



Department of
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Footrot Manual

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Footrot Manual

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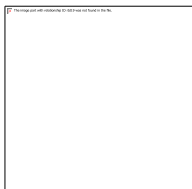
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Acknowledgments

This manual is based on previous Footrot Procedures and has been reviewed by the Footrot Working Group.



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Foreword

This work instruction (referred to as the 'Footrot manual') needs always to be read in conjunction with the Procedure Biosecurity - Virulent footrot in sheep and goats

In this work instruction, "footrot" without qualification is referring to virulent footrot. Where qualification is required the terms "virulent", and/or "benign" appear before the word "footrot".

The NSW Footrot Strategic Plan originally (1988) proposed taking action where underrunning was present. It has always been the intent of the Plan to eradicate virulent footrot and leave benign footrot alone accepting that the latter is almost impossible to eradicate.

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1. Diagnosis of Footrot

1.1 Diagnosis

The principal criteria in making a diagnosis of footrot in a flock/mob are:

- prevalence of sheep within the flock/mob with lesions of score 2 or greater,
- prevalence of sheep within the flock/mob with lesions of score 4 or greater;
- the progression or regression of lesions **without treatment**.

These criteria **must** be assessed with consideration of past and present environmental conditions and the flock history.

Laboratory tests may be used as an aid to diagnosis but do not replace the requirement for a thorough field examination of the flock.

1.2 Recording

Veterinarians, Biosecurity Officers, other Authorised Officers (AO) and accredited Footrot Contractors are required to record accurate details of sheep examinations, flock structure and history, and environmental assessments. The veterinarian is responsible for ensuring that these records are maintained in order to justify diagnoses and action taken.

A footrot property report **must** be completed at each visit. This report must include:

- the foot score report,
- an assessment of environmental conditions and
- details on the flock management, including changes since the previous visit where applicable.

Templates for foot scores and environmental assessment are available and should be used. The [laboratory footrot specimen advice form](#) can be used (even if you are not submitting samples) Refer to the LHMS SOP for the correct procedure to enter footrot information into the system to allow accurate program reporting.

1.3 Flock history

The flock history must include details of:

- previous history of footrot in the flock,
- footrot status of neighbouring flocks (if known),
- recent introductions into the flock (includes goat introductions),
- recent treatments that may have suppressed lesions,
- age, breed and sex of sheep,
- recent movement of sheep between properties.

1.4 Environmental conditions

In each flock where footrot lesions are detected, the veterinarian should always consider whether environmental conditions are conducive to the complete expression of clinical signs at the time of examination.

Some factors which should be taken into account include:

- time of year that the examination takes place,
- rainfall in the previous 3 months,
- nature of pasture, including proportion of clover and an estimate of the dry matter per ha,
- mean daily temperature in the district in the previous 4 weeks,
- the ability of the pasture to keep sheep's feet moist.

A regular "spread period" cannot be defined adequately district by district or season by season.

1.5 Examination of sheep

The veterinarian must be familiar with the range of lesions present in the flock and must interpret these in the light of the environmental and flock history before establishing a flock diagnosis. The foot scoring records are required for this process.

In all circumstances where virulent footrot is suspected, enough sheep must be examined to ensure that the number of affected sheep (score 2 or greater) reflects the actual flock situation.

In cases where the diagnosis is not certain this will involve the **examination of at least 100 sheep selected at random** from the mob in question. Repeat inspections and/or examination of more sheep are recommended when the diagnosis is not certain.

At each inspection, the lesions seen in sheep that have been examined are to be recorded on a foot score report and entered in LHMS.

See the [Primefact](#) Footrot in Sheep and Goats for images of footrot foot scores

1.6 Clinical presentation of virulent footrot

Virulent footrot should be considered in any flock where sheep show advanced underrunning (score 4 or 5 lesions) or where a significant proportion show underrunning (score 3).

The arbitrary level of more than 1% of sheep showing score 4 or 5 lesions may be a useful guide but should not be used as an exclusive criterion for considering virulent footrot.

Under warm, moist conditions, sheep show a severe and progressive separation of the soft and hard horn from the soft tissues underneath, often involving the whole of the sole and extending up the wall.

The disease develops rapidly in favourable conditions. Within 7 to 14 days inflammation between the claws (score 2) can develop into advanced underrunning (score 4). Under favourable environmental conditions, more than 10% of sheep usually show advanced underrunning (scores 4 and 5) with lesions persisting if treatments are not undertaken.

Usually both claws are affected and often more than one foot.

Lameness is a feature of the disease.

Virulent footrot can cause significant production losses.

1.7 Clinical presentation of benign footrot

The main lesion is an inflammation of the skin between the claws, referred to as interdigital dermatitis (scores 1 and 2).

The condition is indistinguishable clinically from interdigital dermatitis and early virulent footrot. The interdigital skin between the claws is moist and inflamed and the horn at the heel may be slightly underrun.

A high percentage of the flock can be affected under favourable environmental conditions.

Usually more than one foot is affected.

Lameness is a feature but is usually not severe. An exception is heavy sheep (rams and pregnant ewes), where the weight aggravates the lameness particularly when sheep first stand up after resting

The disease can disappear spontaneously without treatment, especially in dry weather or when sheep are moved to dry pasture.

*In some circumstances lesions may progress to score 4 in a small proportion of the flock. These score 4 lesions **regress without treatment.***

The clinical expression of the disease depends on:

- the strain of *Dichelobacter nodosus*
- the time of year
- the pasture conditions and
- animal factors, e.g. young naïve merinos in suitable conditions are more likely to show clinical expression than adult sheep.
- If environmental conditions are less than ideal for footrot, the prevalence of lesions will be lower.

Any treatment will suppress expression and make clinical diagnosis more difficult.

1.8 Objective scoring for footrot

Clinical lesions associated with *D. nodosus* infection are scored using the modified Egerton system standard scoring system approved by the national [Animal Health Committee](#) as follows:

Score	Description
Normal foot	There is normal skin between the claws, with no reddening or inflammation and no loss of hair. There is no exudate present
Score 1	There is slight to moderate inflammation with some erosion of the skin between the claws. The skin appears slightly red and there can be hair loss. There is no underrunning or erosion of the horn
Score 2	The skin between the claws is inflamed, raw and usually has an exudate present. This condition may involve part, or all, of the soft horn of the inside of the claws. There is no underrunning of the horn
Score 3a	There is separation of the skin horn junction, with underrunning extending no more than 5 mm
Score 3b	There is underrunning no more than halfway across the heel or sole
Score 3c	There is more extensive underrunning of the heel or sole but not extending to the outside edge of the sole of the claw. That is, it does not involve the hard horn of the claws
Score 4	The underrunning extends to the outside edge of the sole of the claw and involves hard horn
Score 5	This is a severe form of the disease involving the sole, with extensive inflammation and underrunning of the hard horn of the hoof

Descriptions of benign and virulent footrot are also provided on page 2 of the Primefact: [Footrot in Sheep and Goats](#). Lesions are illustrated on pages 5 and 6 of the Primefact.

1.9 Diagnosis in the flock situation

Footrot is a complex disease involving an interaction of animal, bacteria and environment. Irrespective of the footrot experience of the veterinarian, it will not always be possible to make a diagnosis on the initial visit. Veterinarians and owners of animals will need to be prepared to re-examine the same animals to monitor progression/regression and/or to examine more animals or more mobs than possible on the initial visit. In some difficult cases, it may take multiple visits (>2) over time to make a diagnosis. As footrot diagnosis in NSW is

a field diagnosis, ultimately it is the examination of the animals that determines if virulent footrot is present on a property.

There are four circumstances that are most likely to confront the veterinarian in the field when investigating footrot. The following are guiding principles to assist in making a field diagnosis.

1.9.1 Circumstances where the disease is virulent

There are sufficient sheep with advanced underrunning (Score 4 or 5 lesions), that the veterinarian is confident of a diagnosis of virulent footrot based on a single inspection and can justify this with adequate records.

OR

There are obvious chronic cases of advanced under-running (Score 4 or 5 lesions), in circumstances where risk assessment indicates virulent footrot is likely, e.g. a mob traced from an infected flock.

In these circumstances where the diagnosis is obvious on clinical grounds, laboratory tests are unnecessary and cannot be justified.

1.9.2 Circumstances Where Disease Appears Virulent, but Further Investigations May Be Required Before Making a Diagnosis

There is a high proportion of sheep with lesions up to and including Score 3c.

OR

There is a small proportion of sheep with Score 3c, Score 4, or even occasional Score 5 lesions, irrespective of the prevalence of lesser lesions in the flock.

Either circumstance may be due to:

- incomplete expression of virulent footrot because the infection is recent,
- incomplete expression of virulent footrot due to suppressive management procedures,
- full expression of benign footrot in a favourable environment.

The veterinarian must use their professional judgement as to whether the percentage of sheep with Score 3c or greater lesions is significant under the circumstances. The proportion of affected sheep will depend on the environmental conditions.

Where there are favourable conditions for expression, the flock must be reinspected in order to establish the diagnosis.

On re-inspection 2-3 weeks later, in the case of untreated virulent footrot:

- the prevalence of Score 3c lesions will have increased,
- Score 3c lesions detected at the previous inspection will have progressed to Score 4 or 5 in a significant number of sheep.

On re-inspection 2-3 weeks later, in the case of benign footrot:

- recent lesions will not have progressed significantly, and some may have regressed.

Where there are unfavourable conditions for expression, the veterinarian may:

- use a laboratory test to assist in the investigation, and/or
- elect to wait for environmental conditions that favour expression before re-inspecting the sheep.

Where the veterinarian is uncertain of the clinical diagnosis but suspects virulent footrot, movement from the property should be restricted until a final diagnosis can be made. An individual biosecurity direction should be issued. The standard IBD can be modified as appropriate. For example, delete requirement to develop an eradication plan and mention of notifying owners

1.9.3 Circumstances Where the Disease Appears Benign, But Further Investigations May Be Required Before Making A Diagnosis

There is a significant proportion of sheep with Score 2 lesions.

OR

There is a small proportion of sheep with Score 3a, 3b or 3c lesions, irrespective of the prevalence of lesser lesions in the flock.

The veterinarian must use his/her professional judgement as to whether the proportion of sheep with these lesions is significant under the circumstances, e.g. environment, suppressive management.

Where there are favourable conditions for expression, the flock should be reinspected in order to establish the diagnosis. On reinspection 2-3 weeks later, lesions will have progressed if due to virulent footrot. Laboratory tests may assist the investigation.

1.9.4 Circumstances where virulent footrot can be excluded

Other identifiable causes of lameness not involving *D. nodosus* are diagnosed and the veterinarian is confident that the investigation has excluded the possibility of virulent footrot infection in the flock.

1.10 Diagnosis of footrot in public places

In a public place a veterinarian or an AO may not have access to information about the flock history on the property of origin and in most cases will not be able to examine large numbers of sheep. In this situation diagnosis in the mob at the public place should be based on the clinical findings in the sheep examined. AOs may use their powers under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (the Act) to act on suspicion of virulent footrot in a public place in order to minimise potential spread of the disease.

For regulatory purposes, in public places, any underrunning assessed as Score 3a or higher of any hoof will require regulatory action.

For further information see the [Virulent footrot in sheep and goats Procedure](https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/sheep/health/footrot/regulations) (hyperlink <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/sheep/health/footrot/regulations>).

1.11 Laboratory testing for footrot

See 1.9- while laboratory tests are used in some states to diagnose virulent footrot, the NSW policy is to use field diagnosis. An objective assessment of foot scores in the flock, along with environmental and clinical history **must** be considered before a flock diagnosis is made.

A laboratory test must not be used on its own to establish a diagnosis of virulent or benign footrot.

Laboratory support is available to assist in making a flock diagnosis, where it has been difficult to make a diagnosis of footrot on clinical grounds alone. Laboratory test results reflect the animal(s) selected for sampling, the sampling of lesions, survival of bacteria in transit, isolation of *D. nodosus* on culture and selection of colony(s) for testing. Thus, the laboratory result may not fully reflect the strains present in a flock.

NSW DPI will fund the cost of laboratory testing for footrot at the NSW State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (SVDL) provided the following procedures have been undertaken in connection with the submission of samples:

1. A complete record is created in LHMS as per the instructions in Footrot-Guidelines for record keeping
2. Foot scores are documented for a minimum of 100 sheep or in flocks <100, all sheep
3. Samples are collected and dispatched following SVDL guidelines as per Video 3 – Collecting and packaging footrot samples on <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/services/laboratory-services/veterinary/veterinary-test-list/collecting-and-submitting-samples-for-veterinary-testing>.

Fees for testing for export certification or other 'private benefit' will be not be covered by NSW DPI.

1.1.3 Smears

Payment for examination of smears will not be covered as smears are not considered to contribute significantly to the diagnosis of footrot.

1.1.4 Elastase

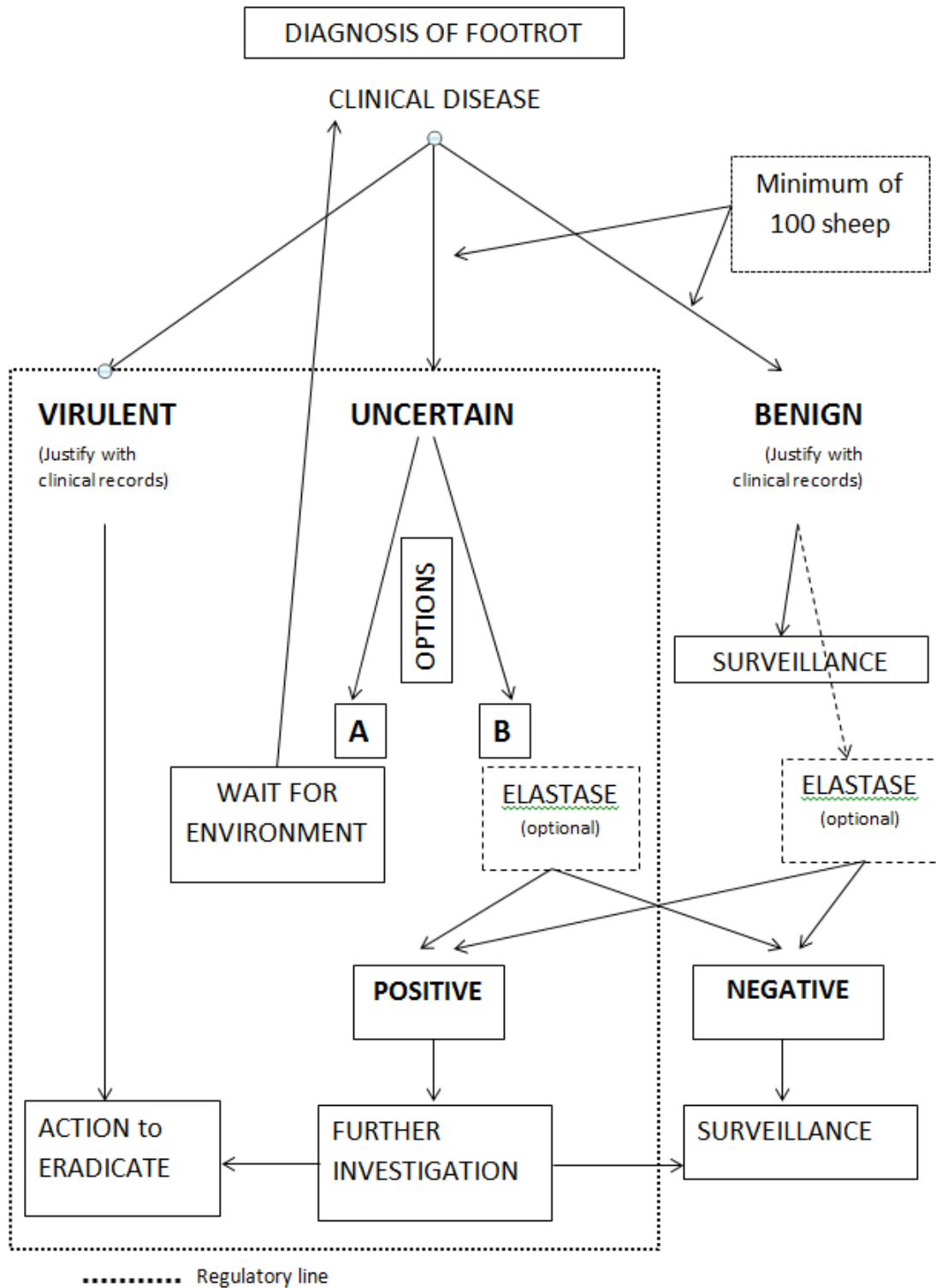
Elastase is an enzyme produced by some strains of *D. nodosus* and is detected using the elastase test which detects hydrolysis of elastin particles in agar. The test is performed according to the [Australian New Zealand Standard Diagnostic Procedure \(ANZSDP\)](#).

1.12 Environmental scoring system

The rating system assumes that 3 environmental factors are necessary for footrot to spread. This should be indicated in the property records at each visit and included on the laboratory specimen advice form if swabs are submitted to the SVDL for testing.

Factor	Characteristics	Score
Moisture	At least 6 weeks of rainfall averaging 50 mm per month, with at least 50 mm in the proceeding 4 weeks.	3 - Favourable
	The presence of sufficient moisture in the pasture to wet your boots mid-morning is quite a good indication that conditions are favourable, assuming temperature requirements are satisfied.	
	If the above conditions are not met	1 – Unfavourable
	If moisture is borderline	2 - Marginal
Temperature	Mean daily temperature between 10°C and 20°C	3 - Favourable
	If outside this range- score as: then indicate whether because < 10 °C - > 20 °C	1 – unfavourable Cold Hot
	If the temperature is borderline	2 - Marginal
Pasture	Pasture is actively growing and contains a high percentage (≥30%) of clover or similar low growing bulky moisture retaining herbage (eg capeweed).	3 - Favourable
	If the above conditions are not met	1 – Unfavourable
	If pasture is borderline	2 – Marginal

1.13 Flowchart for flock diagnosis



2. Footrot Tracing

2.1 Epidemiological investigation

As soon as footrot is newly diagnosed on a property, an epidemiological investigation should be undertaken to determine the likely source of the infection and its duration. This investigation should identify and consider the risk presented by all movements (or potential movements) onto the property including those from neighbouring flocks. In recently infected flocks it may be possible to limit the problem to certain mobs or parts of the property, particularly where it is made up of a number of separate holdings. Where a source cannot be identified, the DV will still be able to allocate a likelihood to each movement as being the possible source(s). This should be entered into LHMS as the information becomes available. The event will be used by DVs who receive traces to/from as a summary of event. The LHMS manual has guidance on entering tracing events in LHMS, "Advice/Plan

2.1.1 Where the source is identified

In flocks where the source and time of infection is able to be confirmed, a list of sheep and goat dispersals (trace-forwards) from the date of infection along with their destination must be compiled. The source property is the only trace back required. The DV should consider the risk posed to neighbours and decide if they need to be notified as a trace forward.

2.1.2 Where the source cannot be identified

In flocks where the source of infection cannot be determined, the DV should obtain a list of introductions and dispersals of sheep and goats for the past two years. Neighbours should also be identified.

2.1.3 Owner records

Unless the DV is satisfied with the owner's records of these stock movements, arrangements need to be made to inspect the records of the owner's agent(s) to ensure that all movements are identified and there is sufficient detail for them to be followed up easily at the other end. Minimum details of movements include a date, the number and a description of the sheep involved, and the name and address of a person who sold or received the sheep. NLIS will have most information which can be cross-referenced with data from saleyard or agent if DV is concerned record is incomplete.

2.1.4 Neighbours

A neighbour is any land that adjoins an infected property and includes land which meets at a corner (i.e. the two properties share a strainer post). It includes land separated by a double fenced road and the road. Users of the road are therefore neighbours. For infected properties, a list of neighbours and a map showing their relationship to the infected property should also be prepared. Those running sheep or goats should be identified. The map provides a check to ensure that all neighbours are identified. For recording purposes in LHMS

a neighbour is a trace. In the "Movement Summary", enter "Neighbour" as the trace "Direction".

2.1.5 Prioritising risk from movements

Sheep movements are to be assessed by the DV for their potential - either as a source of footrot or a risk of spread to another flock. Based on consideration of the factors listed below, the DV should allocate a priority of High, Medium, Low or nil to each movement. These categories correspond to the following:

- *High:* This traced flock has a very high probability of being the source of infection or has almost certainly been exposed to infection by the movement of sheep to it. It follows that for trace backs, there will only be one (or in unusual circumstances two) flocks identified as high priority. There may be multiple high priority trace forward flocks.
- *Medium:* This traced flock is possibly the source of infection or may have been exposed to infected sheep.
- *Low:* This flock is considered to have a low probability of being the source of the infection, or there is little chance that the sheep which have gone to it have been exposed to the disease. It does not mean there is no risk.

2.1.6 Team leader consultation

Before advising other DVs either in your region or other regions, the DV should discuss with their team leader. The purpose of this joint discussion is to review the process that was followed, to consider all aspects of the investigation, to determine that all the relevant epidemiological information has been captured and to discuss the logic behind the allocation of the trace priorities. If agreement is unable to be reached, contact the NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator.

2.1.7 Advising DVs in other regions

Tracing notification requires the trace be entered into LHMS (see 2.1.8). Once the trace(s) have been entered, take a screen shot of each event. The tracing event number should be included in the subject line of an E-mail which is forwarded to the DV for the region from / to which there is a trace. Also include the Diagnostic Event number that would allow the DV to obtain the epidemiological information required to follow up the trace (typically this is the only open "Footrot-Virulent" event). The follow-up of high priority traces should not be delayed while all tracing information is being completed or reviewed. DVs in other districts should be advised promptly of the outcomes of investigations (when conclusive) so further tracing can be put on hold.

2.1.8 Recording

- Tracing information is recorded in LHMS. See the LHMS manual for detailed instructions.
- As information is entered against the Diagnostic event, keep in mind the event and the traces provide both a summary and detail of the event that a person unfamiliar with the property should be able to read and obtain the required information.

- The “Advice/Plan” tab is used to record ongoing developments and as tracing is completed, include an assessment of the most likely source of infection. A property map with the relationship of neighbours denoting those with sheep should be attached.
- The DV who originates a trace must monitor traces. Completed traces should be reviewed, in particular the “Movement Summary Detail” with the outcome recorded as positive (source of footrot identified or infection confirmed in trace forward sheep), or negative (no evidence of footrot in trace forward or traceback sheep). This includes both traces within a region and traces to other regions. There is no field in LHMS to record this so it should be compiled in a separate spreadsheet.
- Should the epidemiological picture on the property change as a result of these further investigations, relevant information must be passed on to DVs with Tracing Event statuses as “Open”.
- Where no action appears to have been taken to investigate high and medium risk traces (go to “Movement summary” and the Field :“Movement Status”. If blank or open, indicates trace has not been investigated) after a reasonable time, the DV is to request their team leader refer the trace their appropriate counterpart.
- Regions will be asked to include a summary of the outcomes of trace forward/trace back neighbour investigations in their Annual Footrot Return. The likely source of infection should be stated for each infected flock.

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Tracing notification requires the trace be entered into LHMS (see 2.1.8). Once the trace(s) have been entered, take a screen shot of each event. The tracing event number should be included in the subject line of an E-mail which is forwarded to the DV for the region from / to which there is a trace. Also include the Diagnostic Event number that would allow the DV to obtain the epidemiological information required to follow up the trace (typically this is the only open “Footrot-Virulent” event). The follow-up of high priority traces should not be delayed while all tracing information is being completed or reviewed. DVs in other districts should be advised promptly of the outcomes of investigations (when conclusive) so further tracing can be put on hold. The NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator should be notified of any interstate traces for follow up by the Chief Veterinary Officer.

2.2 Action following receipt of advice of traced sheep

The following action should be taken upon receipt of the tracing notification

2.2.1 Traceback movements

- The traced owner should be notified by letter that there is an association between his/her flock and the infected flock. The traced owner should confirm (or at least not deny) that the movement occurred.
- Arrangements should be made for a property visit to collect information from the owner and to inspect the sheep in the case of high and medium risk traces. This visit should occur within 2 weeks for high risk traces and within 4 weeks for medium risk traces. Low risk traces may be investigated within the next 12 months as part of the

targeted/randomly selected surveillance program within a district. This priority may change where advice is subsequently received from the original DV that no other source of infection has been identified. In this case an inspection should occur soon after receiving that advice.

- In the case of high risk traces, it is the owner's responsibility to have a property visit within 2 weeks. If this does not occur, the owner is issued with an Individual Biosecurity Direction IBDs are not routinely issued to medium or low risk flocks. However, they are be provided with information about their General Biosecurity Duty and an obligation to notify disease. They are to be advised that this warning must be taken into consideration when recommending action should a failure to notify occur. Where investigations indicate that a medium risk flock is the most likely source of infection, it is appropriate to issue an IBD if an inspection is not undertaken within 4 weeks.
- The flock history should consider:
 - Management – is the flock closed/self-replacing or is there sheep trading activity? Proximity to other known infected flocks within the previous 2 years?
 - Are cohorts of the trace-back sheep still on the property?
 - Have there been other dispersals which may have led to infection in other flocks? Have suppressive footrot treatments been used on the property?
 - Environmental considerations?

This is interpreted in the context of the information provided in the tracing notification and the Diagnostic Event on the infected property. Information is used to plan how to undertake the inspection.

- Property inspections in accordance with Diagnosis of footrot (see section 1) must be undertaken in high and medium risk flocks. It may involve a paddock assessment of all mobs to identify those mobs that should be brought in for examination. Priority should be given to trace or cohort sheep if present. It will involve the turning and examination of a minimum of 100 sheep in suspect mobs with foot scores recorded to exclude virulent footrot. A diagnosis may be made on a smaller number of sheep where virulent footrot is diagnosed. A paddock assessment of an appropriate number of mobs with examination of any lame sheep is appropriate for low risk flocks during or following a suitable footrot spread period.
- Where footrot is detected, action proceeds in accordance with the Eradication section (see 3 Footrot Eradication Programs)
- Where footrot is not confirmed, it may be that the DV believes that footrot is not present in the flock, or that environmental conditions do not favour the expression of footrot and that a repeat inspection is required.
- Before the DV can classify a high risk trace as negative, they must discuss the history and results of the investigation with their Team Leader and agree that such action is appropriate. This consultation is not required for the DV to classify medium or low risk traces as negative.
- The DV must complete the trace as per the LHMS Guideline. In addition, report the results of all trace investigations to the DV who originated the trace. This is done by E-mailing the originating DV with the LHMS Trace number and the Diagnostic Event number created by the investigating DV.

2.2.2 Traceback movements

- Similar actions to Trace-back investigations should be taken.
- A specific consideration of the flock history is: are any trace forward sheep still present?
- Arrangements should be made for a property visit to collect information from the owner and to inspect the sheep in the case of high and medium risk traces. This visit should occur within 2 weeks for high risk traces and within 4 weeks for medium risk traces. Flocks identified as low risk traces may be investigated within the next 12 months as part of the targeted/randomly selected flock paddock inspection program within a district.
- Again, before a high risk trace can be dismissed, Team Leader endorsement for that action is required.

2.2.3 Action in neighbouring flocks

- An assessment should be made of the risk of sheep straying from or to neighbours as potential sources of infection.
- Risk assessment should allocate neighbours as high, medium or low with follow up investigations in accordance above for traced sheep. In some instances, neighbours may be considered no risk, such as where infected sheep are only on the property for a short period and have not been kept near the boundary.

2.2.4 Letters to owners

The letters available on the intranet are provided as a guide. They contain essential information to be conveyed to neighbours or owners of traced sheep in certain circumstances. DVs are able to vary the wording of these letters or add things to meet local needs. However, the essential messages must still be expressed clearly in modified letters.

3. Footrot eradication programs

The basic principle of eradication is to eliminate all cases of virulent *D. nodosus* infection in sheep and goats. As there is no absolute test available to confirm that sheep or goats are free of virulent strains of *D. nodosus*, it is necessary to challenge flocks with suitable seasonal conditions to determine whether or not the last cases have been eliminated. In some districts, conditions to provoke relapse/transmission may not occur for more than one year.

3.1 Provision of Technical Information and Advice

Following a diagnosis of virulent footrot and explaining the general biosecurity duty, the District Veterinarian must provide the owner/manager of the sheep with written [advisory material](#) describing the various options for eradicating footrot. Further information is provided in the Procedure Biosecurity- Virulent footrot in sheep and goats Section 6.3 Stock located on private land.

As part of this initial written advice, the owner/occupier must be informed that:

- the property will only be released from an Undertaking or Individual Biosecurity Direction (IBD) when an AO is satisfied that footrot is no longer present in the flock.

- if he/she is unable to complete an effective Approved owner footrot eradication program within a reasonable time then a compulsory eradication program will be enforced. This may require employment of outside labour at the stock owner's expense.

The written advice must be followed by personal discussion(s) with the owner/occupier about the practicalities of implementing these programs. The aim is to assist them to identify the best option for their enterprise.

3.2 Footrot Eradication Program

A condition of the IBD by the owner/occupier under the Act is a requirement to develop a Footrot Eradication Program.

Programs in general terms include:

- Removal of all sheep from the property eg direct to slaughter, slaughter only sale, to a feedlot with required arrangements to take affected sheep
- Inspect and cull
- Inspect and treat (salvage)- tools to assist treatment include foot bathing, antimicrobials or vaccination. Vaccination requires CVO-applications for footrot vaccination need to be submitted to the Sheep Health Coordinator. To be considered, LHMS must be up to date and include an eradication plan explaining how the vaccine will be used to assist eradication.

This Program is developed and agreed to by the owner/occupier and the District Veterinarian after taking into consideration what is likely to achieve the best results for the individual owner. The Program is compulsory.

The following elements should be included, as appropriate, in a footrot eradication program:

- a description of the type of program to be undertaken
- details of all mobs of sheep on the property identifying those that are involved in the program
- the dates that the various eradication inspections are proposed to be completed and the name of the person who will inspect the stock
- a procedure for segregation of infected stock
- deadlines for disposal of infected stock
- foot bathing treatments which are permitted
- details of salvage treatments (if used)
- a requirement for clean musters
- a requirement for branding all stock at each inspection
- a requirement to advise the District Veterinarian or Biosecurity Officer of activities undertaken
- milestone dates so that progress can be monitored
- review dates
- a procedure for making changes to the program

- Sample templates for footrot eradication plans are included as Appendix 1 of this Work Instruction.

3.2.1 Approved Footrot Eradication Programs

Encouragement and advisory support should be provided to assist producers to undertake an effective eradication program of their choice. This program must be approved by the District Veterinarian. The outcome of this program must be the eradication of footrot from the flock, not ongoing control to suppress the disease at a low prevalence.

Initially, owners will be given flexibility to decide on the type of eradication program that they will undertake. For example employing an accredited contractor or doing the eradication inspections themselves. The District Veterinarian should assist the owner, where requested, to design a program that meets their production goals without compromising biosecurity and animal welfare. This generally involves short term retention of animals to meet a production target. Discharging the biosecurity duty should be outcome focused whereby the owner should be allowed to determine the best combinations of actions to suit their particular circumstances to achieve eradication.

Irrespective of the nature of the Program, it must be written down and the District Veterinarian must agree that the plan is technically sound. It must also contain review dates.

One review date should be set to coincide with an inspection at the anticipated end of one eradication period.

Once agreed by the District Veterinarian this owner program becomes the Approved Footrot Eradication Program.

The Approved Footrot Eradication Program should be signed by both the owner and District Veterinarian and include an acknowledgment that if reviews indicate that it is necessary, a revised program will be developed.

3.2.2 Time available to complete approved program

When developing timelines for the eradication program, a period of 24 months (two eradication periods) is available for the eradication program to be completed. That is, all the eradication inspections in the program have been undertaken and the flock IBD/undertaking is revoked or eligible for a release inspection.

Unless circumstances beyond the control of the owner have intervened, if not commenced already, AOs should consider actions to take as outlined in 3.2.4 Compliance and Enforcement.

In large flocks it may be unrealistic to attempt eradication within this timeframe. In these situations, an appropriate extension to this timeframe should be agreed between the District Veterinarian, LLS Team Leader and the NSW Sheep Health Coordinator.

3.2.3 Supervision by authorised officers of approved footrot eradication programs

Approved Footrot Eradication Programs require supervision by Authorised Officers whose initial and principal role should be advisory to ensure that the outcomes anticipated can be achieved. That said, activity reports must be provided to the DV as detailed in the approved

program. All instances of non-conformance should be brought to the attention of the owner and recorded on the LHMS record.

The District Veterinarian should determine the level of supervision appropriate for each flock. Supervision is undertaken at two levels:

- Farm-based checks on all aspects of the program including
 - inspection technique
 - mustering
 - identification
 - segregation and disposal.

Inspection technique and mustering are best assessed at the time eradication inspections are undertaken. However, it may be of value to visit at other times to check sheep are properly segregated and identified infected sheep have been disposed of.

- Office-based reviews of activity reports provided by contractors and owners on monitoring of infection rates and reconciliation of mob numbers and branding can be checked, movement documents (NVD) can confirm that the sheep have gone to slaughter within a reasonable time, and phone contact with owners/contractors as required.

3.2.4 Compliance and Enforcement

Compliance and Enforcement actions should be in accordance with the Biosecurity and Food Safety Compliance Policy and Biosecurity and Food Safety Enforcement Policy.

3.2.5 Interim control strategy arrangements

In some circumstances it may not be possible for an owner to be certain of the details of an eradication program immediately after the initial diagnosis. For example;

- the effectiveness of a control program over spring to reduce the prevalence of infection may determine whether a culling program is economically feasible the following summer.
- a single mob may be diagnosed during the spread period and the owner may not be able to decide between a partial destocking or an inspect and cull program until they know the number of infected mobs and the prevalence.

In these circumstances, an interim control strategy should be documented as part of the IBD and the Approved Eradication Program developed after an appropriate review date. This date should be clearly identified. In the above example, the review date would correspond to the first inspection after the next predicted spread period.

At this review date the Approved Footrot Eradication Program will be developed based on the outcomes of the interim control strategy.

3.2.6 External assistance to undertake the program

The compulsory program will usually require the owner to engage an accredited contractor, private veterinarian or LLS staff to undertake and be responsible for the inspection process. Ideally, the person used should be agreed with the owner.

Costs incurred in engaging external assistance are to be met by the owner.

It is preferred that external assistance to an owner/occupier/person in charge should be provided by either an accredited contractor or private veterinarian. In some districts, contractors are not available locally, so that contractors who are prepared to travel may have to be used. LLS need to carefully consider potential consequences before they commit their staff to do the eradication inspections. Issues include

- cost recovery
- equity for other ratepayers and
- availability of resources for other LLS activities (particularly if there are large numbers of sheep involved or unforeseen emergencies demanding resources such as an emergency response).

3.3 Record keeping and reporting

LLS Team Leaders are responsible for footrot eradication in their regions and District Veterinarians must maintain a separate LHMS record for each property.

Records that must be kept include:

- Copies of programs undertaken on each property
- Reports of eradication inspections and the actions that result including
 - mob number,
 - sheep numbers,
 - date,
 - level of infection (footrot score sheets)
 - destination of culls
 - relevant comments/observations of mustering, inspection technique etc
- Records of supervisory activities. These would include
 - visits
 - reviews
 - office checks
 - defects, corrective actions, etc.

This information must be included in the LHMS record as an attachment or may be entered directly. See the Guidelines for recordkeeping for Footrot- virulent for instructions.

An annual audit of records will be conducted by the Sheep Health Coordinator who reports to the NSW Footrot Steering Committee. A summary of the progress with eradication on farms over 2 years under restriction (IBD) will be included in the annual report to the Footrot Steering Committee.

4. Release from IBD/Undertaking

4.1 Pathways for release from an IBD or Undertaking for footrot

An IBD or biosecurity undertaking can be released when an Authorised Officer (AO) is confident footrot is no longer suspected to be present on a property. Suspicion can be allayed by either

- destocking the infected sheep or
- completion of an approved footrot eradication program (AFEP) based on inspecting sheep's feet.

4.1.1 Total destocking

The IBD may be lifted seven days after all sheep and goats have been removed from the property. The AO must be satisfied that all sheep had been removed at day zero.

A thorough property inspection may be necessary to ensure all sheep have been removed unless convincing evidence is provided that all sheep were destocked.

4.1.2 Partial destocking

Where a District Veterinarian is satisfied that footrot has only recently been introduced and is confined to certain mobs, the IBD may be lifted following destocking of all infected and high risk mobs in the flock.

A clean inspection of all sheep in the remaining mobs considered to have had contact must then be undertaken, preferably after the disease has had an opportunity to express itself or spread. Based on a risk assessment, mobs with no contact with at-risk sheep may be excluded from inspection.

The District Veterinarian must make a record in LHMS of the reasoning behind any decision to exclude certain mobs from the destock and subsequent inspections. Where the infected sheep have been present on the property for more than 2 months, the history of the flock should be discussed with the LLS Team Leader or the NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator and agreement reached on which are the high-risk mobs. The NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator may seek the advice of the Footrot Technical working group.

The District Veterinarian must reconcile sheep numbers onto and off the property and must be satisfied there has been no straying between mobs. A paddock inspection after destocking should be undertaken to confirm that all at-risk sheep have gone. The fencing should be assessed to ensure it has been adequate to restrain the at-risk mob and to prevent straying after the partial destock.

Partial release from the IBD may be considered if the DV is satisfied different sheep enterprises on the one farm are run separately and a review of biosecurity/ management indicates there is no contact between infected and clean stock.

4.1.3 Completion of an eradication program

Where an AFEP has been completed, the IBD or undertaking may be lifted after a clean release inspection. Prior to the release inspection, there should have been at least 2 clean inspections of all infected mobs (clean inspection means no infected or suspect sheep detected and no treatments undertaken).

The release inspection may be done by an AO and/or an approved contractor working under the supervision of a veterinarian.

In footrot areas where the environment is conducive to the spread and expression of footrot, inspection should be carried out at least 6 weeks after the commencement of a spread period and involve the inspection of all feet of all adult sheep with no clinical evidence of footrot being detected. Lambs on ewes need not be inspected if ewes are cleared.

Any variation to these procedures, such as the use of risk assessment to reduce inspections in low-risk mobs in summer eradication programs or completing a release inspection where mobs have not had 2 clean inspections, must be discussed and agreement reached with the LLS Team Leader or DPI Sheep Health Coordinator. The NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator may seek the advice of the Footrot Technical working group.

The District Veterinarian must be satisfied that previous treatments, e.g. the use of footbathing, antibiotics or footrot vaccine, will not affect disease expression at the time of the release inspection and will not prevent expression during the spread period immediately previous to the release inspection (note: under the Biosecurity Regulation 2017, Clause 15, vaccination for footrot is not permitted except with prior approval of the Chief Veterinary Officer).

If the DV is confident that the eradication program has been completed to a high standard, then the release inspection can be undertaken. This is where:

- Records of all inspections and treatments have been kept and examined and
- Identification and check mustering have been employed to ensure all sheep are included in the program and the release inspection and
- There has been good dialogue with the owner / contractor as the program progressed and
- In the case of a program undertaken other than by a contractor, the District Veterinarian is satisfied that records are accurate, and the inspections have been carried out properly and
- The AO has no reason to doubt and is confident footrot is no longer present in the flock.

Any variation to the above procedures must be authorised in writing by the NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator. The NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator may seek the advice of the Footrot Technical working group.

4.2 Protocol for release from a direction or undertaking

The Owner/Occupier/Manager will have fulfilled the requirements of the "Approved Footrot Eradication Program" and in consultation with, and with the approval of the District Veterinarian, engaged an Accredited Contractor who will perform a single inspection of every foot of every animal in the flock during the summer following completion of the eradication program. (In some circumstances the District Veterinarian may decide to perform this examination).

The total flock must have been subjected to a spread period without evidence of a footrot outbreak in any mobs. (This usually means Spring conditions). In circumstances where a typical spread period for the region has not occurred (eg a failed spring), the DV may offer a release inspection before the next spread period (refer to 4.4). The owner/operator/manager will inform the DV of the proposed start date of the release inspection.

No antibiotic treatments or foot bathing treatments are to be used within 4 months prior to the start of this release inspection.

The contractor will set aside all animals with any symptoms of infection and notify the District Veterinarian so these animals can be inspected. No treatments of any sort - paring, foot bathing, foot sprays, antibiotic injections, etc - are to be administered to these animals. It is

also the responsibility of the owner to record details of such animals and supply these to the District Veterinarian.

4.3 If footrot is found during a release inspection

If footrot is found at a release inspection there is little point in continuing with further inspections. A review will be necessary to determine why the program failed and agreement reached on an Approved Footrot Eradication Program with high probability of success for the future.

In some circumstances continuation of the inspection may be warranted as an early start to an eradication program.

4.4 Situations where a spread period is unlikely to occur (prolonged drought).

In exceptional circumstances when a spread period has not occurred in a reasonable time (e.g. Failed spring, under prolonged drought conditions) a release inspection may proceed, with written agreement of the NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator, following completion of a successful approved footrot eradication program. The NSW DPI Sheep Health Coordinator may seek the advice of the Footrot Technical working group.

4.5 Authorised Officer records

The AO must keep appropriate records of release inspections in LHMS. This includes records of inspections undertaken by the AO, or copies of reports received from the stock owner or accredited footrot contractor.

This includes dates, numbers and mobs of sheep inspected, the reasons for any variation of the standard release strategy that was used and copies of authorities provided by the NSW DPI Footrot Coordinator where necessary.

Copies of legal documents such as the release from IBD or undertaking advice must be attached to the LHMS record.

4.6 Advice to owners

Following release from the IBD or undertaking, the owner should be:

- encouraged to continue to monitor the flock for footrot.
- made aware that the process for releasing the order or undertaking does not provide a guarantee that the flock is free of footrot.
- Reminded that they have a legal obligation to notify footrot should it be present in the flock, and that early detection will maximise their options for eradication. This advice should be explained to the owner and also provided in writing when the order or undertaking is formally released. A copy of this advice must be attached to the LHMS record for the property.

4.7 Post release inspections

Flocks released from undertakings/IBD will require an inspection following the next spread period after release. Strategies used must have a high probability of detecting virulent footrot

if still present in the flock. In small flocks (<100), all sheep should be examined. In flocks >100 sheep, muster what is considered the highest risk mob(s) for breakdown (hospital mob, any with initial large number of lesions) and inspect 100 sheep at random in each mob and any lame sheep. An alternative might be to conduct paddock inspection of all mobs with any lame sheep caught and examined for footrot.

LLS will be asked to report on the outcome of post release inspections in the annual footrot report.

Planning for the post release inspection should be incorporated into the Authority's footrot surveillance program for the next year

4.8 Prevention of footrot

Footrot is a readily preventable disease but requires care when purchasing and managing sheep.

Boundary fences and gateways should always be kept as sheep-proof as possible.

Where there is a suspicion of footrot in a district, owners should not share roads or any other ground with other flock owners, unless there is at least 7 days between sheep movements.

Stray sheep or goats should not be tolerated – they are dangerous to road-users and neighbouring sheep flocks. Stray sheep should never be put over a fence, without the express approval of that landowner.

Adjoining owners can significantly benefit each other by working together to enhance biosecurity. These measures will also greatly reduce the risk of spread of other diseases, such as sheep lice and Johne's disease.

When purchasing sheep, including rams, owners should make every effort to minimise the chance of buying footrot. Purchasers should carefully inspect sheep before purchase, question the vendor about footrot, and only purchase if the vendor provides a signed, completed National Sheep Health Declaration, which is an approved vendor declaration for footrot in NSW.

Purchased sheep should then be isolated on the purchaser's property, until they have passed through a period suitable for spread, usually the spring, without breakdown.

5. Definitions and acronyms

Accredited Footrot Contractor: a person approved by the NSW Veterinary Practitioners Board to undertake work on approved footrot eradication programs. See https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/sheep/health/footrot/livestock_contractors

AO: Authorised Officer under the Act

BO: Biosecurity officer from LLS

Cohort: group of animals sharing common land and facilities

DV: District Veterinarian

DPI: NSW Department of Primary Industries

Footrot: infection with virulent strains of the bacterium *Dichelobacter nodosus*

IBD: Individual biosecurity direction

LHMS: Livestock Health Management System

LLS: Local Land Services

NVD: National Vendor declaration

SVDL: State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

6. Legislation

- Biosecurity Act 2015
- Biosecurity Regulation 2017

7. Related Policies and Procedures

- [Primefact Number 265: Footrot in sheep and goats](#)
- [Livestock contractors certification scheme](#)
- Biosecurity and Food Safety Compliance Policy
- Biosecurity and Food Safety Enforcement Policy
- Virulent footrot in sheep and goats Procedure

8. Appendices

General information by eradication program type. Templates as relevant to the eradication type are also available on the intranet.

8.1 General notes on designing a footrot eradication program

- Footrot is eradicated by identifying and then culling all infected sheep/goats.
- Any program which relies on salvage (keeping sheep which had footrot but appear to be cured) has a significant greater risk of failure.
- No treatment will cure all infected animals. This means that all feet of each sheep and goat have to be examined at each inspection.
- Breakdowns in programs are not uncommon
- Surveillance and segregation of suspect mobs through winter/spring is essential.
- Lambe sheep/goats should be caught and examined for symptoms of footrot and advice sought if suspect lesions are seen.
- Foot bathing out of yards can reduce the risk of serious breakdown or cross-infection of other mobs but is no substitute for constant surveillance, especially before crutching, shearing, lamb-marking, etc.
- Decontamination of yards, paddocks, lanes, etc, is achieved by a 7 day spelling after infected or suspect sheep/goats have walked through these areas. Clean mobs should be moved or handled first through yards, then other categories, and infected mobs last. **Foot bathing is not a substitute for these precautions.**

- While cattle are not under any official restrictions, they can occasionally carry footrot infection between mobs/properties. Consideration should be given to keeping cattle that have been grazing with infected sheep/goats separate from clean mobs of sheep/goats during the eradication program.
- The inability to achieve a clean muster is a common cause of later reinfection. Muster a paddock and then check muster.
- Branding of all animals at the point of turning during each inspection will indicate the ability to achieve a clean muster. Brand infected and culls with a red brand on head/wig.
- Foot bathing at or between each turn should only proceed after consultation with the District Veterinarian. This treatment can suppress symptoms of footrot and make removal of infected animals more difficult.
- **"Non-spread Period"** is that period when transmission of virulent footrot will not occur due to hot/dry conditions.
 - Commence first inspection in early summer when clover has wilted.
 - 2nd and subsequent inspections (turns) should proceed at 3 to 6 week intervals, until each mob has had two totally clean turns where no infection has been detected. In a non-spread period, there should be no Score 1 or 2 lesions.
 - Change back to spread period- in some seasons, a change in the weather such as summer storms will result in marginal or full spread period potential. This will complicate eradication if benign *D. nodosus* is present resulting in more sheep being culled. Halting the program risks spread of virulent *D. nodosus* in the clean mob if all infected sheep were not detected in the first tip. Tip and Cull programs can be changed to Inspect and Treat. But this will inevitably increase the cost of the program and may have little impact ultimately on the proportion of sheep retained.
 - During periods of prolonged spread, eradication programs may commence and attempt to complete their first and second clean inspections. During these conditions an inspection can be called clean despite the presence of score 1 and 2 lesions. Sheep identified with score 1 and 2 lesions can either be sold for slaughter or managed as a treat and cure mob. If score 1 and 2 lesions in the treat and cure mob are still observed following treatment, they should either be culled, or the program should be discontinued until environmental conditions allow for a non-spread period. To avoid over culling and significant financial losses, if large numbers of sheep with score 1 and 2 lesions are detected at the first attempted clean inspection, the program should be discontinued until environmental conditions are favourable for eradication.

8.2 Inspect and Cull Program

- Enter ALL mobs (indicating ewes with lambs at foot) in the MOB LIST.
- If you are not inspecting the total flock record your reasons.
- Infected animals and culls identified at each turn must be isolated from any identified clean animals or non-infected mobs until sold/destroyed, (See Disposal)

8.3 Inspect and Treat (Salvage) Program

- All "cured" animals must be branded and isolated from identified clean animals from the 2nd turn onwards and this separation must be maintained until the end of the next major

spread period (usually Spring) and subsequently confirmed as cured by turning every animal and inspecting every foot. Consult with the District Veterinarian.

- At the 1st turn infected animals may be treated with either
- Antibiotics:
 - Advice on type and usage MUST be obtained from the District Veterinarian.
 - Antibiotics are prescription only and can only be purchased from a Veterinary Practitioner upon agreement with the District Veterinarian overseeing the program.
- Footbathing Chemicals
 - Consult District Veterinarian for type and method/frequency of use
- Treatment may suppress clinical signs of infection at subsequent infections. This should be a consideration when deciding treatment regimes.
- At 2nd turn **do not re-treat any non-responders**. Cull and dispose of as per "Approved Footrot Eradication Program"

8.4 Disposal of Infected stock

This should be done via slaughter only sections of saleyards or direct to abattoirs. Normally this should occur within 2 weeks of completion of each turn unless otherwise agreed to by the District Veterinarian. The owner must contact the LLS office for a Permit. Stock must be 'fit to load' under the livestock transport code.

Unsaleable animals may be destroyed on-farm.

8.5 Record Keeping (owner or contractor performed inspections)

It is the responsibility of the Owner/Occupier/Manager to properly complete the "Flock Status Report" supplied and return to the LLS within 2 weeks of completion of a turn.

Failure to comply may jeopardise a future release from Undertaking/IBD

Alteration to agreed programs may be necessary due to changed circumstances. Prior agreement from the supervising District Veterinarian must be obtained. Failure to obtain prior agreement may be considered as a breach of the Undertaking/IBD.