

Code of Welfare for Deer



Introduction

The code of welfare for deer came into force on 18 May 2007. It is intended to encourage all deer farmers (including those on game estates and safari parks) to adopt the highest standards of husbandry, care and handling. It sets out the general principles for the care of deer, and is enhanced by the Deer QA On-Farm Programme that incorporates the recommendations of this code. Game estate and safari park operators can refer to the New Zealand Association of Game Estates Industry Agreed Standards for further information, although those standards do not supersede this code.

The code is available online at www.biosecurity.govt.nz/animal-welfare/codes or by request from animalwelfare@maf.govt.nz (tel 04 894 0366). It should be read alongside the report, which explains the decisions made in the development of the code. It will also be on the DINZ website www.deernz.co.nz

Who wrote the Code?

Deer Industry New Zealand drafted this Code. Deer farmers, veterinarians, scientific researchers, processor exporters, stock and station agents, and other interest groups were consulted. NAWAC (the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee) considered the views of these groups, and members of the public, before recommending to the Minister of Agriculture that this Code be issued. The proactive development of good industry codes of practise over the years put the deer industry in a strong position to feel confident that deer farmers could comply with this code.

How does it affect me?

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 their 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. While stock handlers have responsibilities for the welfare of animals under their immediate care, these responsibilities do not detract from the liability of the owner and person in charge of the deer on the farm. Responsibility for meeting minimum standards relating to the provision, design and maintenance of the facilities and equipment, the allocation of operational responsibilities, and the competence and supervision of performance of employees will lie with the owner and person in charge of the deer. 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 for deer requires owners and persons in charge to ensure that their personnel have either the relevant knowledge and 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?

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.

How do codes work?

The Animal Welfare Act imposes a duty of care on owners or 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. This detail is provided by codes of welfare. Codes serve a number of purposes (legal, advisory, educational). It is therefore important to understand how to read them. For each topic in a code there is usually four sections:

1. An introduction which gives a background to the topic and may explain some of the reasoning behind the minimum standards;
2. **The minimum standards** – these are the part of the code that have legal effect. Failure to meet the requirements of the minimum standards may be offered in evidence that a breach of the Animal Welfare Act has occurred;
3. **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;
4. **General information** – general advisory information on the topic.

Codes are not set in stone. They have to be reviewed at least every 10 years but may be reviewed sooner than that if there is a reason to do so, for example, new research findings that suggest a new approach. This code will be reviewed no later than 18 May 2017.

What is specifically required?

Minimum standards in this code cover:

- Stockmanship and the requirement for adequate training (formal or informal)
- Adequate daily quantities of food (note that emaciated deer (i.e. in adults body condition score below two) must receive immediate remedial action)
- Adequate daily water supply
- Requirements for adequate shelter (see box at left/right)
- Appropriate design, construction and maintenance of handling facilities
- Appropriate design, construction and maintenance of holding facilities (including those used for overwintering), and management of deer in holding facilities
- Restraint and handling practices (electric prodders or goads must not be used)
- Appropriate maintenance and use of restraint equipment
- Management of social behaviour and mixing groups of deer
- Management of male deer (hard antler deer must be kept separate from those without hard antler)
- Management of female deer and fawns (including hand rearing of fawns)
- Management of weaning (including requirement for frequent inspection and provision of ample high quality, familiar feed, water and shelter to weaners)
- Remedial action for ill health or injury
- Requirements for inspection appropriate to the circumstances and class of deer
- Requirements around pre-transport selection of animals (see box at left/right).

What about de velvetting, castration and transport?

Velvet antler removal, castration and transport are covered in separate documents:

- Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer During the Removal of Antlers
- Animal Welfare (Painful Husbandry Procedures) Code of Welfare 2005
- Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Animals Transported within New Zealand (a voluntary code that is currently being redrafted as a legally binding code of welfare).

Shelter

Like all grazing stock, deer need access to shelter and shade in hot and very cold weather and they need a dry place to lie down. Natural features such as gullies, hollows or trees can all provide shelter and shade, as can man-made features such as hay stacks or buildings. In addition, the 'hiding' instinct is more strongly developed in deer than in our other pastoral species and access of hinds to places to hide their fawns is a critical behavioural requirement. Yet it is not uncommon to see deer in paddocks with no or inadequate shelter or areas in which they can exercise their instinctive behaviour. Interestingly, providing hiding places carries an economic benefit as well as a welfare benefit – fawn survival is significantly improved.

The code has a lengthy section on shelter which includes sections on cold conditions and hypothermia and hot conditions and heat stress. Minimum standards and recommended best practices are:

Recommended Best Practice - Shelter:

- (a) It is strongly recommended that deer have access to a relatively dry and sheltered area on which they may rest, particularly where paddock conditions become very muddy when crops are grazed or directed during wet weather.
- (b) Farmers should provide shelter and shade through tree plantings, artificial shade, access to mature tree blocks, or paddocks with contours that provide protection from adverse weather conditions.
- (c) Farmers should provide deer with a range of means to mitigate heat stress such as plentiful water, a wallow or shade.
- (d) Farmers should have contingency plans to be followed in emergencies such as floods, storms, fire risk or severe weather conditions.

Minimum Standard No. 4 - Shelter

- a) All deer, including fawns, must have access to shelter to reduce the risk to health and welfare caused by exposure to cold.
- b) Where conditions are likely to lead to fatal hypothermia remedial action must be taken.
- c) At calving/fawning time fawns must have access to sufficient ground cover for at least the first 2 weeks following birth, to allow them to express their natural hiding behaviour.
- d) All classes of deer must be provided with means to minimise the effects of heat stress.

Pre-transport Selection

Transport can have a significant impact on animal welfare and is one of the most stressful events occurring in the life of a farmed deer. Confinement, movement of the vehicle, prolonged absence of food and water, inability to regulate temperature, the presence of unknown animals, and separation of social groups all contribute to this effect.

Transport itself is covered under the Animal Welfare Act and will be covered in a separate code of welfare. However, careful management of pre-transport selection is key in managing the welfare impacts of transport, and is covered by the code of welfare for deer. Minimum standards and recommended best practices for pre-transport selection are:

Recommended Best Practice - Pre-transport selection:

- (a) Pregnant deer should not be transported after 1 October. See the Deer QA Transport Programme.
- (b) Veterinary advice should be considered if transporting pregnant deer after 1 September.
- (c) Deer should be yarded without food for a minimum of 4 hours before transportation but for no more than 12 hours. Clean water should be available from a familiar source during this time.
- (d) All deer being transported should meet the requirements of the Deer QA Transport Programme.

Minimum Standard No. 15 - Pre-transport Selection

- a) The person in charge must examine the selected deer prior to transport to ensure that all animals are fit and healthy for transportation.
- b) Pregnant deer expected to give birth within 21 days must not be transported.
- c) Unweaned deer (dams or fawns) and deer that have been weaned for less than 10 days (dams or fawns) must not be transported.
- d) All deer must be able to stand the bear weight on all 4 limbs and be fit enough to withstand the journey without suffering unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress.