

## AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

<b>SOP No:</b>	18
<b>SOP</b>	Alpacas
<b>Scientific Name:</b>	<i>Lama pacos</i>
<b>Category:</b>	2, 3, 4, 5
<b>Approval Level:</b>	Category 2: School Principal may delegate Category 3: School Principal may <b>NOT</b> delegate Category 4: Animal Ethics Committee Category 5: Animal Ethics Committee
<b>Authority:</b>	<b>Government Schools</b> – Department for Education and Childhood Development Animal Ethics Committee <b>Independent and Catholic Schools</b> – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee
<b>Authority Approval Date:</b>	1 August 2010
<b>Last update</b>	22 January 2019
<b>Disclaimer:</b>	<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>
<b>Licensing Requirement:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Compliance Requirement:</b>	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 differences - Alpacas are a member of the Camelid group. In Australia, there are two types: the Huacaya and the Suri. The former is the more common. It has a soft bonnet of fibre on the forehead and 'mutton-chops' on its cheeks.

The body fibre grows straight out from the body and is not unlike Merino fleece. Suri alpacas are covered in long, pencil-fine locks, similar to dreadlocks. The fleece has lustre and feels more slippery and silky than that of the Huacaya. Alpacas begin life as Crias. They grow into Tuis (adolescents) and then Hembras (adult females) and Machos (adult males).

- Physical Attributes:**
- **Size:** 78 cm-104 cm at the withers
  - **Weight:** 47 kg- 80kg
  - **Age at adult size:** 2-3 years
  - **Average life span:** 15-25 years
  - **Weight at birth:** 5 kg-10kg
  - **Gestation period:** 335 days (range 11-12 months)
  - **Number of offspring:** 1 (twinning extremely rare)
  - **Sexual maturity:** females, 12-24 months; males, 18-24 months
  - **Weaning age:** 6-8 months
  - **Body temperature:** 38°C
  - **Heart rate:** 60-100 beats/minute
  - **Respiration rate:** 20-30 breaths/minute

**Behaviour:** Alpacas are normally alert and inquisitive. They move together when herded. They groom themselves by having regular dust baths and scratching on posts or bushes. The herd will have a community dung pile and, if necessary, animals will even line up and wait for their turn. Alpacas chew their cud, usually while lying down early in the morning. They will sprawl out and sun themselves, especially after periods of rain, and will wade in creeks, dams or even water troughs to cool down. Alpacas can swim.

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Alpacas are herd animals and need the company of other alpacas. A minimum of two animals should be kept.

### **Environment:**

Alpacas may be kept in extensive situations with carrying capacities similar to those for large sheep. Alpacas need to run and need room for a dust bath. Access to shade at all times is essential and sprinklers may be provided on very hot days to allow the animals to cool down. Alpacas prefer shelters that allow them to see out.

Sheep fencing to a height of 1 200 mm is adequate to keep alpacas penned. Do not use barbed wire. Alpacas rarely test fences but, if they are confined and stressed, they will jump easily over 1 000 mm pens, particularly if they are confined without companions. For this reason, it is always advisable to take them to shows and displays in pairs.

Alpacas can survive harsh conditions but are susceptible to heat stress. They should be provided with access to shade and sprinklers in very hot weather. They rarely seek shelter from rain but usually lie down with their legs tucked underneath them. Cria and freshly-shorn alpacas need protection from the cold.

Because of problems of fleece contamination, bedding for penned animals should be made from woven or slatted rubber matting rather than straw. If straw is used, ensure that it is free from seeds, as it is very difficult to remove them from the fleece. Alpacas avoid defecating in their pens unless they are confined for long periods. They usually wait until they can get to the dung pile.

### **Feeding:**

Although they are slightly heavier than sheep, alpacas are more efficient feed converters, so they require a similar amount of feed. A maintenance diet is about 1.5 per cent of body weight each day on a dry-weight basis. The additional energy and nutrition needs of lactating alpacas increase the daily requirement to 3-4 per cent.

Supplementary feeding may be necessary if insufficient grazing is available on pastures. Alpaca can have their diets supplemented with a stud mix, lucerne hay or alpaca pellets. Seek advice from the Department of Agriculture for correct feeding, pasture quality and supplementation.

### **Breeding:**

### **Handling:**

Alpacas need to be handled calmly and with care to prevent distress and injury to the animals and their handlers. When working with alpacas, consistently quiet and slow behaviour makes them very easy to handle and they usually herd easily. Alpacas learn quickly and will learn to come up to a feeding pen when called.

They need to be shorn yearly, generally around September-October.

### **Hygiene: Disease prevention:**

Disease control methods and internal and external parasite control programs should be developed in consultation with veterinarians or the Department of Agriculture. All actions should be documented in the appropriate records.

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<b>Signs of illness:</b>	<p>Alpacas' health should be monitored daily or even more often. The first sign noticed is often a change in their natural demeanour. They may be listless or lethargic and closer examination may show variations in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• body temperature;</li><li>• gastrointestinal function, e.g. diarrhoea, weight loss, loss or change of appetite;</li><li>• regular dust-bathing habits or bathing in unusual places;</li><li>• urogenital function, such as abortion, infertility or abnormal discharges; or</li><li>• respiratory function, e.g. persistent coughing, gasping or panting.</li></ul> <p>There may be evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• skin condition such as lesions or abnormal growths</li><li>• tucked-up appearance, stiff gait, abnormal posture, patchy coat or loss of hair</li><li>• excessive scratching or rubbing or</li><li>• swollen joints or lameness</li></ul> <p>A failure to thrive or grow is another sign of illness.</p>
<b>Treatments:</b>	<p>If it is not possible to identify and correct the cause of ill-health, assistance from veterinarians familiar with alpacas should be sought. Illnesses, injuries and treatments given must be documented in the appropriate records.</p> <p>Treatments must be documented in the appropriate records.</p>
<b>Euthanasia:</b>	<p>In the case of an alpaca 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 alpacas. 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 – see contact details below.</p>
<b>Disposal/fate planning:</b>	<p>Alpacas can be sold privately or at auction. They must not be released into the wild. Carcasses must be disposed of in accordance with local council regulations.</p>
<b>Holiday and weekend care:</b>	<p>Alpacas need to be monitored, checked daily and fed regularly over weekends and holiday periods.</p>
<b>Approved activities:</b>	<p>Observation, breeding and farming.</p>
<b>Resources:</b>	
<b>Websites:</b>	<p><a href="http://www.alpaca.asn.au">www.alpaca.asn.au</a> <a href="http://www.pir.sa.gov.au">www.pir.sa.gov.au</a></p>