

**Guidelines for the Welfare of  
Red and Wapiti Yearling Stags During the  
Use of Rubber Rings to Induce Analgesia  
for the Removal of Spiker Velvet**

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## **1. Introduction, Purpose and Scope**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The issue of these guidelines follows a formal request from the New Zealand Game Industry Board, supported by the New Zealand Deer Farmers Association and the New Zealand Veterinary Association (Deer Branch), that the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) approves a mechanical block technique intended to achieve analgesia when velveting red and wapiti yearling stags. This request was referred to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) by the CVO.

The Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer During the Removal of Antlers ("the Code") was published in 1992.

The aspect of the Code that refers to the induction of analgesia when velveting is:

#### **4.4.2. The Operation**

*"The velvet antler must be fully desensitised before velvet harvesting, using only those forms of anaesthesia approved by the Chief Veterinary Officer."*

### **1.2 Purpose**

These guidelines are intended for all velveters responsible for the welfare of red and wapiti yearling stags and who intend to use rubber rings to achieve analgesia.

### **1.3 Scope**

These guidelines provide for the welfare of red and wapiti stags during the use of rubber rings intended to induce analgesia for the removal of spiker velvet from yearling stags.

Only persons registered under the NVSB programme may use the procedures provided for in these Guidelines.

### **1.4 Definitions**

For the purpose of these guidelines "spike" means velvet antler up until the stage that the spike becomes hard antler

An "analgesic ring" is a rubber ring that is designed to induce analgesia in the spike, that meets, or is similar to, the specifications and properties of the "NaturO" band for analgesia, and approved by the CVO.

An elastrator ring is not an approved device for the purpose of these guidelines.



## **1.5 Term and Revision**

These guidelines are approved for 12 months only commencing 1 September 1998, the date that the CVO approved the procedures in the Appendix.

These guidelines are based on the knowledge and technology that was available at the time of publication and may need to be varied in the light of future knowledge.

AWAC will review these guidelines when deemed necessary but in any event the guidelines and procedures will be reviewed in association with the National Velvet Standards Board (NVSBS) at the conclusion of the 1998/99 velvet harvest season.

These guidelines may be modified by AWAC as a result of the monitoring programme using the data obtained from the NVSB, farmers, veterinarians and others involved in the monitoring programme.

## **2. Quality Assurance System**

### **2.1 QA system**

To ensure that standards of animal welfare and husbandry are maintained, each deer farm using these procedures must comply with the quality assurance system and procedures established by the NVSB to ensure that the conditions of these guidelines are being met.

### **2.2 Records**

The maintenance of good records is an integral part of a quality assurance system and good farm management.

Adequate records will assist in the detection of any husbandry or health problems.

Accurate records must be kept each time the procedures are used and any adverse reaction to the use of rubber rings noted. Recording requirements are described in the Training Manual and Support System for Deer Farmer Harvest of Velvet Antler, NVSB, July 1998

### **3. Procedures for the Use of a Mechanical Block**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The Code deals with the issue of antler removal in all deer. Because of welfare and management considerations specific to a mechanical block technique these guidelines are specific for the induction of analgesia using a mechanical block in red and wapiti yearling stags (spikers).

#### **3.2 Justification**

Spikers with hard antler or pedicles demonstrate aggressive behavioural tendencies and are known to cause serious injury and/or death to other members of the herd. Animals without antlers are easier and safer to handle. The application of an analgesic ring provides a simple, effective and reliable alternative to injected local analgesic for the removal of antlers.

The use of a mechanical block technique will allow the spike to be removed with minimal stress and interference to the individual animal.

This technique provides a simple and practical method for inducing analgesia prior to spike removal based on rigorous peer reviewed scientific research and subsequent evaluation in the field.

#### **3.3 Caution on Use**

This technique should be used only for yearling stags destined for slaughter. While there is no indication to date that subsequent velvet growth is affected by this procedure, further research will be conducted to validate this.

#### **3.4 Administrative Procedures**

The lay person wishing to use a mechanical block technique must possess an adequate knowledge of all issues of welfare relating to the procedure and be competent to an agreed standard in performing the practical procedures.

Velvetters wishing to participate in this programme are required to:

- register with the NVSB
- provide the NVSB with confirmation of a consultation with his or her veterinarian. This consultation will enable the veterinarian to establish that the person carrying out the procedure has adequate facilities, is sufficiently aware of health and hygiene requirements, has undertaken any vaccination programme that may be deemed appropriate, and is

aware of any possible untoward sequelae (abnormal conditions or complications) that may occur with the use of the procedure

- agree to on-farm visits by the NVSB or its representatives for monitoring purposes
- agree to supply such information as may be requested from time to time by the NVSB as part of the monitoring programme.

### **3.5 Monitoring**

It is important for the acceptance of these procedures that the programme is regularly monitored in accordance with the requirements of the NVSB programme.

The rationale for monitoring is to assure all stakeholders of the effectiveness of this technique in a large variety of farm situations and to provide data from which AWAC can review these guidelines.

These procedures will be monitored at a level sufficient to assure the well-being of the deer involved in the programme.

The level of monitoring will be determined by independent statistical advice and will be carried out by, and at the discretion, of the NVSB.

The results of auditing will assist in planning the extent, or necessity, for ongoing monitoring in accordance with a programme administered by the NVSB.

The NVSB will receive the returns from participating farmers and keep records of random site monitoring records.

### **3.6 Mustering and Handling**

The animals selected for the procedure should be run into properly designed yards where they will not be overcrowded or alarmed by noise or unusual visual stimuli.

The design of the race and yards should be such that the yearling stags can be yarded with minimal stress to the animals and minimal risk of damage to the spike.

Any device that immobilises the animal by the use of an electric current, such as the Stock-Still Electro-immobiliser, is not a device approved by the CVO and must not be used.



### **3.7 Procedures for inducing analgesia using a mechanical block technique**

The procedure involves the application of an analgesic ring about the base of the pedicle prior to velveting.

This technique may be used only after consultation with a veterinarian and in accordance with these guidelines and procedures approved by the CVO as set out in the Appendix.

### **3.8 Aftercare**

Animals must be inspected after spike removal and before they are released.

Animals must be inspected sufficiently frequently to ensure their well-being especially during the first seven days after the spike removal.

Animals should be kept under observation in accordance with good stock-sense. Although few problems are likely to be encountered, if any problems do occur which cannot be corrected by the owner or supervisor of the animals, veterinary advice must be sought.

Veterinary supervision must include instruction by the supervising veterinarian to the deer farmer on possible untoward sequelae, how to react and at what point the veterinarian should be consulted.



## **Appendix**

### **Technical Procedures for the Use of Rubber Rings to Induce Analgesia in Red and Wapiti Yearling Stags for the Removal of Spiker Velvet**

#### **1. Application**

##### **1.1 Equipment and facilities**

Facilities for adequate restraint are essential, e.g. a crush or race, depending on the preference of the farmer.

Analgesic rings and applicator are required.

All equipment should be clean and free of faecal contamination.

The procedure should not be carried out in wet or muddy conditions.

##### **1.2 Animal health**

Animals should be healthy and the spike should be free of mud or other contaminating material that might contribute to the development of inflammation or infection.

##### **1.3 Time of Application**

The technique can be applied provided there is a discernible spike above the pedicle/antler junction, up until the stage that the spike becomes hard antler.

Since not all animals will be at the same stage of spike development at the same time, it may be necessary to repeat the muster as others reach a suitable stage of antler development. However, if the procedure is left until the spike has commenced to branch difficulties will be encountered in getting the analgesic ring over the branching. In this event the stag must be velveted using the approved analgesic procedures in the Code.

##### **1.4 Procedure**

Deer should be held with the minimum necessary restraint for the minimum necessary time.

Place the applicator and analgesic ring over the spike and apply the ring below the pedicle/antler junction.

The analgesic ring must be applied as close to the head as possible. This ensures analgesia is attained after the specified waiting period.

The analgesic ring must be applied to each spike being cut.

Ensure that the analgesic ring is securely positioned.

Animals should be left undisturbed for a minimum of 60 minutes.

As soon as possible after the requisite waiting period, remove the antler by cutting above the pedicle/antler junction with an appropriate sharp cutting instrument. The cut velvet must not come into contact with unhygienic surfaces.

The ring should be removed immediately after the velvet has been cut using a sharp instrument, e.g. a scalpel, taking care not to injure the animal. Spike removal must be completed within 120 minutes of the application of the analgesic ring.

If on any individual animal it is found that there is inadequate analgesia at the start of velveting, velvet removal must stop forthwith and an alternative form of approved analgesia provided if the operation is to be continued.

In the event of the analgesic ring breaking prior to velveting a replacement must be applied and the specified waiting period recommenced.

## **2. Post-application observation and records**

Animals must be observed closely a number of times within the first seven days post-velveting (and at regular intervals thereafter) to enable the farmer to detect any untoward sequelae such as bleeding, swelling, inflammation, or infection. If any abnormalities are observed, a veterinarian should be consulted and the abnormalities recorded.

Information is to be supplied to the NVSB in accordance with the procedures set out in the Training Manual and Support System for Deer Farmer Harvest of Velvet Antler, NVSB, July 1998