

RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING SHEEP

adopted by the Standing Committee at its 25th meeting on 6 November 1992

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PREAMBLE

The Standing Committee of the European Convention on the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes,

Having regard to its responsibility under Article 9 of the Convention for the elaboration and adoption of recommendations to the Parties containing detailed provisions for the implementation of the principles set out in Chapter I of the Convention based on scientific knowledge concerning the various species of animals;

Aware also of the established experience in the implementation of the principles of animal welfare set out in Articles 3 to 7 of the Convention;

Considering that in the light of established experience and scientific knowledge about the essential biological needs of sheep, certain systems of husbandry at present in commercial use, and in particular those in which the animals are closely confined, often fail to meet all the needs the fulfilment of which is essential for the animals' welfare.

Considering therefore that strong and continuous efforts have to be made to adapt both existing extensive and intensive husbandry systems and

develop satisfactory new systems so that these needs can be met for sheep kept for farming purposes;

Aware that the basic requirements for the health and welfare of livestock consist of good stockmanship, husbandry systems appropriate to the biological needs of the animals, and suitable environmental factors, so that the conditions under which sheep are kept fulfil the need for appropriate nutrition and methods of feeding, freedom of movement, physical comfort, the need to perform normal behaviour in connection with getting up, lying down, resting and sleeping postures, grooming, eating, ruminating, drinking, defecation and urinating, adequate social contact and the need for protection against adverse climatic conditions, attack by predators, injury, infestation and disease or behavioural disorder, as well as other essential needs as may be identified by established experience or scientific knowledge;

Concerned with the possibility that the results of certain developments in biotechnology may add to welfare problems of sheep, and aware of the need to ensure that such developments do not diminish their health and welfare;

Bearing also in mind that it is an obligation of the Committee to reconsider any recommendation when appropriate new knowledge is available and therefore wishing to encourage research by all Parties with the object of developing alternative systems which are more likely to provide solutions in keeping with the intentions of the Convention;

Has adopted the following Recommendation concerning sheep.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1

1. This Recommendation shall apply to all sheep bred or kept for the production of food, wool or skin or for other farming purposes.
2. For the purposes of this Recommendation, the word "sheep" refers to all ovine stock, and any sheep under 6 months of age is considered to be a lamb.

Article 2

It should be borne in mind that some important biological characteristics of sheep (Ovis aries) are as follows:

- a. They are grazing animals whose feet and general physiology are best adapted to dry firm ground and relatively warm conditions.

However, because of the differences between breeds, for example fleece characteristics, sheep will thrive in a wide range of climatic conditions.

Newborn lambs are adversely affected by cold, wet and windy conditions, some breeds being more affected than others.

b. They can show a substantial anti-predator response to man, dogs and some other species and this indicates that they regard such species as dangerous. In yards and buildings they can be easily disturbed for example by shadows, reflections and loud noises. Once held, however, they show much less behavioural response. They show relatively little behavioural response to pain even though this causes substantial physiological response such as that caused by tissue damage.

c. The members of this species are very social, spending all of their lives close to other members of the flock whom they recognise individually, and being particularly disturbed by social isolation. Fine-wool breeds, such as Merino, flock closer together than Northern European hill breeds such as Scottish blackface.

d. Sheep of most breeds are seasonal breeders but at other times of year, males form separate sub-groups. Ewes may give birth to one or more lambs. Other ewes show interest in the new-born lamb and may steal it. Lambs are followers that is they show a following response, soon after birth to large animals such as their mother, but they may follow the wrong ewe at this time. Disturbance just before or after parturition may result in failure of formation of the ewe-lamb bond. Breeds vary in the likelihood that disturbance of the ewe-lamb bond formation will occur, fine-wool breeds being most susceptible, and lambs, especially second born lambs, may become separated from their mothers and die.

STOCKMANSHIP AND INSPECTION OF SHEEP

Article 3

1. The type of sheep kept and the number and the stocking rate should depend on the suitability of the natural environment and the likely availability of sufficient feed throughout the year. The stockman should be sufficiently skilled to safeguard the welfare of the stock kept, taking account of the characteristics of the breed and of the husbandry system used as well as all aspects of the environment. The size or density of a flock should not be too large and a large flock should not be set up unless it is reasonably certain that the stockman can safeguard the welfare of each individual animal.

2. The animals should be cared for by sufficient personnel with adequate theoretical and practical knowledge of sheep, and of the husbandry system

used to be able:

- * to recognise whether or not the animals are in good health;
- * to understand the significance of behavioural changes;
- * to appreciate whether the total environment is adequate for the animal's health and welfare.

3. The stockman must be competent and should be experienced in all areas of sheep husbandry including handling sheep, lambing, milking if appropriate, any dipping and spraying techniques which will be used, hoof trimming and, as far as this is permitted under domestic law, other procedures for the prevention and treatment of e.g. foot rot, vaccination, injection and oral dosing. When the stockman with a small number of sheep does not have the required experience or does not have at his disposal the necessary equipment, he must ensure that he has access to expertise or to such equipment enabling him to solve in an appropriate way any problem encountered.

Sheep should preferably not be kept singly.

Article 4

1. In order to develop a positive relationship between man and animal, there shall be appropriate careful handling and other contact from an early age of the animal.
2. The stockman should be experienced in handling and moving sheep, and understand their behavioural patterns.
3. Sheep must be handled calmly as they are more likely to be willing to be led or driven when treated in this way than if excited. When sheep are moved their gregarious tendencies should be exploited. Activities which may frighten, injure or cause agitation to animals must be avoided. Sheep should not be lifted by the head, horns, legs, tail or fleece. Instruments such as sticks shall be used only for the purpose of guiding animals and must not be used in a manner which causes animals unnecessary pain or suffering.
4. Sheep dogs shall be given proper training in particular so that they do not injure sheep.

Article 5

Sheep kept for farming purposes shall not be used to achieve any other goal, such as public spectacles or demonstrations, if such use is likely to be

detrimental to their health and welfare.

Article 6

1. The flock shall be inspected thoroughly at least once a day, except where sheep are kept outside in safe extensive conditions and in clement weather when the frequency of inspection may be reduced but should be at least once a week. However, these inspections shall be more frequent than once a day or once a week when the welfare of the animals may be at risk, in particular at lambing time, after shearing or dipping, where there is a substantial risk of fly strike or attack by predators, and where management or other conditions change significantly. Such inspections shall be made independently of any automatic surveillance equipment and for this purpose a source of light shall be available.

2. Thorough inspection of a flock does not require each animal to be examined individually. Individual examination shall be required whenever the overall inspection suggests this is necessary.

3. For this individual examination of sheep, special attention shall be paid to bodily condition, movements and posture, rumination, condition of the fleece, ears, eyes, tail, legs and feet, including any behavioural changes, wounds, injury, lameness or disease. Healthy animals make sounds, show activity movements and posture appropriate to their age, sex, breed and physiological condition. These include: general alertness, good uniform fleece, clear bright eyes, good teeth, free movement, absence of lameness, good appetite, drinking and suckling behaviour, rumination, freedom from external parasites with no visible wounds, abscesses or other injuries.

Article 7

1. At any inspection it must be borne in mind that signs of ill health include: listlessness, loss of appetite, fall in milk yield, cessation of rumination, discharge from the eyes, nose or mouth, excessive salivation, persistent coughing, swollen joints or swellings elsewhere on the body, lameness, diarrhoea, discoloration of milk or urine, bloat, vaginal prolapse, frequent scratching or rubbing, blow fly myiasis, loss of bodily condition, behavioural changes including loss of dominance order and in some circumstances, being apart from the flock.

2. If animals are not apparently in good health, or are showing adverse behavioural changes the stockman shall take steps without delay to establish the cause and take appropriate action. If this immediate action taken by the stockman is not effective, a veterinarian must be consulted and, if necessary, expert advice should be sought on other technical factors involved.

Separate pens providing appropriate comfort and supervision and, where

possible, allowing the animals to remain in visual contact with other sheep, shall be available for sick and injured animals.

3. Sheep which refuse to eat or which are less thrifty shall be given special treatment, and be removed to different pasture or separate accommodation if necessary. Sheep with poor teeth shall be provided with feed which they can eat without difficulty, and if this is not possible and the sheep cannot be treated satisfactorily, they shall be killed.

4. If sheep are ill or injured to such an extent that transport would cause considerable additional suffering, they must be treated or killed on the spot. Where sheep have to be killed on the spot, this must be done humanely and without delay, and where possible by a person experienced in the techniques of killing.

BUILDINGS, ENCLOSURES AND EQUIPMENT

Article 8

Parties should consider making arrangements for :

a. advice on health and welfare aspects to be sought when new enclosures, housing or equipment are to be constructed or existing enclosures, housing or equipment modified;

b. new methods of sheep husbandry or equipment to be tested and, if found satisfactory, approved from the point of view of animal health and welfare before their introduction into commercial use.

Article 9

When accommodation for sheep is being considered all external environmental factors, such as noise, light, vibration, atmospheric conditions, pollution and risks such as fire and flood should be taken into account.

Article 10

For housed sheep, all reasonable precautions shall be taken to reduce the risk of fire and expert advice should be obtained from the appropriate authorities.

Consideration should be given to installing fire alarm systems which can be heard at any time of the day or night. Firefighting equipment in working order should be readily available in houses for sheep.

There shall be provision for housed livestock to be released and evacuated

quickly in case of emergency.

Article 11

1. Internal surfaces of buildings and pens, fittings and equipment for housed sheep should be capable of being easily cleaned and disinfected or be easily replaced if necessary. Surfaces shall not be treated with paints or wood preservatives which may be toxic to sheep. Buildings and equipment shall be designed, constructed and maintained so as to minimize the risk of injury or distress. They should not predispose animals to disease.

2. Hay and silage racks shall be designed, situated and used so as to avoid the risk of injury, eye damage or either racks or bales falling on sheep or lambs.

3. Water bowls, troughs and nipples shall be constructed and sited so as to minimize contamination from urine and faeces, to minimize the risk of water freezing or spilling and to prevent injuries. They should be kept thoroughly clean and be checked at least once daily, and more frequently in extreme weather conditions, to ensure that they are in working order.

Where the water supply is automatic, waterbowls are to be preferred to nipples; a sufficient number of bowls or nipples shall be accessible in each pen. Where nipples are provided, sheep which are not accustomed to these should be trained in their use.

4. Floors shall be designed, constructed and maintained so as to avoid discomfort, distress or injury. Solid floors should be well drained and sheep shall be provided with suitable and adequate bedded areas large enough for all sheep to lie down simultaneously. Slatted or perforated floors shall not allow the feet of sheep to be trapped or injured. Slatted floors should not be used for lambs.

MANAGEMENT

Article 12

1. The health of flocks shall be safeguarded by careful husbandry and management. Advice from a veterinarian should be followed in planning pasture management to minimize the risk of spread of disease drawing up a treatment plan adapted to the requirements of the flock and including in particular appropriate vaccination, foot care, anthelmintic and other treatment. Before flocks are mixed or before newly acquired sheep are introduced into a flock, they should be checked to ensure that they are healthy and free from infectious or contagious diseases and infestations and measures shall be taken to minimize the risk of bullying.

2. All necessary measures must be taken to prevent and control external

and internal parasites. Where infestations such as myiasis are likely to occur, sheep shall be given routine preventive treatment by dipping or other effective measures. Used chemicals and their containers shall be disposed of having regard to any danger to other species and the environment.

3. Special care shall be taken by the stockman to ensure that all equipment used for shearing, dipping, marking, dosing, where appropriate vaccination, and treatment is maintained in a satisfactory condition. Equipment for injections applied by the stockman in accordance with national legislation must be cleaned and sterilised before and after use and frequently during use. The nozzles of dosing guns must be of a suitable size for the age and breed of sheep on which they are being used.

4. If sheep need to be restrained, this should preferably be done by sitting them on their hindquarters or lying them on their side and not by turning them on their backs.

Where mechanical devices are used to restrain sheep they must be properly maintained and adjusted.

Electro-immobilisation shall not be used.

5. Electro-ejaculation shall not be used other than for veterinary diagnosis when there is no other method available. In such exceptional circumstances, it shall be carried out under strict veterinary control.

Article 13

1. Sheep should be maintained in a clean condition. Where sheep are grazing arable crops, particularly root crops, they should have access to an area of grass or straw to limit the build up of mud on the fleece and to provide an adequate lying area of suitable size.

2. Those parts of the accommodation with which the animals come into contact should be thoroughly cleansed, and where appropriate, disinfected, every time the accommodation has been emptied and before new animals are brought in. While the accommodation is occupied by the animals, the interior surfaces and all equipment therein shall be kept satisfactorily clean.

3. Any dead sheep must be removed promptly and disposed of hygienically in accordance with national legislation.

Article 14

1. When there is a risk of attack by predators, measures shall be taken to minimize the risk in accordance with domestic law and other legal

instruments for the protection of animals or for the conservation of threatened wild species.

2. Suitable holding and handling facilities shall be available on the farm or elsewhere and these, if necessary, shall include lifts or ramps with side protection for loading or unloading, facilities for foot treatment and for dipping or spraying. Such facilities shall have no sharp edges or projections likely to injure sheep. Surfaces shall not be treated with paints or wood preservatives which may adversely affect the health or welfare of sheep.

3. Where sheep have to be marked, this shall be done as painlessly as possible using non-toxic aerosols or paints, tattooing, tagging the ear or the implantation of electronic devices, where any of these methods are permitted under national legislation. In as far as these operations could cause harm to the animal they shall only be carried out by a skilled stockman using instruments in a proper state of repair and should not be undertaken under unsuitable circumstances such as during the fly or tick season.

4. Sheep shall not be restrained permanently. If they are temporarily tethered which should be allowed only for a short period, this shall not be done where there are obstacles, or a risk of being attacked by dogs or other predators. When it is necessary to use restraining devices such as harnesses, these shall be made of suitable materials and be properly fitted and adjusted to ensure that they are comfortable and do not rub. If lambs have to be restrained, they shall be penned and not tethered.

Article 15

1. Adult sheep of wool breeds must be shorn at least once per year. Shearing must be carried out by a competent operator in a way which causes the least possible harm or distress to the animal. Shearing instruments must be regularly cleaned and disinfected and be in a fully serviceable condition appropriate to the size and age of the animal. Prior to, and during, shearing sheep shall be handled carefully to avoid injury. Any shearing wounds must be treated immediately.

2. Shorn sheep shall not be turned out unless it can be reasonably expected that the lack of fleece will not unduly harm the animal because of inclement weather conditions, or some form of protection can be provided.

3. If in accordance with national legislation, sheep may be shorn in competitions provided that such competitions are open only for experienced shearers and that the quality of the shearing rather than the rate is rewarded.

Article 16

1. The stockman must pay particular attention to the condition of the feet of sheep and preventative measures should include regular claw trimming as necessary. Only non-irritant preparations maintained at correct dilutions shall be used in foot baths.

2. To minimize the spread of foot rot or other infections, sheep should not graze on pastures where there is a serious risk of contamination. The entrances and exits to buildings and fields should be maintained in a dry condition.

Article 17

Fences should be properly erected and maintained to avoid the risk of injury to sheep. Barbed wire should not be used. Where any type of mesh fencing is used, and particularly for horned sheep, it shall be inspected frequently and kept taut to minimize the risk of entanglement. For lambing fields, the use of mesh fencing should be avoided and the installation of moveable or fixed open fences is recommended. Electric fences should be so designed and maintained that contact with them causes no more than momentary discomfort to the sheep. Electrified mesh fences shall not be used for horned sheep if they could present a risk for the animals.

Article 18

For housed sheep, space allowance per animal, the total area available to all animals and the group size shall be determined according to the age, size and other biological characteristics of sheep. Pen shape and stocking density shall allow sufficient freedom of movement for adequate exercise. Particular care shall be taken that pregnant ewes are not overstocked. In order to prevent problems of social interaction among housed sheep because of too large group size, not more than 50 animals should be kept together. Shy feeders should be identified and segregated to form new smaller groups in separate pens.

Article 19

When first housed sheep should have dry fleeces and be free of foot rot. Any cases of foot rot which occur must be treated immediately.

Article 20

1. Sheep should not be housed throughout the year. If they are housed for a considerable part of the year they should have free access to runs or enclosures.

2. Pastures and enclosures should be selected and managed in such a way as to ensure that sheep are not subjected to physical, chemical, parasitic or any other health hazard including parasitism which can be reasonably

avoided and account should be taken of the risks presented by access routes.

3. Reasonable precautions shall be taken to ensure that the welfare of sheep is not adversely affected by unfavourable weather conditions.

4. Sheep should be prevented from gathering in places where they may be buried by snow, and should be shepherded into safer areas whenever possible. All sheep should be removed in time from any land which is in danger of being flooded.

Article 21

1. Care must be taken to ensure that each sheep has access to an adequate supply of nutritious, hygienic and balanced feed every day including mineral supplementation where necessary. The biological need of sheep for water shall be met each day, either by making available to them an adequate supply of water of satisfactory quality, or, with the exception of milking sheep, by providing them with a diet with an appropriate moisture content, or both. Water obtained from bores, wells, rivers, streams and dams should be monitored for suitability for sheep.

2. Feed shall be palatable. When sheep are fed in groups sufficient trough space must be available to allow all sheep to feed simultaneously and avoid undue competition for feed except where feed is always available. Stale or contaminated feed shall be removed from troughs before fresh feed is added. Sudden changes in the composition or quantity of the feed should be avoided, and sufficient roughage shall be available when sheep are fed high intakes of cereal based diets.

3. Arrangements shall be made to ensure that adequate supplies of feed are available at times when adverse weather conditions can reasonably be expected to occur.

Article 22

Throughout the hours of daylight the level of lighting, natural or artificial, should allow all housed sheep to see and to be seen clearly.

Article 23

Buildings for housed sheep shall be adequately ventilated, naturally or artificially, to avoid high humidity, condensation and draughts. The rate of air exchange should provide for respiration, removal of excess heat, moisture and noxious gases, and minimize the effects of dust.

Article 24

1. All equipment, including milking equipment, ventilating fans, heating and lighting units should be kept clean, inspected daily and kept in good working order. Inspection devices shall be checked daily. Fire extinguishers and alarm systems should be checked and tested regularly. The stockman must ensure prompt action is taken to prevent suffering whenever electrical or mechanical failures occur.

2. Any automated equipment shall incorporate a fail-safe device maintained in good working order, and where the life of sheep is dependent on such equipment, an alarm system shall also be installed which will warn the stockman of failure of automated equipment. These alarm systems must be regularly tested. Defects shall be rectified immediately or alternative measures taken to safeguard the health and welfare of the sheep.

3. All electrical installations at mains voltage shall be inaccessible to sheep, well insulated, safeguarded from rodents and properly earthed.

Article 25

When changes are made which involve the installation of more complex or elaborate equipment than has been previously used, animal welfare shall be taken into account. Systems involving a high degree of control over the environment shall be put into operation only where conscientious staff skilled in both animal husbandry and the use of the equipment are available.

Article 26

For housed sheep, the stockman should make in advance plans for dealing with emergencies such as flood, disruption of supplies, or failure of automatic equipment, and must ensure that all staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. At least one member of staff should always be available to take the necessary action.

PREGNANCY AND LAMBING

Article 27

1. Heavily pregnant sheep must be handled with special care to avoid distress and injury resulting in premature lambing.

2. Care must be taken to ensure that pregnant and nursing ewes shall receive sufficient feed to maintain their health and body condition and to foster the development of healthy lambs. This is particularly important during the last 6 weeks of pregnancy when feeding should be carefully regulated to avoid pregnancy toxaemia.

Article 28

1. The stockman should be familiar with the signs of difficult birth and be able to deal with these or have access to expert assistance. Particular attention must be paid to hygiene at lambing and adequate supplies of water of satisfactory quality, disinfectant and obstetrical lubricant should be available. If lambing pens are used every effort should be made to prevent the build up and spread of infection by the provision of adequate clean bedding, and by ensuring the pens are cleaned and disinfected regularly. The umbilical cord shall be disinfected where necessary. Dead lambs and fallen afterbirths shall be removed without delay and disposed of in a hygienic manner in accordance with domestic legislation. Causes of mortality should be investigated.

2. The stockman should be familiar with resuscitation techniques. Some form of heating should be available to revive weak lambs, and suitable pens should be available for emergencies. To avoid mis-mothering with sheep which are closely confined the group size should be kept to a minimum. Animals must be kept under surveillance to ensure that maternal bonding occurs and, during lambing in winter, that the lambs are dried.

3. When lambing takes place in a building, each ewe and her offspring should be confined together for at least 24 hours and the animals checked to ensure that maternal bonding occurs. This will not apply where separation of the ewe and offspring is necessary for veterinary purposes.

Outdoor lambing should only be allowed for breeds which are adapted to the environmental and atmospheric conditions of the pasture. Where lambing takes place out of doors, suitable enclosures should be provided and some form of windbreak or shelter shall be available.

4. Each newborn lamb should receive an adequate amount of colostrum from its dam or another source supplied at body temperature. Where this may involve a risk of disease transmission, which could be the case when using colostrum from another farm, it should be subjected to an appropriate treatment, for example being heated for an hour at 56°C, but in any case, it shall not be overheated as this destroys antibodies. Colostrum should be supplied as soon as possible and in any case within 4 hours of birth. Adequate supplies of colostrum should be stored under hygienic conditions for emergencies.

5. Where lambs have to be reared artificially, they should be given milk or suitable substitute about 4 times each day for about the first two weeks with the liquid feed being reduced over weeks 3 and 4 to encourage solid feed intake. From the end of the first week of life, lambs should have access to grass or other fresh, fibrous food, and water of satisfactory quality. Where concentrated feed will be fed after weaning, lambs should

be accustomed to it before being weaned.

Where automatic feeding is provided, lambs should be trained in its use to ensure an adequate feed intake. Automatic feeders providing milk shall be thoroughly cleaned regularly, preferably daily.

6. Lambs which are not required for rearing must be cared for as humanely as those kept for rearing and if they are to be killed, this must be done in accordance with the provisions under Article 7 paragraph 4.

MILKING

Article 29

1. To avoid injury to teats and mastitis, special attention shall be paid to hygiene, milking techniques and the efficient functioning of milking machines. Good milking practices should include careful handling, an examination of foremilk and the avoidance of excessive stripping. Before and after milking, hygienic measures should be taken to reduce the risk of spread of disease.

2. Lactating ewes shall be milked sufficiently often according to yield in order that udders are not kept uncomfortably full.

CHANGES OF PHENOTYPE AND/OR GENOTYPE

Article 30

1. Procedures resulting in the loss of a significant amount of tissue or the modification of bone structure, or which cause a significant amount of pain or distress shall be forbidden, and in particular:

- amputation of the penis or other penile operations
- disbudding of the horns
- freeze dagging
- mulesing
- toothgrinding and tooth shearing

2. Exceptions to the prohibitions under paragraph 1 may be made:

(a) for procedures performed solely for veterinary purposes to relieve or to prevent pain or suffering;

(b) for the following procedures which can be performed on the conditions set out in the paragraphs hereafter:

(i) docking of tails by surgical methods or with haemostatic tongs, so long as sufficient tail is retained to cover the anus in male, and the anus and

vulva in female sheep;

(ii) castration by surgical methods or with haemostatic tongs;

(iii) dehorning;

(iv) vasectomy;

(v) ear marking by tagging or tattooing, identification by implantation of an electronic device or horn branding;

(c) where allowed under national legislation for castration and tail-docking by the use of rubber rings, notching and punching of ears.

3. Tail-docking and castration, in particular by the use of rubber rings, should be avoided. If these procedures have to be carried out, only surgical methods preceded by anaesthesia or haemostatic tongs should be used. Dehorning should only be carried out by a veterinarian using an anaesthetic. Vasectomy and caesarian section or any other laparotomy shall only be carried out by a veterinarian. Other procedures in which the animal will, or can reasonably be expected to, experience pain may only be carried out with the use of an anaesthetic and shall be carried out only by a veterinarian or other person qualified in accordance with national legislation.

4. Contracting Parties should encourage research into the problems associated with tail docking and castration.

Article 31

Breeding or breeding programmes which cause or are likely to cause suffering or harm to any of the animals involved shall not be practised.
