

# Sheep: Summer Heat Stress

Information sheet 1

November 2020



## Introduction



Australia's weather extremes are brutal and millions of sheep and lambs are at its mercy. The prediction by the CSIRO regarding climate change is that hot days will become more frequent and hotter, extreme rainfall events will become more intense and the time in drought will increase over southern Australia.

According to Environment Victoria: In Victoria, the two worst heat waves on record have occurred in the past 10 years. In January 2018, Bendigo [an area known for sheep farming] experienced a record breaking 12 consecutive days over 35°C (breaking the previous record of eight days, set in 2014).

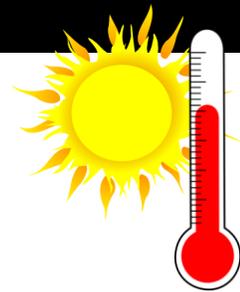
Agriculture Victoria recommends sheep receive shelter from harsh temperature extremes in its guidelines, however there is no legal requirement to do so at farms, saleyards, feedlots or slaughterhouses.

Learn more here

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/sheep/health-and-welfare/sheep-shelter-guidelines>

## Heat Stress in Summer

- ❖ The comfort zone of sheep is between 21-31°C.
- ❖ Suffering from heat can begin at 26°C (WBT)\* in humid conditions.  
\*(Humidity is referred to as the Wet Bulb Temperature.)
- ❖ Sheep will seek shelter from the sun if provided with it.



# Agriculture Victoria Sheep Shelter Guidelines

*“Sheep should be provided with shelter in times of above or below average temperatures.”*

Agriculture Victoria

## Guidelines for extremes of hot temperatures

**An extreme temperature for sheep is above 31°C.**

- ❖ Suitable shelter for extreme heat protects animals from the sun and allows for the cooling effect of the wind and includes:
  - constructed shelters using materials such as shade cloth, corrugated iron or timber
  - trees with large canopies — planted individually in fields
  - naturally undulating paddocks and gullies
  - shelterbelts — thick hedges of trees.
- ❖ Heat stress and exhaustion should not occur if sheep are able to find shade and rest during the hottest part of the day.
- ❖ It is important that sufficient shelter is available for all animals at the same time, to prevent sheep crowding and smothering. It is preferable that all animals are able to lie down, as this helps them cool themselves.
- ❖ Water should be close to shelter and be of sufficient volume to cope during periods of peak demand.



## Conclusion

Sheep are undeniably adversely affected by the high temperature extremes in Australia and can suffer heat stroke and death as a result. Melbourne Sheep Save believes that the guidelines for shelter listed on the Agriculture Victoria website should be made a legal requirement on all farms, instead of a recommendation. Taking into consideration the predictions regarding the effects of climate change, farmers need to act now to create adequate shelter for the animals in their care.



### References

<https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/OandA/Areas/Oceans-and-climate/Climate-change-information>

<https://environmentvictoria.org.au/our-campaigns/safe-climate/victoria-heatwaves-climate-change/?fbclid=IwAR2ZStt9hHHM-fLqEZFQnVuv-mu-TcoowEzd844ESJG3qalmrkS8T9rorJ0>

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/sheep/health-and-welfare/sheep-shelter-guidelines>

[www.animalsneedshade.org/sheep](http://www.animalsneedshade.org/sheep)