SOP No: ATT 081

SUBJECT: Methods of mustering sheep, and handling them in yards and pens

DATE: 18.02.2015

REASON FOR USE: The purpose of this procedure is to handle sheep in yards in a manner which minimises any stress on the animal and any risks of injury to sheep and operator.

POLICY:
Minimum of one operator required
Demonstrator: competence in this procedure
Students: familiarity with sheep behaviour.
Note that this SOP does not make any recommendations about transporting sheep. This topic is covered by the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock.

PRECAUTIONS:
- Wear sturdy footwear, use sun protection when outside
- Sheep should be handled quietly before, during and after the procedure
- Sheep should not be overcrowded in yards
- Wash hands and exposed body parts thoroughly with soap and water after handling animals.

EQUIPMENT:
Yards, pens, dogs (if these are used they must be adequately trained for the particular job, e.g. heading, yard work, and be controlled by a competent handler), appropriate personal transport (e.g. motor bike, quad bike, four wheel drive vehicle or horse; if these are used the operator must have a current licence or be competent in riding a horse).

PROCEDURE:

A. Mustering:

1. Quietly move around the sheep to bring them together into a mob; as you do this, move to appropriate positions for optimum sheep flow. Be aware of the effect of entering a sheep’s flight zone and know where a sheep’s balance point is. Understand flocking behaviour, the
usual direction of movement in the paddocks to be traversed, and be aware of any hazards in the area. Trained sheep dogs may be required to assist movement of sheep.

2. Move the mob towards the yards by travelling behind or beside the animals to steer them whilst maintaining a constant walking pace. Note that some dogs work by bringing the mob to the handler so it is necessary to move slowly ahead of the mob to the desired location as the dog controls the mob.

3. Do not rush the animals, and slow down when passing through gateways.

4. When the sheep reach the yards, it may be necessary to ensure that sufficient people/dogs are available to hold them together while they enter the yards.

- Animal Safety: specific issues to be aware of for this activity include:
  - Avoiding mustering and moving sheep long distance in hot conditions; schedule mustering for early morning in hot weather. Allow the animals to rest and get water if conditions are hot or the animals show signs of heat stress.
  - Avoiding mustering mobs of ewes with very young lambs to prevent mismothering.
  - Avoiding moving weak or pregnant sheep too quickly or too far (to prevent stress).
  - Avoiding overcrowding in yards leading to smothering.

B. Yarding:

1. Open gates into the yards as necessary to allow a free flow of animals before attempting to move the sheep.

2. Move sheep between yards and along races by moving into the flight zone of the sheep at the rear. If movement is stopped by animals at the head of the group, you will have to apply pressure to these to restart the flow, either by moving into their flight zone, or by applying light hand pressure to the rump. If animals have turned in the race, you may have to release the pressure to allow them to retreat and rejoin the mob at another position. When possible, work
from outside the race. As the flight distance of sheep may be larger than the size of the yards you may have to use rattles or clapping to encourage them to move.

3. Take care when handling aggressive rams (and sometimes ewes) to avoid injury from charging animals. Be aware that rapidly moving sheep can cause leg injuries to people.

C. Catching a sheep: note that the animal must be confined in a small yard or pen.

1. Approach the sheep quickly and quietly, exploiting the blind spot behind head. Sheep will normally face into a corner away from you.

2. Place one hand under the chin and either press your legs against its flank to restrain it against the side of the pen or straddle it. Place your free hand on the opposite flank, turn the sheep’s head gently (there is no need to use excessive force) away from yourself while pressing into the sheep’s flank with your other hand. As the sheep falls towards you, allow it to fall against your legs (if it falls free it will no longer be restrained).

3. Grasp both forelegs and tilt the sheep into a sitting position (60 degrees from upright) leaning against your legs.

4. To release the animal, roll it back onto all four feet and allow it to stand and walk away.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

DATE ISSUED:

REFERENCES