

Welfare decisions for sheep

Current as of November 2023.

Sheep lose condition when feed is short, or when compromised by certain diseases and/or parasites. These guidelines help you assess your sheep to decide what action to take if their condition drops.

In addition to provision of supplementary feed, sheep that fall to body condition score (BCS) 1.5 or less, may also need veterinary care to identify the presence of any disorder. **It is not acceptable to leave sheep in poor condition to weaken and die of starvation or disease.**

Legal requirements for the transport and sale of sheep

The *Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020* (Transport Regulations), requires that sheep in BCS 1.5 or less cannot be transported unless a veterinarian has deemed the animal(s) fit to undertake the journey. The veterinarian must provide written approval to the transporter.

Sheep in BCS 1.5 or less cannot be presented for sale.

Criteria for destruction on property

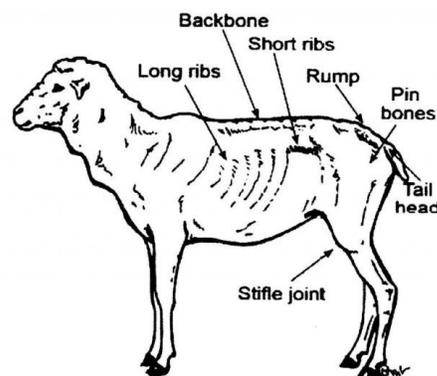
Some sheep may require humane destruction on property. They should be destroyed if they are in a poor or very poor condition i.e., BCS 1.0 as described

in Table 1 and meet the following conditions:

- They fall or are knocked over easily.
- They are unable to stand without assistance.
- They have an unsteady gait.
- Adequate good quality feed and/or water cannot be provided.
- It is uneconomic or not possible to transport, sell or feed animals due to extenuating circumstances.

Assessing animals

This diagram shows the key sites for assessing an animal's condition.



More information



Important Disclaimer

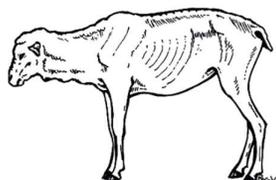
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Use this table for guidance on the attributes that indicate whether a sheep is at risk, and how the animal should be managed including whether it ought to be humanely destroyed.

Table 1. Assessment of body condition

BCS 1.5: High risk



BCS 1.0: Consider euthanising



General description	Significant muscle wastage. Unlikely to conceive. At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stressors. Recovery is dependent on high quality care.	Weak with extremely low body reserves. Animal is lying down and unable to rise. At point of death.
Backbone	Spines of backbone identifiable.	Spines of backbone easily identifiable.
Short ribs	Prominent and very sharp to touch.	Very prominent and easy to see individually.
Inside pin bones	Sunken.	Deeply sunken to the bone.
Muscle wastage	Rump muscle concave. Muscle wastage in loin and leg muscle evident.	Obvious over whole body. Rump and leg muscles deeply concave.
Stifle joint	Stifle joint not identifiable.	Stifle joint identifiable.
Tail bones	Individual bones just able to be felt.	Individual bones easily felt.
Appearance	Able to stand but listless and dull.	Lacking energy, dull and listless. Lying down and may not be able to raise head off the ground.
Mobility	Mobile and able to lie down and rise but with some difficulty. May seem to 'teeter' while standing.	Cannot get up. May be kicking hind legs.
Lambing requirements and risks	Will need a lot of assistance. The ewe and lamb may not survive. Very high possibility of pregnancy toxemia.	Extremely unlikely that lamb and ewe will survive lambing.
Transport and sale	Not fit for transport without veterinary approval. Not fit for sale.	Not fit for transport without veterinary approval. Not fit for sale.
Action required	Must be fed adequately immediately to prevent weight loss. Seek veterinary advice to identify underlying causes and management options.	Seek veterinary advice or destroy on-farm.