

Deer Industry Conference FGM Hamilton May 2007

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Good morning ladies & gentlemen

I want to take some of your time to talk briefly about
The Code of Welfare, Velvetting and Animal Welfare

Firstly the Code of Welfare

Yes at last here it is. Hot off the press. Some of you will remember me talking about beginning to draft this code around 4 years ago so it's been a very long time coming. In fact it's been doing the rounds of bureaucrat's offices for approx two years.

The Deer Industry is the first pastoral sector to have its own code of welfare. Obviously others are very close to completing theirs for instance the dairy code probably isn't too far away.

I think to that it's important to recognise that the industry initially drafted it's own code rather than someone else doing it, as we've seen in the past with some other codes.

Summary of the code of welfare for deer

Introduction

The code of welfare for deer came into force on 18th May 2007.

It's intended to encourage all deer farmers (including those on game estates and safari parks) to adopt the highest standards of husbandry, care and handling.

Basically it sets out the general principles for the care of deer,

Who wrote the code?

Initially this was done through a small team including deer farmers, veterinarians (in the early stages), processor - exporters, stock and station agents, as well as DINZ personnel.

Just as an aside we started with the generous help from the Pork industry who gave us an electronic template of their own code so we had something to start with. All codes have to be written in the same format so that was of great help to start with.

The first few versions of the code threw up all sorts of anomalies such as when doing global changes in the document like changing the word pig for the word deer then as we worked our way through the document we were coming across these new animals called DEERLETS so it was quite amusing at times

Along the way we had huge input from the wider deer industry through consultation and submissions from DFA branches which was great. All branches had opportunities

to have input. Scientific researchers and other interested groups were consulted as well.

Once this process was finally completed (I think it was on version no 27) the draft code was submitted to NAWAC (the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee) At that point we no longer had ownership it then became NAWAC's code

NAWAC considered the draft; they added their own requirements (however they did this in consultation with the code writing team) and then put the code out for public consultation.

There were only around 20 submissions made from the public and most of those were in support of the code. Unlike other codes where there have been tens of thousands of submissions from the public. Once the public submissions had been dealt with NAWAC passed it on to MAF Policy to determine that it didn't breach any legislation in any way then passed it to the Minister for signing off.

And here at last after a very long time we have the code.

How does it affect me as a farmer?

Under the Animal Welfare Act the "owner" of an animal, and the "person in charge" of an animal, are responsible for meeting the legal obligations for animal welfare and have overall responsibility for the welfare of the animals.

Deer owners may place their deer in the care of others for the purposes of rearing, transport and slaughter, but this does not absolve them from their responsibility.

Responsibility for meeting minimum standards during the operation of particular tasks will lie with the person responsible for carrying out that particular task.

To ensure that this happens, the code of welfare requires owners and persons in charge to ensure that their personnel have either the relevant knowledge or training, or appropriate supervision, to ensure that the health and welfare needs of the deer in their care are met.

Does it cover all of my deer, all of the time?

Yes this code applies to any deer held behind any boundary fence or other enclosure for the broadest purposes of farming, including the keeping of deer on game estates or safari parks.

It covers all aspects of deer production except the removal of velvet and castration of male deer. This is covered in other codes.

How do codes work?

The Animal Welfare Act imposes a duty of care on owners and persons in charge of animals

They must meet the physical, health and behavioural needs of their animals. However, the Act itself does not specify the needs for individual species or circumstances. All that detail is provided by codes of welfare.

The Animal Welfare Act sits at the top and all the codes of welfare sit underneath but all feed directly into the act

Codes serve a number of purposes (legal, advisory, educational). So it's quite important to understand how to read them.

For each topic in a code there are usually four sections:
an introduction which gives a background to the topic
the minimum standards these are the part of the code that have legal effect.
recommended best practice practices that we hope all deer farmers will aspire to and which if followed, will lead to better welfare (and often better economic) outcomes;
general information general advisory information on the topic.

Where can I get a copy of the code?

The code will be available online on the DINZ web site. It's also available on the MAF & Biosecurity websites.

For those who don't have broadband and don't want to download on dialup
If you want a copy, please contact Pam at the DINZ office and she will get one to you.
A summary of the code will also be in industry publications in the future.

I personally believe that because of the proactive development of good industry codes of practice over the years it's actually put the deer industry in a strong position to feel very confident that deer farmers could easily comply with this code.

To date 9 codes of welfare have been issued

Broiler chickens: Fully housed 2003

Rodeos 2003

Pigs 2005

Layer Hens 2005

Zoos 2005

Circuses 2005

Painful husbandry Procedures 2005

Companion Cats 2007

Deer 2007

VELVETTING

Just very briefly now turning to Velveting

The numbers of active velvetters has dropped significantly this past season and every reason to suspect a further drop for the coming season.

Many more velvetters have taken up the option of using the mechanical block system. That's fine however a message here is that we need to know when this happens. Quite often the vets will just give certified velveter a supervisory visit on how it operates and then sells the farmer his NaturO rings and away they go. That info isn't being passed on to us and like I said we need to know this information for the programme and our data base to function properly. The contract details need to be altered when this happens as well.

While I'm talking about this another message to all velvetters is that even if your only using NaturO rings its still a requirement to sign off the velvet record book and give it to you're veterinarian at the end of the season.
This is also required in order to keep everything current on the data base as well as the smooth running of the programme..

NVSB Audit

Data has been analysed from the last velvet season and the big picture is showing it to be on a par with the past three seasons in all the major areas.

You may have heard me say previously that each year as part of the programme requirements we have to benchmark the season and present those findings to the constituent bodies including NAWAC.

However the audits have shown up a few areas where we need to improve and the message here is:

Hygiene

I'm talking about the velvet itself.
We're dealing with a food product;
Everybody knows that.

So we need to take particular care in the handling and storage of the product.
I've heard indirectly from the velvet pools this year of the disturbing amount of velvet mainly spiker velvet that is turning up in bags with large amounts of frozen dirt from the shed floors. or of large frozen blocks of blood and hair mixed with the velvet.
We need to be more aware and a little more careful

Shed cleanliness

Auditors have recorded many sheds not up to a reasonable standard of cleanliness.
Bird droppings piled up on rails around the actual work areas where velvet is being placed prior to freezing.

Uncapped needles

They've also expressed concern at the number of incidences where velvetters were operating or carrying out tasks with uncapped needles in their hands. There is a real danger in this practice.

The cost of running the programme isn't getting any cheaper
There are less registered on the programme now than for many years
For instance the cost of the velvet Id tags is now close to 20cents each
So it's annoying to hear all sorts of rumours as to what they may or may not be being used for

It's so imperative we continue to do things right.

Animal welfare

Turning quickly to Animal Welfare

Once again you've heard me talk about this over the years however it's a bigger issue now than ever before.

It has no barriers its right across the board now from demands from some of our offshore markets to our general public here in this country.

People are becoming much much more aware of welfare issues. Not only that they know how to draw attention to welfare issues now.

We see local programmes about cruelty on TV. We see the results of court cases in the press.

In fact we see more and more cases coming to the courts these days some of them for things we probably would have taken for granted a few years ago but not anymore.

Some of you would probably remember back in the earlier days how we got looked at sideways by other export sectors when we were actively promoting good animal welfare practices throughout the deer industry.

Well look at it now all those things we were predicting back then have all come about and now all meat sectors have their own programmes most of which actively promote animal welfare.

There are so many people or agencies out there now looking for welfare issues and a number of them who follow up on these issues as well.

That's when the going gets tough for the individuals involved.

For instance MAF VA at venison plants now takes a more active look for welfare issues.

Not just for injuries and condition but also for velvet issues where welfare has been compromised.

It might be in the future that they will pick out a consignment of animals that have been sent to slaughter where some have been velvetted and they may well ask the question of the owner of the animals how did the velvet get removed. Prove it. Are you a registered velvetter? Well if your certified you can prove that. Did a veterinarian de-velvet your deer? Prove it. If you not a certified velvetter and a vet didn't remove the velvet

Then I fear this is where some farmers may well get caught out.

You don't have to be a genius to work out the numbers between how many are registered velvetters, how many have veterinarians remove their velvet and how many are left in that equation

I've said it all too often we run the risk for the industry of individual's velvetting their own deer out side of the NVSB programme or without any veterinary assistance.

All I will say on that is the end result these days could be mind boggling with fines under the Animal Welfare act up to \$25000 for an individual.

In the past 6mths I've been aware of many requests from off shore for animal welfare improvements in some of our practices here for instance just on transport alone there have been calls across the board for

Lower densities of stock in Crates.

That's less animals per pen in the crate. Not only that but how does the driver know how many of those particular animals to put in those pens?

Waterproof roof's on crates. Animals on lower decks in crates are protected from the elements why aren't the ones on the top decks?

More ventilation in stock crates.

Proof of driver training in animal welfare.

I'm certainly not saying we will have to do all this but it's usually a good guide as to what's going to be called for in the future. I would add here though that I believe the deer industry is in very good shape to be able to comply with any requirements that may be thrust upon us in this regard.

I may already have shown this image to you before as it's a couple of years old now but look at the ventilation on this crate. All controlled by shutters to open up or close down the airflows. It even has extractor fans at the front of each pen.

Close you eyes and envisage the truck that comes onto your farm and compare the two crates.

This next image shows a few things that might make you shake your head.

Water troughs, water sprayer's, closed circuit TV cameras to monitor the animals
The second deck lowers down towards the bottom deck level for easy loading.

There will be some changes ahead that's for sure.

My aim for this industry is that we are a step ahead all the time.

Thanks for your time