



## NSA Policy Position

### NSA position on welfare at shearing

#### **Background**

- Most UK farmers shear their sheep for management reasons, selling fleeces at a loss.
- The British wool market is oversupplied with high micron fleece. Some farmers are adding value to their clip by using low micron (finer wool) genetics.
- A trend for commercial flocks to use shedding genetics (Wiltshire Horn, Exlana, EasyCare etc) has been made on some farms to save on labour.
- In many cases it is a hired contractor, and not the sheep keeper, that shears the sheep.
- Most sheep are shorn in the late spring/early summer to keep them cool during summer and allow time for regrowth before winter. Winter shearing is also a useful management tool for better husbandry in specific situations.
- Defra's welfare codes cover sheep shearing [here](#) on page 13.

#### **NSA believes**

- Shearing is a vital management tool for most breeds of sheep to avoid welfare issues.
- Wool should be championed for being natural, renewable, sustainable and biodegradable.
- Shearing should always be completed to a high standard to ensure the best welfare outcomes for the sheep. This means quick but careful work to prevent injury.
- Members should undertake a British Wool training course if they shear their own sheep, or use contractors that have passed a British Wool training course (or overseas equivalent). The keeper, the shearer and those around them are responsible for animal welfare.
- All sheep farmers, shepherds, shearers and others involved in shearing should familiarise themselves with the 'Industry Guidance on Shearing' produced in 2019 available [here](#). Farmers have the ultimate responsibility and duty of care over their animals.
- Farmers and shearing contractors take animal welfare very seriously – and does not tolerate the rare cases where behaviour is found to fall below acceptable standards. It encourages its members to stop using a contracting service if they believe the standards are not acceptable.



## **Reasoning**

- Shearing prevents opportunities for flies to lay eggs in wool, hatching out into maggots and causing blowfly strike, a disease that affects animal welfare and, if left untreated, can be fatal. A soiled or overgrown fleece provides a habitat for maggots to hatch and attack the flesh of sheep.
- Shearing reduces the likelihood of heat stress and sheep being cast on their backs. A heavy fleece can cause discomfort.
- 50% of the weight of clean wool is pure biogenic carbon.

## **Future**

- British Wool runs shearing, wool handling, crutching, and equipment management courses.
- Around 800 shearers receive British Wool training annually across the UK each year.
- High-quality low micron wool is being bred in a genetic wool project called Fabulous Fibre by importing the Snowline breed from New Zealand.
- Growth in shedding genetics should reduce the amount of low value wool produced in the UK.

Updates:  
August 2018  
January 2019  
May 2019  
March 2025