

Footrot notifications

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There has been significant progress with footrot eradication over the last decade. The whole of NSW is now gazetted as either Control or Protected Area status for footrot. In fact, more than 85% of the State has now reached Protected Area status.

An active program, strongly supported by industry, to identify infected flocks and eradicate the disease produced this result. Sheep producers know they can now reliably source sheep with a low risk of footrot from many areas of the State. At the same time there is an expectation from producers that all flocks infected with virulent footrot are in quarantine, and subject to regulatory actions.

The key to maintaining Protected Status is the identification of infected flocks and eradicating the disease before it is able to spread.

Many producers believe that it is the responsibility of Stock Inspectors to find the infected flocks but some of the larger Rural Lands Protection Boards have several thousand sheep flocks. Clearly, it is impossible for a small number of Inspectors to know the footrot status of all flocks in the district – particularly if owners take action to mask the disease.

The owner/manager of a flock is responsible for the health of their sheep. For this reason there is a legal obligation on owners/managers of sheep flocks to notify an Inspector if their sheep have footrot. Sheep owners are not expected to be experts in footrot diagnosis. However, where they identify abnormalities in their sheep's feet – and they are not certain of the cause – they are expected to have the problem properly investigated.

Footrot notification

If there is footrot in their sheep, owners or persons

in charge of stock are required to notify a Stock Inspector – either District Veterinarian or Ranger at the local Rural Lands Protection Board, or the Senior Regional Animal Health Manager for the district concerned. They may ask a Stock Inspector to come out and investigate the cause of lameness in their flock.

This notification requirement arises from Section 9 of the *Stock Diseases Act*. An obligation is placed on occupiers of land, owners of stock and persons in charge of travelling stock to notify the Ranger, DV or SFVO within 48 hours of it first coming to their knowledge that the stock are diseased. Section 22(1) of the Act says that the owner of the stock or the occupier of the land knows the stock are infected if the stock have been diseased for seven days. In the case of travelling stock, the person in charge knows the stock are infected after they have been diseased for two days.

Similarly, a veterinary surgeon and any other person who attends or is consulted with respect to stock, is required to notify within 48 hours if they either suspect or are of the opinion that footrot is present.

Evidence of underrunning of the foot in a dry environment and/or responses to treatment with footbaths should be regarded as suspicious of footrot and require further investigation.

Failure to notify the presence of footrot in a flock is a breach of the *Stock Diseases Act* and can lead to significant penalties, including prosecution for serious or blatant breaches.

If footrot is detected without prior notification then evidence for possible further regulatory action will be collected. The severity of the action taken would depend on factors such as:

- whether the flock in is a Protected or a Control Area for footrot,
- the number of sheep infected, and
- the severity of the footrot lesions.

Evidence of recent treatments or a repeat offence will be regarded seriously.



Reminder

There is an industry expectation that individual owners will undertake footrot eradication when footrot is found – and the best way of finding footrot is by owners notifying problems. It is no longer satisfactory to just undertake control measures and suppress the disease. In cases where footrot is diagnosed RLPBs are committed to working with producers to eradicate this debilitating disease.

For a full description of footrot and development of the disease see the Primefact 265 *Footrot in sheep and goats*.

NSW Footrot Strategic Plan

In 1988 the NSW sheep industry adopted the NSW Footrot Strategic Plan as a formal program directed at the eradication of virulent footrot. The Plan is overseen by an industry based Steering Committee with responsibility for setting direction and monitoring progress of the Plan.

The NSW Footrot Steering Committee has set the target of mid 2007 for all of New South Wales to be declared a Protected Area for footrot (where flock prevalence in any individual Rural Lands Protection Board is less than 1%). This target will only be achieved by all sectors of the sheep industry working cooperatively to eradicate this important disease.

Publications available

For a complete list of NSW DPI Primefacts and Farm Enterprise Budgets on the Web, please see this website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts.

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www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (May 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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