toxaemia.	Extremely unlikely that lamb and ewe will survive lambing.
Transport, sale	Suitable for transport and sale but with minimum time off feed.	Unsuitable for sale through saleyards or transport over long distances.	Cannot travel.
Action required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be fed adequately to prevent further weight loss. • Suitable for transport to agistment. • Suitable for sale but must not be kept off feed or water for extended periods. • 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. • Not suitable for transport over long distances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destroy on-farm or seek veterinary assistance to do so.

Acknowledgement: derived from Primefact 1003 (March 2010) Welfare decisions for sheep, Industry and Investment, Government of NSW. www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/sheep/health/other/welfare-decisions

Table 2: Welfare decisions for beef cows

Cow condition	At risk	High risk 1	High risk 2
			
Description	Lean but strong and healthy and with noticeable muscle wastage. Reduced reproductive performance likely.	Healthy but with significant muscle wastage. Unlikely to conceive. Able to recover in time if adequately fed.	Weak, with very low body reserves. At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress. Recovery dependent on high quality care and will be slow.
Backbone	Easily seen.	Spines of backbone individually identifiable.	Spines of backbone individually identifiable.
Short ribs	Visible. Fairly sharp to touch	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 (between hooks and pins).	Rump muscle concave. Muscle wastage in loin and leg muscle evident.	Muscle wastage obvious over whole body. Rump and leg muscles deeply concave.
Stifle joint		Stifle joint not identifiable	Stifle joint identifiable
Tail bones	Individual bones not identifiable.	Individual bones just able to be felt.	Individual bones easily felt.
Skin	Pliable.	Less pliable.	Tight.
Appearance	Bright, alert.	Healthy.	Lacking energy or dull.
Mobility	Normal gait.	Mobile, able to lie down/rise	Unsteady gait, may drag hind feet or plait hind legs. Difficulty lying down/standing up.
Ability to calve	Some assistance required.	Moderate assistance required.	High level of assistance required.
Transport, sale	Suitable for transport and sale but with minimum time off feed	Unsuitable for sale through saleyards or transport over long distances	Not fit to travel
Actions required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be fed adequately to prevent further weight loss. • Suitable for transport to agistment. • Suitable for sale but must not be kept off feed for extended periods. • Supervise and be ready to assist during calving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be fed adequately to prevent weight loss. • Suitable for transport direct to agistment. • Suitable for sale only direct to farm or abattoir with appropriate management. • Supervise closely and be ready to assist during calving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not transport. • Must be given high-quality feed, water and care; OR • Destroy on farm. • Supervise closely and be ready to assist during calving.

Acknowledgement: derived from Primefact 619 (May 2007) Welfare decisions for beef cows, Industry and Investment, Government of NSW

Intervention Guidelines

The proposed decision criteria below shows three levels, based on what a reasonable person would do in the circumstances to address the needs of the animal/s in situations of compromised animal welfare. Note — the levels are not based on the degree (severity) of compromised animal welfare or the number of animals affected.

No Issue

The welfare of the animal/s is not compromised.

Low-Level Risk - Advice Only

This category includes those cases where the welfare of the animal/s is compromised but the management of the situation is consistent with what would be expected of a reasonable person to address the welfare needs of the animal/s in the circumstances. The situation/circumstances may also be present on other properties in the district or region.

This category also includes cases where it is not clear whether animal welfare has been compromised (i.e. there is some doubt whether welfare has been compromised). However it is not considered acceptable to maintain animals in 'at risk' condition as part of normal seasonal management.

Welfare Compromised - Official Instrument Used

In this category, the welfare of the animal/s is compromised and the situation is not consistent with (less than) what would be expected of a reasonable person to address the welfare needs of the animal/s in the circumstances. However, the person in charge has already taken action to address the welfare needs of the animal/s or indicates a genuine willingness to do so.

This category will usually involve the use of a Direction Notice and will progress to the next level (regulatory action recommended) if the owner/person in charge fails to take action to address the situation.

Regulatory Action Recommended

In this category, the person in charge is considered to have deliberately, intentionally or recklessly caused harm or refuses to take action (to address compromised welfare) that is consistent with what would be expected of a reasonable person in the circumstances.

Contacts

Animal Welfare Unit (Administration and enforcement of *NT Animal Welfare Act and Regulations*)
Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services - 1300 720 386
www.nt.gov.au/animalwelfare

Animal Biosecurity Branch (Administration and enforcement of *NT Livestock Act and Regulations*)
Department of Resources - (08) 8999 2035 www.nt.gov.au/d/animalhealth

www.nt.gov.au/d/animalhealth

<http://pic.primaryindustry.nt.gov.au>

www.nt.gov.au/d/nlis

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