



Horn tipping of sheep

Current as of March 2023.

This factsheet assists a person responsible for sheep in meeting their animal welfare obligations when horn tipping sheep.

What is horn tipping?

Horn tipping or trimming is the removal of the insensitive part of the horn of an adult sheep resulting in a blunt and shorter horn end.

When done correctly there is no bleeding from the horn.

Cutting into the corium (sensitive tissues of the horn) in sheep may be an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* and can only be performed by a veterinarian or a person authorised under the *Veterinary Practices Act 2021*, with appropriate pain relief.

Horn tipping in sheep may reduce the risk of overgrown horns penetrating areas of the face and decrease the likelihood of the animals catching their horns in fences, yards or trees. However, tipping does not reduce the risks of fighting, or carcass bruising. Livestock with tipped horns, can still cause injury to other animals and stock handlers. Horn tipping should be carried out when the horn is:

- growing in a direction that is likely to penetrate the skin
- touching the skin or eye of the animal
- blocking the ability for an animal to see clearly from one eye
- sharp and a potential hazard to humans and other livestock.

Horn tipping procedure for adult sheep

A person should not undertake horn tipping unless they are competent to perform the procedure or acting under the direct supervision of a person competent to perform the procedure.

Tipping the horns of rams must be done with caution as considerable variation exists for the position on the horn where the sensitive corium commences. These differences could occur between rams within a breed and between breeds.

The process for horn tipping sheep is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 – Process of horn tipping sheep

Drafting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft the animal from the rest of the mob for closer inspection.
Restraint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle animals safely to ensure the head is stable.
Examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the animal. • Assess the amount of horn needed to be removed. • If only insensitive horn tip is to be removed, proceed.
Chose instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose the appropriate horn tipping instrument to remove the horn tip (Image 1). These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - embryotomy wire (saw wire connected by two stainless steel handles) - horn saw - parrot teeth tippers - guillotine dehorners. • Progress with a series of horn tipping cuts from the tip of horn. • Cut perpendicular to the ground and parallel with the serrations on the horn. • Be aware not to enter the sensitive corium as the first curl is approached. If entered it will bleed and cause pain and may be an offence under the <i>Animal Welfare Act 2002</i> and <i>Veterinary Practices Act 2021</i>. • Only a veterinarian (or a person authorised under the <i>Veterinary Practices Act 2021</i>) can remove more than the insensitive tip of the horn. This procedure must be done with appropriate pain relief. • Maximum trim of horns is halfway around the first curl closest to the skull (approximately midway between the ear and the eye). • If the procedure is undertaken correctly, the animal should not experience bleeding from the site or pain. • Cutting at the correct location and angle prevents the horn growing into the face. The horns will continue to grow and retrimming may be required.



Image 1 – Instruments used for tipping the horns of adult livestock (Source: Meat & Livestock Australia)

NOTE: Read and follow the manufacturers label for correct and safe use.

More information

- Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020
- *Veterinary Practices Act 2021*
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock; Livestock at Saleyards and Depots; Sheep
- Animal Welfare Factsheets:
 - Transporting and selling sheep and cattle with injured or broken horns
 - Management of sheep and cattle with ingrown horns
 - Humane destruction of sheep and cattle
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Consignors and Transporters
 - Animal Welfare Responsibilities – Saleyards
- [agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare](https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare)



For more information and to view the suite of animal welfare factsheets, scan the QR code, or visit: <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/resources-and-publications>.

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