



## Tail docking Standard Operating Procedure

Corresponds with AW3.7 and AW3.10

### Justification

Tail docking shall only be carried out if failure to do so would lead to welfare problems.

### Details of procedure

Lambs can be restrained either by hand or in cradles.

The tail shall be docked with sufficient length to cover the vulva of a ewe, and the equivalent length in rams. Docking at the distal end of the caudal fold or no shorter than the third palpable joint should ensure this requirement is met. Docking tails to shorter lengths can increase the risk of rectal prolapse and vulva cancer and does not reduce the risk of fly strike, so is not permitted under RWS.

Two different techniques may be used:

- Thermocautery (Docking Iron)
- Application of a rubber ring

### Thermocautery (Docking Iron)

This method uses a blade heated by gas or electricity to cauterize the wound and prevent bleeding. The heat also sterilizes the blade. There is some evidence that this method is less painful than rubber ring tail docking.

If using a hot knife when windy, consider using a wind block to maintain the knife at optimum temperature. A knife that is too cold will not cut through the tail in one motion. A knife that is too hot will cut through the tail too quickly and not cauterize the tail tip and increase the amount of blood loss.

### Rubber ring

Rubber ring tail docking works by constricting blood flow, causing tissue below the ring to die and slough off. The process takes several weeks and leaves a sealed scar.



## **Pain relief measures**

For all methods, pain relief shall be applied when suitable pain relief is available on the market. Pain management options shall be discussed with a veterinary surgeon and options shall be reviewed regularly. See the additional pain relief guidance sheet.

## **Age**

Lambs shall not be tail docked until the ewe/lamb bond has become established. The procedure shall be carried out between the ages of 24 hours and 8 weeks.

## **Care of animal(s) during/after the procedure**

Lambs should be handled quietly before, during and after the procedure.

Following the procedure, lambs will be turned back onto dry, clean pasture or a dry, clean pen with their mothers.

Lambs must be inspected regularly following the procedure and with minimal disturbance for signs of post-operative complications during the healing process, and appropriate action taken as indicated.

Complications can include infection, particularly for rubber ring tail docking as the ring cuts into the tissue before the tail drops off. This can lead to abscesses or clostridial disease such as tetanus. If docking irons are not applied correctly there is a risk of burns. It is worth noting that some research suggests a proportion of lambs will exhibit hyperalgesia – an increased sensitivity to pain – and/or traumatic neuroma – a painful lesion at the tail end – after tail docking.

## **Precautions**

Good hygiene should be practiced in relation to facilities, hands, handling and instruments with disinfectant being used and changed frequently.

Risk of infection can be limited by ensuring ewes have been routinely vaccinated and that the lambs are vaccinated at lamb marking

Consideration of weather and yard conditions and fly activity should be made when planning lamb marking (e.g. avoid muddy yards and wet or humid weather).

## **Qualifications, experience or training necessary to perform this technique**

Only well-trained or well-supervised individuals will perform these procedures.