SOP No: ATT 070

SUBJECT: Hot-iron branding of cattle.

DATE ISSUED: 16.07.2014

POLICY: Two people are required for this procedure. Demonstrator: experience in this procedure. Students: competence in handling animals. Students should practice this technique on an inanimate model before using it on live animals. Legal requirements: a person shall not sell [in Queensland] any cattle of a live weight in excess of 100kg unless those cattle are branded. Animal welfare considerations: The Code requires that animals are protected from undue pain and distress and from a welfare perspective, branding is not the preferred method of identifying livestock; other methods, in particular National Livestock Identification (NLIS) devices such as an ear tag or rumen bolus, are preferred. Branding will only be done where it is necessary to comply with Queensland law or where other methods of identification are impractical. Commercial practice: there are some limitations inherent in freeze branding (see ATT071), and managers may not have access to dry ice or liquid nitrogen. In such cases hot iron branding may be the only practical alternative when cattle must be branded.

PRECAUTIONS: Wear sturdy footwear and sun protection Animals should be handled quietly before, during and after the procedure Be aware that branding irons and the devices used to heat them may cause burns Branding causes pain to animals and they will attempt to escape during the procedure; this may lead to the operators being kicked or otherwise injured Use of a calf crush involves tipping the crush over with the calf restrained inside; there is a risk of injury to the operators when this is done Wash hands and exposed body parts thoroughly with soap and water after handling animals.

EQUIPMENT: Calf branding crush. Branding equipment: irons, heating device and fuel. If gas is used to heat the irons make sure that the cylinder is correctly secured so that it can’t be knocked over.

PROCEDURE: Use only the brand registered for the property (it is illegal to use an unregistered brand; refer to the Brands Act 1915 for further information). Hot-iron branding should be done on calves 2 to 6 months of age. Never brand wet, weak or emaciated animals. Queensland legislation stipulates that brands can be applied to cattle only on the neck, rump, shoulder, thigh or twist (the upper rear portion of the animal’s hind leg between the pin bone and the hock). Cheek branding is illegal.
Queensland legislation stipulates that brands can be applied to cattle only on the neck, rump, shoulder, thigh or twist (the upper rear portion of the animal’s hind leg between the pin bone and the hock). Cheek branding is illegal. Symbol brands and conjoined three-piece brands are preferred for animal welfare.

Apply the brand as follows:

1. Check that the branding irons are in good order (in the correct shape, free from rust, and with the shaft securely attached to the head)
2. Place the iron in the flame and heat the iron to the correct temperature (a dull red colour)
3. Secure the calf in the crush.
4. Identify the area to be branded.
5. Double-check that the correct branding iron is to be used, and that it is held the correct way up.
6. Apply the hot irons for a maximum of 2 to 3 seconds, with a slight rocking motion to ensure that the hot iron contacts the skin over the full face of the iron.
7. If the animal moves under the iron, remove the iron from the skin immediately to avoid leaving an indistinct mark; do not rebrand over the first mark as this risks causing excessive damage to the skin, and is difficult to do and will result in an indistinct brand.
8. When the brand has been applied make sure that the iron is free of hair and other debris and place back in the flame.
9. Make sure that the irons have reached the correct heat before using them again.
10. Release the animal from the crush
11. Return the branded calves to their mothers (if unweaned) or to good quality feed and water as soon as possible after the procedure. Check animals at least once daily and seek veterinary advice if there is pain or distress.
12. At the end of the day, check that irons have cooled before they are stored away; check that gas bottles are correctly turned off and secured.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

REVISED: 

CHAIR OF AEC

REFERENCES