



# **LIVESTOCK WELFARE COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

Established 1978

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## **POSITION STATEMENT**

### **STATEMENT ON THE JUSTIFICATION FOR USING CERTAIN PAINFUL PROCEDURES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LIVESTOCK**

This Statement sets out the considerations that were used in arriving at a decision that certain painful procedures used in livestock are currently accepted as essential and can therefore be used, with the conditions and guidelines that have been formulated for each one. However in this statement only the justifications are dealt with, and not the other nine tests of acceptability. By contrast one procedure that was acceptable in the past, but not presently, is dealt with separately.

#### **SOME ACCEPTED PROCEDURES AND JUSTIFICATIONS**

##### **1. CASTRATION**

- Animal benefit: Negligible, but it does reduce fighting and injury.
- Owner benefits: Essential to prevent unwanted breeding after puberty, and improve carcass quality at slaughter, useful to keep wool quality high.
- Measurement of benefits: Multiple scientific studies and evidence to support the large financial benefits that castration brings.
- Restriction: Only acceptable for males that will be slaughtered well after puberty.
- Alternatives: No practical and affordable methods are available at present.

##### **2. DEHORNING**

- Animal benefit: Avoid severe bruising and injuries, particularly at handling, during transportation and before slaughter.
- Owner benefits: Easier handling, bruising at abattoirs leads to costly cutaways, skin damage causes downgrading of hides.

- Measurement of benefits: Many studies and scientific articles showing the severe untoward effect caused by horned animals.
- Restriction: Not recommended for use in sheep, or goats apart from milk goats.
- Alternatives: Breeding of polled (genetically non-horned) animals strongly recommended, and is well established in the majority of beef breeds. However it cannot be done with goats because of genetic linkages with deleterious traits.

### 3. **BRANDING**

- Animal benefit: Stock theft is a massive problem that usually entails a long list of cruelty and suffering in the animals.
- Owner benefits: Because stock theft causes huge financial losses, the law makes this compulsory – only permanently identified animals can be traced back to their farm of origin.
- Measurement of benefits: Police records reveal that only branded stolen cattle can be traced back to their owners, with a good chance of successful prosecution of the thieves.
- Restriction: Only cattle may be branded, it is not allowed in sheep or goats – these must be tattooed.
- Alternatives: None presently available, but these are being sought.

### 4. **TAIL DOCKING**

- Animal benefit: This helps protect wool sheep from attack by blowfly (maggots) that lead to an agonising and lingering death.
- Owner benefits: Severe losses caused by blowfly attacks, costs of treatments, cutaways of wool.
- Measurement of benefits: Several scientific studies over many decades showing the necessity of tail docking in sheep.
- Restriction: Not accepted for cattle or goats, not recommended for sheep other than wool breeds.
- Alternatives: Because of deleterious genetic linkages breeding sheep without tails has so far been unsuccessful.

## **PROCEDURES PREVIOUSLY ACCEPTED BUT NOT CURRENTLY**

### **MULESING**

In the past, this severe procedure was recommended because it reduced the risk of blowfly attack in wool sheep. However, once it was shown that the problem could be virtually eliminated by corrective breeding (selecting for plain-bodied and not pleated skins) it was phased out and is now actively discouraged. In fact those still using it are prosecuted, with the full support of the wool industry.

**Accepted: December 2016**