

Sheep castration, tail docking, and pain management

Executive summary

It is essential for sheep health and welfare, that any procedures having the potential to create pain and suffering should be balanced against the need for that procedure. Castration and tail-docking are sometimes routine husbandry procedures and, because they are painful, efforts must be made to reduce their use, especially where there are alternative management techniques.

Where castration and/or tail docking are considered to be necessary, this should be in consultation with the farm's veterinary practice as part of the farm health and welfare plan. Associated pain should ideally be minimised through the use of local anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia, however, this is impeded by the lack of licensed products for use in sheep.

We consider our associated recommendations as aspirational and something to work towards within the context of the flock and wider farm management plan:

- Where possible, management practices aimed at achieving slaughter weight prior to sexual maturity should be adopted, providing this does not compromise welfare.
- Where sexual maturity is reached before slaughter, where possible, the onset of breeding activity should be prevented by physical and visual separation of ram lambs from ewe lambs.
- Castration should only be carried out when alternatives are not compatible with the overall management of the farm. Where possible, pain should ideally be minimised through the use of local anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia, taking into account the lack of licensed products.
- The health and welfare consequences of fly-strike should not be underestimated and farmers and vets should work in partnership to ensure that prevention forms an integral part of the farm health and welfare plan.
- Where possible tailored management techniques appropriate to the climate, environment, and flock, should be put in place in order to reduce the need to tail-dock.
- Tail-docking should be carried out when alternative management strategies are considered to be insufficient to eliminate the risk of fly-strike. Where possible, pain should ideally be minimised through the use of local anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia, taking into account the lack of licensed products.
- Good worm control should form an integral part of the farm health and welfare plan.
- Anthelmintic use should be judicious with particular emphasis on the SCOPS principles of sustainable parasite control.

- Castration should only be carried out in consultation with a veterinary surgeon, as part of the farm animal health and welfare plan
- Castration must only be carried out by a trained and competent person and in accordance with legislation. Where possible, pain should be minimised through the use of local anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia, taking into account the lack of licensed products.
- Castration should not be performed on lambs until the ewe/lamb bond has become established and a good colostrum intake has been assured. Particular attention will be needed for male lambs who may also be tail-docked at the same time.
- Surgical castration at any age should only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon, where possible using local anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia under the Cascade.
- Tail docking should only be carried out in consultation with a veterinary surgeon, as part of the farm animal health and welfare plan.
- Tail docking must only be carried out by a trained and competent person in line with legislation. Where possible, pain should be minimised through the use of local anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia, taking into account the lack of licensed products.
- Tail docking should not be performed on lambs until the ewe/lamb bond has become established
- Surgical docking at any age should only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon, using appropriate anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia under the Cascade.
- If both tail docking and castration are needed these should be carried out at the same time to reduce distress and the risk of mis-mothering.
- Where possible local anaesthesia and appropriate analgesia under the Cascade should be used for all surgical castration and tail-docking procedures, and anaesthetic must be used for surgical castration in sheep aged three months or over
- Local analgesics and anaesthetics with currently established use in sheep should be licensed as such in the UK.