

ANIMAL WELFARE (LLAMAS AND ALPACAS) CODE OF WELFARE 2013 REPORT

Introduction

1. The draft Animal Welfare (Llamas and Alpacas) Code of Welfare (the Code) has been developed by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC), pursuant to the Animal Welfare Act 1999 (the Act). This report accompanies the Code recommended by NAWAC to the Minister, as required by section 74 of the Act.

The report notes:

- the reasons for NAWAC's recommendations;
- the nature of any significant differences of opinion about the Code, or any provision of it, that have been shown by the submissions; and
- the nature of any significant differences of opinion about the Code, or any provision of it, that have occurred within NAWAC.

In providing this report, NAWAC notes that it fully considered all submissions it received and reviewed relevant scientific literature, and that there was debate among NAWAC members on many points. This report is not required to, and does not attempt to, show every detail of the analysis and discussions that took place.

2. There are a number of minimum standards where the animal welfare implications are self-evident and require no explanation for their inclusion. NAWAC has decided that it will not provide comment on these minimum standards or recommended best practices, but will provide explanations on minimum standards which it believes are complex or controversial or on which it received submissions with significant differences of opinion. Minimum standards as drafted may have been amended for a number of reasons, including to make them legally robust, to ensure a more effective coverage of the issue, or to change from a recommended best practice to a minimum standard (or vice versa).
3. It should be noted that the Act does not define "significant differences". While there were a variety of opinions expressed in the submissions, NAWAC did not consider that all differences necessarily represented significant differences of opinion. NAWAC has taken the view that significant differences are either where there are large numbers of submissions which are contrary to a minimum standard in the Code, or where a submission puts forward a justification based on scientific evidence or good practice for a different or alternative minimum standard. NAWAC notes that some individuals or organisations may interpret "significant differences" in a way that varies from the NAWAC view.

4. The Code applies to all South American camelids kept for any purpose in New Zealand (alpacas, llamas, guanacos and crossbreeds of these species).

Why do we need a code of welfare for camelids?

5. There are approximately 15000 camelids in New Zealand. Camelids are commonly kept for purposes of farming (for fibre or for meat), for showing, trekking or as companion animals (pets). This code has been developed as, each year, a large number of camelids are sold to be kept as pets on lifestyle blocks, but many of these owners possess insufficient knowledge about camelid husbandry and health to be able to maintain the welfare of their animals. Many of these camelids fall into situations of abuse or neglect. The llama and alpaca industries are keen to be seen as responsible and forward thinking and so have been proactive in pursuing the development of a code of welfare for camelids, both for establishing standards and for its educational role.
6. The Act specifies that owners and persons in charge of animals (including camelids) must meet the needs of animals in their care. It does not specify how to meet these needs. Nor does it describe how those responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act might determine whether or not these needs have been met. Additionally, the Act functions to avoid unnecessary or unreasonable pain or distress being caused to animals but does not list the areas or practices in which this might be a concern and the ways in which it might be avoided. This is the function of the codes of welfare.
7. It is essential that owners and persons in charge of camelids know what the needs of camelids in their care are, and how these needs can be met, in order that they can act lawfully and so that the welfare needs of their camelids are met. This code of welfare for camelids fulfils this requirement and constitutes the Government's statement of policy in this regard. It sets out the Government's expectations regarding appropriate treatment of camelids and identifies what is considered to be inappropriate treatment of camelids. It is expected that camelid owners will use this code as guide to best practice and that those required to ensure compliance with the Act will use it to assist in identifying unacceptable practices.
8. Key needs are described in the areas of stockmanship, mustering and droving animal handling and restraint, food and water, shelter, housing and farm facilities, female camelids, colostrum, weaning, shearing, animal identification, behaviour, health, pre-transport selection, elective husbandry procedures and emergency humane destruction.

Code preparation and public submissions

9. The Act allows for any individual or organisation to draft a code of welfare. The Code was initially drafted by a working group established by the New Zealand Llama Association and the Alpaca Health Subcommittee with support from the Sustainable Farming Fund. As required by the Act, representatives of those likely to be affected by the Code were consulted during its preparation and before public notification.
10. NAWAC considered the Code in early 2010 to ensure that it complied with the purposes of the Act, that it was written clearly so as to be readily understood, and that representatives of those likely to be affected by it had been consulted. NAWAC wishes to point out that, at that time, NAWAC decided not to make any final decisions on the Code until it had received submissions. The Code is required to be publicly consulted, and for NAWAC to come to any conclusion prior to this consultation would have meant that NAWAC was not following due process by acting in a biased and predetermined manner.
11. The Code was publicly notified on 27 July 2011 by notices in the major newspapers in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. In addition, it was sent to all major libraries and to specific interested groups. The closing date for submissions was 9 September 2011.
12. A total of 8 submissions were received during the public consultation period. All submissions were read in their entirety and taken into account. A summary of the submissions received on the 2010 draft Code was prepared and NAWAC's responses to the submissions were noted.
14. All submissions were carefully considered by a subcommittee of three members appointed by NAWAC to review the Code. The subcommittee reviewed the Code in detail and all the submissions received on it. The subcommittee met for one full day in January 2012. Throughout the period the Code was under review, subcommittee members worked in collaboration by email, and in consultation with MPI Animal Welfare staff.
15. The subcommittee reported the Code back to NAWAC on 16 May 2012 for final consideration and approval for recommendation to the Minister. The Code was subsequently peer reviewed by Prof Kevin Stafford, an expert in animal behaviour and welfare science, who is based at Massey University in Palmerston North, NZ.

Key issues

16. The following key issues represent the significant concerns raised from the public consultation on the draft Code.
 - **Cria**

Why is it important to ensure that cria receive colostrum within 24 hours of birth?
 - **Weaning**

At what age can cria be nutritionally weaned?

- **Behaviour**

Why do camelids need to be provided with social companions?

Can a single cria be raised alone?

- **Health**

What can be done to prevent camelids from developing rickets?

- **Elective Husbandry Procedures**

At what age is it optimal to castrate a camelid?

What can be done to fighting teeth to reduce the risk of injury as a result of aggression between male camelids?

17. Cria

Why it is important to ensure that cria receive colostrum within 24 hours of birth?

There were a number of submissions on the provision of colostrum for cria. The adequate ingestion of good quality colostrum is essential for the growing cria (Smith et al., 1996) as it provides a concentrated source of essential nutrients and increases the efficiency of the immune system by transferring maternal antibodies to the cria (Johnson 1994). It is important that the cria ingests as much colostrum as it can as soon as possible after birth as the ability of the cria's gut to absorb colostrum decreases over time. NAWAC have therefore added a minimum standard stating that cria must be provided with colostrum, or a colostrum substitute, within the first 24 hours of birth and a recommended best practice that the cria receive colostrum within 6 hours of birth.

18. Weaning

At what age can cria be nutritionally weaned?

Submissions were received on the minimum age at which cria should be weaned. Camelids are not born with a functioning fermentation system in the gut and, following the birth of the cria, the rumen continues development before it is capable of fermenting roughage. The time required for a cria to become nutritionally independent of the mother can vary, but in the wild, most cria wean themselves by six months of age. Early weaning has the possibility to have a detrimental impact on the cria due to the inability of the cria to digest solid food efficiently at this younger age (Fowler, 1998). A minimum standard has therefore been added by NAWAC stating that weaning needs to be managed in a way that minimises the negative impact on the cria and the dam. A recommended best practice has been added that cria should not be weaned before 24 weeks of age to ensure sufficient development of the rumen and ensure that the cria will be able to digest forages efficiently.

19. Behaviour

(a) Why do camelids need to be provided with social companions?

Public submissions asked for clarification on the social requirements of camelids. Isolation of camelids has been shown to cause stress (Fowler, 1992) and removal of a social companion has been shown to cause camelids to exhibit an increase in heart rate and exhibit behaviours that are suggestive of acute stress (Pollard and Littlejohn, 1995). The provision of a companion animal at all times is necessary to maintain the welfare of llamas and alpacas. A companion camelid is preferable, although in an emergency situation, such as in the event of the death of one camelid, a different animal such as a sheep or goat can be used as a ‘companion’ for a short length of time. A minimum standard has been added to reflect this, and a recommended best practice included to state that camelids should live in groups with others of their own kind.

(b) Can a single cria be raised alone?

Raising camelids with a large amount of human contact following birth can cause the cria stress and influence the development of abnormal behaviours in later life, including the manifestation of ‘berzerk male syndrome’ (Gegner, 2000). The potential development of this behavioural problem is particularly relevant in the case of hand raised camelids which are likely to have a greater amount of contact with humans when young than are those cria raised by their dam. The development of berserk male syndrome (which can also occur in females) can ultimately result in the camelid becoming unmanageable, exhibiting aggression towards humans (Gegner, 2000), which may result in euthanasia of the animal. NAWAC has therefore added a minimum standard stating that cria must be raised in the company of other camelids.

20. Health

What can be done to prevent camelids from developing rickets?

The importance of Vitamin D for camelids, in particular, supplementation of this vitamin for alpacas, was raised in the public submissions. Vitamin D is used to support bone mineralisation as well as to facilitate intestinal absorption of phosphorus in the body. This vitamin is naturally synthesized in the skin upon exposure to sunlight but a lack of this vitamin can result in a hypophosphatemia (Van Saun et al., 1996; Van Saun, 2006). Llamas and alpacas seem to be very susceptible to Vitamin D deficiency compared to other ruminants and supplementation of this vitamin is sometimes (although not always) necessary. A seasonal incidence has also been recognised with this syndrome, with most cases occurring during winter (Van Saun, 2006). NAWAC has therefore added a minimum standard stating that camelids must receive sufficient Vitamin D to ensure their health and welfare.

21. Elective Husbandry Procedures

(a) At what age is it optimal to castrate a camelid?

Early (prepubertal) castration of a number of species of animals, including camelids, has been shown to delay the closure of the long-bone physes, resulting in animals with a tall, straight legged stature (particularly of the hind limbs) (Anderson, 2003). Despite early castration often being a preferable option from a

management viewpoint in order to sell gelded camelids as pets, it has been shown that llamas castrated prior to 8 months of age will continue to increase in height until after 18 months of age (Smith et al., 1992) resulting in incorrect musculoskeletal development and the possibility of early onset of degenerative osteoarthritis of the stifle joints. Alpaca reach developmental maturity more quickly than do llamas and guanaco and therefore castration can be performed earlier in alpacas with no deleterious effects. For this reason NAWAC have included in the code a recommended best practice that castration of llama and guanaco should be performed when these species are over 18 months of age, and castration of alpaca should be performed when they are 12 months of age or more.

(b) What can be done to fighting teeth to reduce the risk of injury as a result of aggression between male camelids?

The removal or blunting of fighting teeth can be used as a means of reducing injuries as a result of aggressive behaviour between male camelids. Fighting teeth are more likely to appear in entire male camelids, usually erupt at 2-3 years of age and can become dangerous by 3 years of age (Cebra, 2011). The tips of the teeth can be trimmed near to the gum line using a wire saw to lessen their impact (Cebra, 2011). If performed correctly, the blunting procedure should not cause the camelid pain, but some camelids may become anxious due to the sawing motion in their mouth. NAWAC has added a recommended best practice that this procedure should be performed by a veterinarian with pain relief. NAWAC has also added a recommended best practice that if the camelid does become distressed, light sedation should be used. Removal of fighting teeth causes pain and so a recommended best practice has been added that this procedure should be performed by a veterinarian.

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