



Dog Bites

Key Messages

1. Dog bites are both a significant welfare issue and a cause of wastage at abattoirs and on farm.
2. Dog bites can be prevented if all dogs around sheep are effectively muzzled.

What are dog bites?

Dog bites are the result of unmuzzled or incorrectly muzzled dogs having access to sheep, either in the paddock, yards or during transport. Abattoirs require dogs to be muzzled at all times.

Dog bites usually occur in the hind quarters, but also can occur on the face or along the back.

Disease on farm

Dog bites can cause losses on farm due to deaths directly from trauma or from secondary infections, and fly strike. Sheep with dog bites are often lame for some time and, combined with secondary infections, can reduce feed intake and production.

Disease picture at the abattoir

Carcases of sheep with dog bites are usually trimmed to the nearest joint which may be the entire hind leg, resulting in a significant reduction in dressed weight. Occasionally whole carcasses are condemned when wounds are infected and the animal is showing evidence of septicaemia (blood poisoning).



Figure 1: Kelpie with wire muzzle. (Lyn Pickles)

Treatment

On farm, individual affected animals may be treated by cleaning the wounds, using a fly strike preventative and under veterinary supervision; antibiotics, and possibly painkillers. Prevention of the wounds occurring in the first place is the key to managing dog bites.

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Prevention

1. The key to prevent dog bites is to muzzle all dogs that come in contact with sheep, including those belonging to contractors and transporters. Some dogs rely on biting to move sheep, so in these circumstances retraining of the dog can help to reduce bites. Restrain dogs when they are not muzzled and not working especially at night or when unsupervised.
2. Reduce the reliance on dogs by improving yard design and use low stress stock handling techniques.
3. If wild dogs are an issue contact your state based Department of agriculture or environment or visit "the national wild dog action plan" website:
www.nationalwilddogactionplan.org.au.

If you are still getting reports of dog bites after muzzling all dogs, re-examine your control program to ensure all dogs are muzzled correctly. Some dogs are sly biters and will only bite when out of view. Follow a line through the abattoirs or get a report about where the lesions are and how recent they are. If the wounds are occurring on the front leg in a consistent spot they may be due to other causes such as an injury in the yards or loading race due to loose tin, nail or wire.