

Good Operating Guidelines for Stag Sales

October 2022

Introduction

Stag sales are a great way to show off our amazing animals. However, they can also present significant risks to animal welfare and our ability to operate if they are not run well.

The NZDFA, NSVB and DINZ have developed the following guidelines to help stag sale organisers hold excellent sale events that meet or exceed current animal welfare and velvet hygiene requirements.

Guidance

Pre-sale

- Do not include images of restrained animals (either chemical or physical) in any promotional material/catalogues, especially online. While the animal may be in no discomfort, the use of restraint can make it seem otherwise.
- Exclude any stags with damaged or injured antlers from the sale.
- Make sure that all facilities (particularly doors or gates) are large enough (height and width) to accommodate the biggest stags being sold. If they are not, either find another way to show the stag, e.g. in the paddock, or modify the facilities.

Sale

- Think about the event from the stag's point of view and do everything you can to minimise stress and anxiety for it, e.g. quiet, calm handling, quick return to the holding pen/paddock.
- Have a plan for dealing with any antler damage/injuries that occur on the day and practice it, so that everyone knows what to do. Make sure you have the number of your local vet practice to hand, just in case you need it.
- If something goes wrong, deal with it in a calm and professional manner.

Post-sale

- Move stags back to the paddock as soon as possible, to minimise stress.
- Only use DeerQA accredited transporters to move stags off the property, especially when dealing with hard antlered trophy stags and high-value animals.
- Stags that are velvetted after the sale must not be transported for at least seven days after velvetting.
- All velvetting must be done by a registered veterinarian or according to NVSB programme requirements. There are additional risks with late-stage velvet removal, so it is advised to remove velvet well ahead of sale day.

Displaying/handling velvet

- Display velvet for the minimum time necessary, then return it to the freezer, to avoid thawing and potential downgrading.
- Place velvet on clean white agricultural plastic wrapping or single use, industrial plain paper, rather than fabric tablecloths, for improved hygiene.
- Wear disposable gloves when handling velvet.
- Minimise handling of velvet at all times. Consider using a cordon or roped-off area to restrict public access, use designated staff to show velvet to potential buyers, or require those wanting to inspect velvet to wear disposable gloves.
- When handling or being in close proximity to velvet, it is recommended to wear a mask.
- Use signs to explain what is and isn't acceptable to the public. Signs can be downloaded from the DINZ website.
- Members of the public should be encouraged not to attend if they feel unwell.

Basic hygiene

- Hand sanitiser should be available at all times.
- Rubbish bins with lids should be provided for the safe disposal of used gloves and masks.

Notes for sale organisers

- Stag sales, especially auctions, are public events and first impressions matter. *What the public sees is what they will remember.* During planning and on the day, do everything you can to give attendees a positive impression of your event and the wider deer industry. You want to be talked about for all the right reasons. Good hygiene, handling and presentation of both stags and any display velvet will help achieve this.
- Have a think about what you could do differently to *minimise stag stress and the risk of unwanted media attention.* For example, do you need to run stags in the ring, or could potential buyers view them in holding pens or the paddock? Small changes to what you've always done can make a big difference to how people view your sale.
- *If something goes wrong and a stag injures itself,* temporarily halt the sale, announce that there is an issue and remove the stag for treatment as quickly as possible. Once the emergency has been dealt with, the sale may resume, but the animal should not be displayed again. Doing this in a calm and professional manner will present the industry in a good light. Panicking or continuing the sale, regardless of the stag's wellbeing, will not. Make sure that any mess is cleaned up as quickly as possible.
- While it is impossible to stop people from taking photos/videos at your sale, you can *ask attendees to behave responsibly and not take images* if something does go wrong.

- Make sure that everyone involved in the sale is following *good Health and Safety practices*, and have suitable PPE, masks, disposable gloves, hand sanitiser and bins on hand. Consider creating a zone for the public to interact, which is separate from any working/handling areas.
- Ideally, jumpy stags or those that are stripping their velvet, should not be shown at public sales, due to the additional stress caused to the animals and the risk of creating an inaccurate perception of the industry. *Consider other ways of selling these animals*, e.g. through private sale.
- Finally, all stags offered for sale must be able to display normal behaviour, *including holding their heads upright*.