



Submission by
Against Animal Cruelty Tasmania (AACT)

to the Review of
Australian Animal Welfare Standards -
Sheep

Introduction

It is important for AACT to establish from the outset that we believe the use of sheep by humans is essentially unnecessary and wrong. The prevailing belief among most people is that sheep were placed on the earth for humans to do with as they please. Besides being quite erroneous, this has led to a disturbing trend to use and abuse non-human species with little regard to the feelings and desires of those species. Humans can and should learn to live without imposing their will on other species such as sheep.

We can and should remove our dependence on sheep as food and fibre by utilising other sources to feed and clothe ourselves. There are very many non-animal products that are less violent (to sheep), healthier (to sheep and to humans), and less environmentally damaging (to all species).

Well-being of sheep

There is no question in our minds that many practices involving sheep are inherently exploitative and abusive. Humans have come to falsely believe that sheep were provided for humans to do with as they choose. This fallacy has persisted through many centuries to the point where few people stop to question its validity. It is no more valid than saying Australian Aborigines were put here for the British to use and abuse as they choose. While this did happen when the British "settled" Australia, many have realised the error of their ways, and so too should they realise the error of their ways in respect of sheep.

Sheep and lambs are sentient beings. Each one of them has thoughts and feelings. We really do not know exactly what sheep experience of life, but it is fair to say they have a very strong connection to it, just as we do. We can assume they have a passion for living and a fear of dying.

What must change is the consideration of non-human animals, such as sheep and lambs, as being "owned" by humans. They are currently accorded the status of property and their value is only that which is given by their "owner". We need to accord non-human animals their proper status as sentient beings. We must value them for their own sake, for their own intrinsic worth.

One thing that is missing in most dialogue about sheep is the consideration of each as an individual. There is a very strong tendency to group all such individuals together with the

one collective term sheep (and we have done so here only for the sake of convention) and to treat them as one amorphous “thing”. This is wrong. Each sheep or lamb is an individual, just as each human is an individual. They each have their own needs, fears, wants, thoughts, feelings. One just needs to look into the eye of a sheep and know there is something unique and special about that creature.

Sheep flesh

The sheep flesh industry in Australia is enormous, and is responsible for bringing millions of individuals into existence just for human use. In Australia around 26 million sheep and lambs are killed for their flesh.

Because they are considered property, and because people feel they have a right to kill another species to feed themselves, sheep are treated in this appalling way. It is time sheep were valued intrinsically.

(The comments in the **Well-being of sheep** section also apply here).

Wool

The wool industry in Australia is huge exploiter of sheep. Being very much market-driven, the numbers of sheep can vary widely from year to the next. When wool prices plummet, the “surplus” sheep become waste and are slaughtered in their millions, or left to starve.

Routine practices such as mulesing, castration and tail-docking cause severe suffering and substantial stress. These are only common because humans are forever demanding cheaper products and that means the well-being of the exploited sheep becomes insignificant in economic terms. These practices need not exist as they are all unnecessary.

(The comments in the **Well-being of sheep** section also apply here).

Live Export

Live export in Australia is yet another of those industries that seeks to exploit non-human animals for human purposes. Over two million sheep per year are transported for long

distances by road and by ship in crowded, stinking, stressful conditions. This is unnecessary in a compassionate world that rightly recognises each individual as a sentient being.

(The comments in the **Well-being of sheep** section also apply here).

Transport

Transport of sheep is also a routine operation carried out by the “flesh” and “wool” industries, and is essentially a by-product of it. Transporting sheep is unnecessary, just as the need for sheep to exist in such numbers is unnecessary. When the human dependence on sheep is removed there is no longer a need to move them around in great numbers from farms to saleyards to slaughterhouses.

(The comments in the **Well-being of sheep** section also apply here).

Slaughter

Slaughter is an act of absolute violence – the taking of a life. Killing for the sake of killing is unequivocally wrong. So-called “humane killing” is still killing, and is no less violent, and is by no means “humane”.

Humans can exist without routinely taking the lives of others. Killing need not be inherent in the lives of humans. A compassionate approach to living will negate the need for slaughter of the innocent.

(The comments in the **Well-being of sheep** section also apply here).

Human Health

Many of the widespread ills that afflict humans in Western countries are a direct result of consuming the flesh of sheep (and other species) [ref]. So many people are “addicted” to the taste of these products of violence that they scarcely consider the harm they are bringing to themselves as a result of the harm done to others. Most people experience improved health after eliminating the harmful sheep “flesh” products from their diets.

Environmental

In 2006 the FAO released a report called Livestock's Long Shadow that brought to public attention the environmentally damaging effects of global dependence on products of animal agriculture. In 2009 an even more damning report was produced by World Watch that revealed 51 percent of harmful greenhouse gases (GHG's) are caused by animal agriculture [Goodland and Anhang 2009].

There is no possible question of the environmental damage of farming sheep. They contribute significantly to the production of methane, a particularly harmful GHG. Methane is now recognised as being more than 70 times as potent as carbon dioxide in its potential to affect the earth's climate. They also contribute to land degradation and loss of habitat for native species.

Continuing reliance by humans on products from non-human animals is having a devastating affect on the earth on which we all depend. Humans have a moral obligation to change their consumption patterns and reverse this distressing trend.

Conclusion

Humans must change their attitude to non-human species, including sheep. We must stop thinking of them as property. We must allow them the right not to be exploited by humans, and recognise them as sentient beings. When that happens, our relationship to them changes, and the abuse and exploitation stops.

More than 26 million sheep and lambs are slaughtered every year in Australia. A change that accords sheep and lambs the right not to be exploited will be a change of great magnitude.