

AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SOP No:	07
SOP	Sheep
Scientific Name:	<i>Ovis aries</i>
Category:	2, 3, 4, 5
Approval Level:	Category 2: School Principal may delegate Category 3: School Principal may NOT delegate Category 4: Animal Ethics Committee Category 5: Animal Ethics Committee
Authority:	Government Schools – Department for Education and Childhood Development Animal Ethics Committee Independent and Catholic Schools – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC)
Authority Approval Date:	1 August 2010
Last Update:	18 December 2018
Disclaimer:	<i>This document may be updated at any time. You should check the web site regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the relevant AEC.</i>
Licensing Requirement:	Not applicable
Compliance Requirement:	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal or the AEC. It is recommended that this Standard Operating Procedure be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.

General Information:

Varietal range difference:

Breeds commonly used in Australia can be divided into the following categories:

- Fine wools, including Merino and Merino Comeback;
- Short wools, including Dorset, Ryeland and Suffolk;
- Long wools, including Border Leicester and Lincoln;
- Dual-purpose breeds, including Corriedale and Polwarth; and
- Carpet wools, including Drysdale and Tukidale Woolless, e.g. the Wiltshire Horn, which sheds its fleece.

Schools and colleges that wish to maintain a sheep enterprise should restrict their choice to plain-bodied sheep, such as the dual-purpose breeds and first-cross ewes. They provide wool production but are less prone to fly strike.

Physical Attributes:

- **Size:** at the shoulder, 600 mm-950 mm, depending on breed
- **Weight:** range 35 kg-90 kg, but can be up to 150 kg
- **Age at adult size:** approximately 2 years
- **Average life span:** 8-13 years
- **Body temperature:** 39°C (+/- 0.5 °C)
- **Heart rate:** 75 beats/minute (range 50-80)
- **Respiration rate:** 15-40 breaths/minute

Behaviour:

Sheep are gregarious animals, moving and responding as groups. This behaviour pattern significantly facilitates moving, working and identifying individual animals with problems: for example, when ewes are about to lamb, they become extremely agitated and move away from the main body of the flock. The same may be true for animals displaying the first signs of ill-health or poor nutrition.

Environment:

Sheep perform well in open pastures that have plenty of water available as well as shelter from wind, rain and sun. If sheep are housed intensively, each pen should be designed to hold no more than four animals and should provide at least 2.25 m² per sheep.

Paddocks must provide adequate protection from predators. Shelter is essential to provide shade and protection from cold, windy and wet weather,

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particularly for newborn lambs and newly-shorn sheep, which are particularly susceptible to cold, wet conditions.

If sheep are to be housed for lengthy periods, wooden slatted floors, with adequate sub-floor and room ventilation, are best. This ensures that wool damage (staining), fleece rot and fly strike are minimised and facilitates cleaning of pens. Feed bins should be off the ground and automatic waterers, which supply clean, fresh water at all times, must be installed and checked daily. Feed and water containers must be cleaned regularly.

For sheep in pens, care needs to be taken that the slatted floors do not cause cold, draughty conditions. Ventilation must be sufficiently effective to prevent them becoming humid or damp and to avoid a build-up of ammonia.

Pens should be cleaned daily.

Feeding:

Sheep are efficient in terms of digestion, with good-quality pasture comprising a balance of grasses and legumes. However, care must be taken when sheep are put on pastures with high legume content, as bloat can occur. Readily-accessible, fresh, clean water is needed for efficient growth.

When feeding by hand, introduce new food types slowly and carefully. Feed plenty of high-quality roughage in small amounts at frequent intervals. Do not feed excessive amounts of grains.

The carrying capacity of sheep on pasture is based on the average annual feed availability and is expressed in terms of Dry Sheep Equivalent/hectare (DSE rating). One DSE is the amount of feed required to maintain a 50 kg wether. A cross-bred ewe with a five-week-old lamb has a DSE rating of 2.9. Monitoring of live weight and condition scoring will indicate the adequacy of the feed conditions.

Young lambs are suckled or fed milk replacement. For older sheep, grazing is the most economical method. Supplementary feeding with hay and concentrate mixes may be necessary. If the sheep are always grazed, local veterinarians or Primary Industries and Resources SA should be consulted to determine whether there is a need for specific supplementation.

The quantity of feed required varies with the animals' weight, stages of growth and stages of production. Hand feeding should be undertaken twice daily for young lambs and daily for other sheep. Newborn lambs must get colostrum in the first 24 hours.

A clean, fresh and reliable water supply is necessary. The moisture content of the animals' feed will determine the quantity of water they require.

Breeding:

- **Weight at birth:** 2.5 kg-5 kg. These are average weights and final birth weight depends on the age of the ewe, the feeding regimen, the breed and whether the birth is single or multiple.
- **Gestation period:** 150 days (range 144-151 days)
- **Number of offspring:** normally a single lamb, but twinning does occur. Some breeds twin more commonly than others: for example, Poll Dorset.
- **Weaning age:** approximately 5 months.
- **Range of breeding ages:** puberty varies from 8-12 months. Most ewes are mated for the first time at 18 months

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Handling:	<p>Sheep need to be handled calmly and with care to prevent distress and injury to the animals and their handlers. A set of solid yards, preferably including a drafting race, simplifies handling. Sheep kept in schools and colleges learn routines quickly and respond to food incentives.</p> <p>Sheep must be shorn by experienced shearers on a yearly basis (except the wool-less breeds). See www.shearingworld.com for the latest shearing patterns.</p> <p>Movement: There are a number of restrictions on the movement of sheep. To ensure that you comply with these restrictions, contact Primary Industries and Resources.</p>
Hygiene:	<p>Disease prevention: Disease control methods and internal and external parasite control programs should be developed in consultation with veterinarians or Primary Industries and Resources SA. Information can be obtained from the Animal Disease Hotline 1800 675 888.</p>
Signs of illness:	<p>Stock health should be monitored at least daily and, preferably, more often. The first sign of ill health may be noticed as a change in the sheep's natural demeanour. They may be listless or lethargic. On closer examination, a sick sheep may display:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• disorientation• lethargy• changed feeding habits• scouring• nervousness• ocular or nasal discharge• separation from or lagging behind the main body of the flock• lameness• ill-thrift or wasting• abnormal gait or a reluctance to rise. <p>A failure to thrive or grow is another sign of illness. Common ailments among sheep include mastitis, bloat, internal parasites, footrot and flystrike.</p>
Treatments:	<p>If you are unable to identify and correct the cause of ill-health, assistance should be sought from veterinarians who are familiar with sheep.</p>
Euthanasia:	<p>In the case of a sheep becoming so sick, diseased or injured that recovery is unlikely or undesirable, on humane grounds euthanasia must be arranged with a veterinarian or a person competent in the technique for sheep. Any death must be reported to the Animal Ethics Committee using the appropriate form (see section relating to ADVERSE EVENTS). Forms are available on the relevant websites.</p>
Disposal/fate planning:	<p>Sheep can be sold privately, at auction or consigned to abattoirs. Carcasses must be disposed of in accordance with local council regulations.</p>
Holiday and weekend care:	<p>Sheep need to be monitored, checked daily and fed regularly over weekends and holiday periods.</p>
Approved activities:	<p>Observation, breeding, farming.</p>
Resources:	<p>www.pir.sa.gov.au www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART www.ufaw.org.uk</p>