

BIOSECURITY ACT 2015

Discussion Paper: Sheep lice

December 2015



Photo: © NSW Department of Primary Industries

Comments on this paper close on 12 February 2016

Email your comments to: submissions.biosecuritylegislation@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Post your comments to: Biosecurity Act 2015
NSW Department of Primary Industries
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For more information

See: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurityact

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Summary

The *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Biosecurity Act) will repeal the *Stock Diseases Act 1923*, which includes regulatory controls with respect to sheep lice.

Having considered existing management arrangements and risks associated with sheep lice, it is proposed to implement similar management arrangements under the Biosecurity Act. Specifically it is proposed that sheep lice will be managed under the **General Biosecurity Duty (GBD)**. In addition, the current sheep lice advisory program will be maintained with industry and government advising on how to minimise risks associated with the pest.

Authorised Officers under the Biosecurity Act will also have powers to direct a person to take appropriate action(s) in association with sheep lice if required.

Background Information

What is the problem?

Lice are parasites of the skin of sheep, and can spread readily when the animals are in close contact, for example, when yarded, or from ewe to lamb. Lice infestations are impossible to detect visually in early stages and by the time lice are visible in the fleece, or fleece damage has occurred, the flock has been infested for at least three months.

Why is it important?

Sheep lice are an important cause of economic loss to the wool industry in Australia and cost NSW sheep producers about \$123 million per year for treatments and lost production. Early detection of lice infestation is extremely difficult and this means it is usually not possible to determine the source of a lice infestation in a flock or region. This can contribute to conflicts within rural communities.

What is the outcome we are seeking?

The NSW sheep industry has tools to assess and minimise the risk of introducing lice into their flocks, and can access current technical advice on the prevention and treatment of lice infestation.

Current management arrangements

Sheep lice is declared to be a “disease in stock” under the *Stock Diseases Act 1923* (SD Act), but it is not notifiable. It is an offence to:

- wilfully communicate or attempt to communicate lice to other stock;
- move, cause or permit infected stock to be in a public place, including a travelling stock reserve or public sale yard; and
- provide false or misleading information in regards to the presence of infection in stock.

DPI and LLS provide technical advice to sheep producers to assist them to manage the risk of lice infestations occurring and to help owners to achieve eradication in infested flocks. Advice may include responsible use of chemicals for lice control programs. There are also powers under the SD Act which can be used to control movements and require specified treatments if necessary.

Use of the National Sheep Health Statement is strongly encouraged. This statement is voluntary for movements within NSW, but once it is completed and signed it is a legal vendor declaration. It is considered best practice for any producer buying or agisting sheep to request a completed

National Sheep Health Statement. This will help in assessing the risk in relation to the presence of sheep lice, prior to accepting the sheep.

Proposed Management under the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015

It is proposed that sheep lice will be managed under the **General Biosecurity Duty (GBD)**.

The GBD requires any person who deals with biosecurity matter (e.g. sheep) or a carrier of biosecurity matter (e.g., shearing equipment) and who knows or ought to know of the biosecurity risks associated with that activity to take measures to prevent, minimise or eliminate the risk as far as is reasonably practicable

For example, sheep owners and dealers are to take steps to ensure that they do not allow lice to be communicated to other sheep at public saleyards and showgrounds, or on public land or travelling stock routes in New South Wales.

As the GBD is outcomes focused, individuals can determine the best way of managing the risks associated with sheep lice. For example, a sheep producer who discovers that his or her sheep are infested with lice should take all practical measures to contain the infestation and prevent it from spreading. The sheep producer could discharge his or her GBD by treating the sheep and taking precautions to prevent spread as per current [recommended guidelines](#) or through other means as long as the desired outcome is achieved.

The National Sheep Health Statement is a useful risk assessment tool when considering the purchase or agistment of sheep. It allows you to minimise the likelihood of introducing lice to your flock.

How you can discharge your GBD may be outlined in Industry Standards, Codes of Practice, guidelines or through other advisory or education material.

What do you think?

We value your comments on how we can improve our biosecurity system and look forward to receiving your input into this important process.

Please complete the following survey on 'sheep lice' at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/sheeplice>.

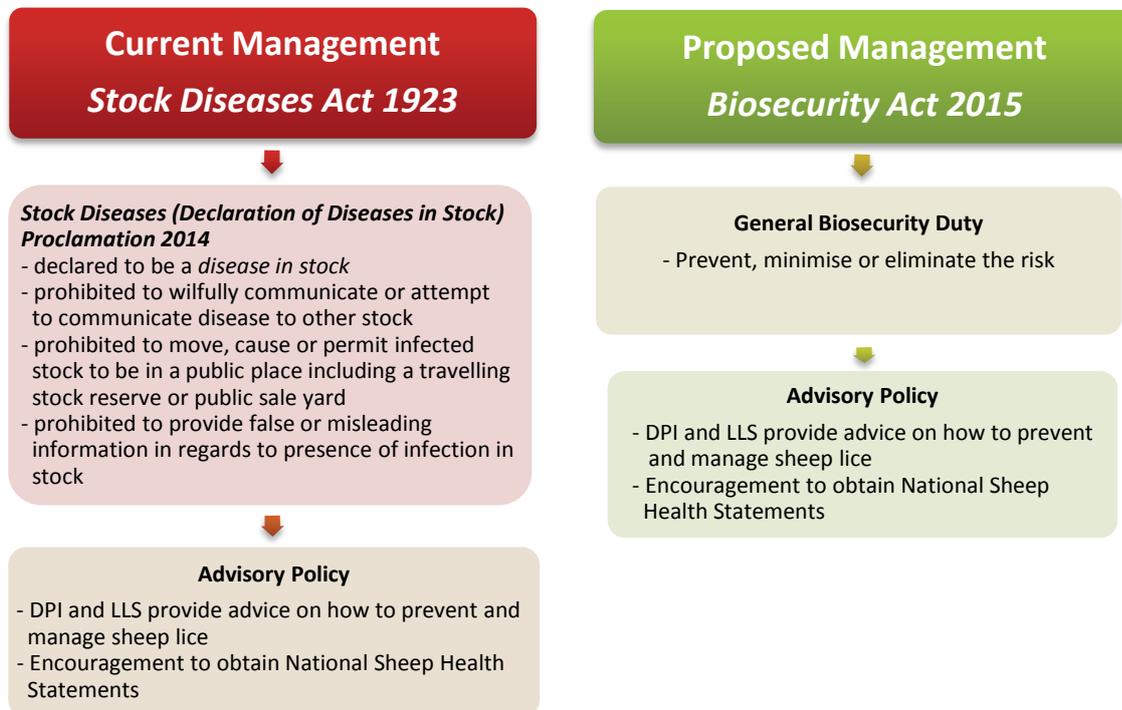
Alternatively, submit your feedback **by Friday, 12 February 2016** via [email](#) or post to:

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For more information about the *Biosecurity Act 2015* and regulatory framework, please visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurityact.

Appendix 1

Summary of current and proposed management of sheep lice



Appendix 2

This is a *hypothetical* scenario of how lice infested sheep *might* be managed under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* and is provided for *consultation purposes only*.

