

## **Background of the Concession (*supplied by National Association of Agricultural Contractors*)**

We estimate that 50-75 skilled overseas shearers entered the UK in 2025.

Whilst this may not seem a huge number, the shearers are critical to the UK sheep industry as they are highly skilled, able to work across the UK and clear huge numbers of sheep in a few months. Each shearer can potentially shear 20,000 sheep+ during their stay so make a significant contribution – well over a million and a half plus sheep shorn each year overall.

1.5 million plus sheep, in a limited weather window, is a huge gap to fill if we cannot bring in overseas shearers.

Many of the shearers who travel are professional shearers, able to shear approx. 200-400 sheep/day. These are exceptional rates, with many 'average' good shearers expecting to complete perhaps 100-150 sheep/day. The overseas shearers are therefore essential to ensure that the operation can be carried out swiftly, within the necessary timescale and to high standards of animal welfare.

### **The Concession**

Since 2011, the NAAC has worked closely with the Home Office to successfully manage this special concession for highly skilled, non-visa national but low immigration risk shearers to come to the UK to assist in shearing the UK's flock each year.

The NAAC assists its members by ensuring they are fully informed and can provide all shearers coming in with a contract of employment. The NAAC also maintains a register of shearers coming in to smooth the entry process (the register is shared with the Home Office) and to keep a record of those entering the UK.

This seasonal concession allows entry for non-visa nationals from 1 April to 30 June, and the requirements of this concession are:

- The applicant is genuinely seeking entry for the purpose of undertaking employment, or providing services, as a sheep shearer, and
- The applicant will be able to maintain and accommodate himself without recourse to public funds, and
- The applicant will leave the UK at the end of their stay, and
- The applicant arrives in the UK for this purpose between 1 April and 30 June.

Shearers are generally on the world circuit or are returning to their home country to shear. These are low risk migrants who do not want to stay in the UK.

Prior to this concession the NAAC has assisted the Home Office for decades allowing overseas shearers to travel to the UK through various Government Schemes.

### **Why the Concession is still Needed**

In 2011 concession was established when the points-based system was introduced. Since then, the immigration process has tightened and it is impossible for shearers to legally enter the UK to work, unless coming on the Youth Mobility Scheme. The problem is whilst shearers are highly fit and skilled to shear such large numbers of sheep, they do not necessarily have any

qualifications for UK visa entry. The Youth Mobility Scheme is limited to 2-3 years entry, with age limits and significant cost – on top of shearers already needing to pay air fares for a few months of work.

In addition, this is a seasonal operation which last 3-4 months each year in the UK. This means that we need professional overseas shearers to assist our UK based team, as these overseas shearers work on ‘the circuit’ year-round and travel across the globe shearing all year. This level of shearing gives them experience, skill and professionalism to shear rapidly but to a high standard, thus protecting animal welfare.

Whilst we do have a skilled group of UK shearers, it is difficult for them to gain sufficient experience unless they join the world circuit. If only shearing in the UK, they only gain a few months of shearing work each year. This means it provides limited experience and is not sustainable as a job all year and additional income is required. This can make it difficult when shearers want to buy a house or have a family as sustained income is necessary.

Having international shearers come to work in the UK also helps strengthen the skills base in the UK. Many of our best UK shearers have honed their skills by working alongside their New Zealand and Australian based counterparts, sharing best practice and improving their technique. This further supports best practice, good animal husbandry and high standards of animal welfare in the UK.

### **Why is shearing important?**

Sheep shearing is a skilled and physical profession which should only be carried out by professionals who have been trained to shear carefully and sympathetically.

Sheep grow wool continuously to protect them from the weather. Wool is a natural product of the sheep’s life cycle, and the welfare of sheep is improved by them being shorn every 12 months.

Sheep are shorn to reduce the incidence of ectoparasite challenges such as blowfly strike, which can be fatal. Fly strike involves flies laying eggs – often in dirty parts of the fleece – and maggots hatching and eating through the sheep’s skin. It also helps prevent sheep from overheating in summer or getting stuck on their backs (cast).

Given the Animal Welfare Act (2006) states animal management must protect animals from “pain, injury, suffering and disease”, the government itself gives a tacit support to the importance of sheep shearing.

Without sufficient shearers, UK farmers face delays that could lead to severe health issues such as flystrike and heat stress, reducing growth rates, meat quality, and profitability. Flystrike already has mortality rates up to 7.5% in affected flocks.

### **Weather Limitations**

UK weather is changing and climate change is bringing increasingly hot, drier summers, with extremes in weather. This brings an increased risk to the UK sheep flock if not shorn in a timely manner ahead of hot weather.

### **Can we supply all UK shearers instead?**

British Wool is the approved provider for sheep shearing and wool handling training in the UK, training 900 people across the country every year. However, many that are trained as shearers

tend to be farmers and smallholders just wishing to shear their own, often relatively small, flocks. It takes significant practice to reach the skill level of the internationally travelling contractors.

Despite the UK's training courses, there continues to be a world shortage of skilled shearers.

We cannot simply train more operators in the UK as it is a skilled operation which improves with experience. It is seasonal and requires a high level of fitness and physical ability which cannot be obtained by a training course alone.

### **In Conclusion**

The industry needs to retain this special concession in the UK, to avoid potential problems in terms of animal health and welfare as sheep would struggle to get shorn in sufficient time to prevent heat and blowfly problems.

We rely on an input of overseas shearers to shear 1.5-2million sheep each year, and this resource is essential to ensure that the necessary shearing can be carried out efficiently, within the necessary timescale and to high standards of animal welfare.

Due to the lack of UK resource and the seasonality of the operation, it is entirely necessary to fill this shortage from overseas. UK contractors are needing to get their shearing teams in place for the coming season, and it is essential that decisions can be made quickly to avoid animal welfare issues.

Some shearing contractors will have 75,000+ sheep ahead of them in the coming months. If they fail to get professional shearers on board, the welfare of many hundreds of thousand sheep will be put at risk.