

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VELVET HARVESTING CODE OF CONDUCT

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The Code of Conduct is correctly named the Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Deer During the Removal of Antler. "The Code" is the basis by which welfare of stags is upheld during antler removal and other management procedures that are affected by the presence of antler.

Both hard antler and velvet antler are covered by the Code as well as the principles of direct and indirect supervision for removal of antler. Direct supervision refers in this context to the removal of antler by a veterinarian.

Indirect supervision refers to removal of antler by an appropriately trained and competent individual under the supervision of a veterinarian, i.e. a trained and certificated deer farmer. It is this part of the Code referring to indirect supervision that has required implementation.

As expected the release in July 1992 of 6500 "Codes" to deer farmers and veterinarians in itself was not sufficient to initiate or change new or existing veterinary practice indirect velvetting programmes.

There was a definite requirement for a national programme that would convert the principles of the Code into practice, for indirect supervision of velvet harvesting. The Code took many years to formulate. Latterly under the guidance of the Animal Welfare and Advisory Committee (AWAC), Associations and Bodies came to a consensus. These groups include NZ Game Industry Board, NZ Deer Farmers Association, NZ Veterinary Association, NZ Veterinary Association Deer Branch, RNZSPCA, MAFPolicy and MAFQual and others.

A small committee was formed from these bodies to piece together an implementation programme for 1993/94 season and onwards. To this end, Mr Collier Isaac NZGIB, Mr Paul Baigent NZDFA, and Dr Adrian Campbell NZVA DB were elected.

Sections of the Code contained specific guidelines and principles for such a programme. These were extracted and through discussion formed the basis for such a programme.

From July 1992 until July 1993 advice from and consultation with industry leaders has resulted in the programme we have today. During this period of time, this committee considered that the role and degree of responsibility indicated a slightly larger and more evenly represented group would be required.

As at April 28 1993 the National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSB) was formed.

The inaugural members are as follows:

Deer Farmer Representatives	Mr Angus Makin Mr Chris Hughes
Veterinary Representatives	Dr David Lawrence Dr Adrian Campbell

This Body has a clear mission statement, a product of industry consultation and endorsement. In itself the Body has no authority, but through consultation and agreement with deer industry leaders, it may recommend changes.

It is valuable at this stage to clearly appreciate the principles and statements extracted from the Code, that went to make up the National Velvet Training Programme.

The following statements are direct from the Code:

Sec. 5.1 A written contract between the veterinarian and the farmer, owner or manager must be made.

Sec. 5.1 Supervision can be undertaken only after an individual has been trained and assessed for both theoretical and practical competence ...

Sec. 6.1 Both theoretical knowledge and practical ability must be assessed by objective criteria, the former being a written examination and the latter a practical assessment requiring compliance with standards approved by the Chief Veterinary Officer.

Sec. 6.2 Theoretical knowledge includes: Legal requirements, Veterinary Supervision, Principles of Animal Welfare, etc. - refer to Code.

Sec. 6.1 The layman wishing to harvest velvet from stags must possess an adequate knowledge of all issues of welfare relating to velvet harvest and be competent to an agreed standard in performing the practical procedures.

Sec. 6.4 The veterinarian must then observe without participation a minimum number of stags being velvettied by the candidate as determined by the C.V.O.

A checklist of compliance with methods and standards approved by the C.V.O. will be used for each stag and a minimum standard of compliance must be met before approval can be given.

Sec. 5.2 The veterinarian must be present on a minimum of one further occasion during the velvet harvest season.

The Supervising veterinarian must be satisfied that the equipment and facilities used are sufficient to achieve compliance with this Code of Practice.

Sec. 5.1 After initial training and veterinary approval, the approved person must be reassessed annually for both theoretical and practical compliance at the start of the velvet harvest season (includes a minimum number of stags being velvettied).

As seen from these extracts, the basis for a training programme was contained in the Code. The complete details of this programme to implement indirect supervision for velvet harvest will be contained in papers presented at the NVSB Veterinary Training Programmes.

The outline of the farmer programmes is found in the flow chart (1).

### Important Points

- \* Veterinary practices have the right of decision as to whether they will indirectly supervise the procedure or not.

Similarly, if they choose to indirectly supervise they have the right of choice as to which velvetting drugs they will provide - i.e. local anaesthetics only or local anaesthetic, xylazine and yohimbine.

Deer farmers may choose their veterinary practice based on these principles.

- \* Veterinary practices should be pro-active in ensuring that their clients are ready for the theory examination in September/October. This theory examination is being coordinated by the Open Polytechnic of Lower Hutt. Similar to the driving licence examination, three sample copies of the possible examinations will be posted to registered candidates. Twenty examination venues around New Zealand will be positioned depending on geographical densities of candidates. Details of time, date and venue will be included with these sample copies. The exam will take place nationally on one day only with opportunity for a resit later. It is envisaged that these papers will contain 45-65 multiple choice questions, with in excess of at least 90% pass mark required.

Candidates will only be assessed theoretically and practically on knowledge for the type of drugs used, i.e. local anaesthetic only or local anaesthetic xylazine and yohimbine. Certification will reflect this as well.

Training manuals have been developed to assist deer farmers. These along with contracts will be sent out to all veterinary practices that registered for this national programme.

- \* During the initial part of the velvetting season, the supervising veterinarian with whom the farmer has a supervising contract will make the pre-assessment visit.

For farmers who have traditionally velvetted their own stags they may continue doing so, given that they have passed the theory examination and complete certification in the 1993/94 season.

The supervising veterinarian will make at least one visit to witness at least 5 stags being velvetted competently. At the same time the facilities will be examined to ensure they come up to a minimum requirement.

Given that this occurs, the supervising veterinarian will complete documentation and return it to the NVSB.

It is then up to the deer farmer and supervising veterinarian to organise an independent assessing veterinarian for assessment. Lists of such individuals will be circulated to at least all veterinary practices.

For deer farmers that have not velvetted stags before, it is required that the supervising veterinarian continues to do this, concurrently training the farmer until certification occurs. Many visits may be required for this farmer by the supervising veterinarian, as may be the case with farmers who have traditionally velvetted their own stags but not necessarily fulfilled the requirements of the Code.

The role of the supervising veterinarian in all cases is to ensure that the candidate is prepared for assessment, that facilities are adequate and to complete the relationship for the supervisory contract. This includes a clear requirement for two veterinary visits per annum.

- \* The independent assessing veterinarian undertakes assessment. Facilities are confirmed as complying and a minimum of five stags being velvetted are required. Documentation consisting of a formal tick sheet for all of these stags is to be completed. The five stags presented here, as for the supervising vet pre-assessment check can include spikers or re-growth stags. However, the type of stag velvetted should be representative of the herd.

The independent assessing veterinarian is from a practice unrelated to the supervising veterinarian. The provides a completely objective assessment of the candidate, with no bias, conflict of interest possible in any direction. This fulfils a mission statement requirement of the NVSB for an audit and provides indisputable evidence of performance.

#### Timetable 1993/94

July	Farmer and Supervising Veterinarian sign contracts
July/August	Deer farmer upskilling - theory
September/October	Theory Examination
October	Velvetting begins
October/November	Supervising Veterinarian visit
October - January/February	Assessing Veterinarian visit

Why do we need a National Training Programme for indirect supervision for velvet removal?

1. To ensure stag welfare is maintained during velvetting, thus fulfilling the requirements of the Code.
2. To formally recognise indirect supervision of velvetting by all certificated deer farmers.
3. To provide indisputable evidence to other countries that velvetting is done in a humane and safe manner.
4. As a result of this, to protect New Zealands export of agricultural products including venison.
5. Bring together all the various programmes that currently exist around New Zealand for indirect supervision of velvetting.

#### Concluding remarks

The performance of the veterinary profession in this programme is being watched very carefully by many people. In one NVSB update bulletin for veterinarians, mention was made of the following:

Veterinarians also need to see the value of such a National Programme. Failure of some veterinarians to support the programme will only divide the profession. Deer farmers will

be guided directly by their veterinarians in many instances. Thus it is imperative for all veterinarians to assess and understand the real value of the Training Programme.

I am very proud to say that our profession has fulfilled this request beyond expectation. The response to printed material, telephone conversation, participation in the recent national Roadshow, etc., has been positive and tremendous.

There has been a high level of trust shown by veterinarians towards their elected representatives. This trust gives great confidence to any representative.

I believe that this programme is a partnership between the veterinarian and client. This relationship has always been excellent and will only be enhanced by this National Training Programme. I cite my own practice, with four recent client meetings netting 180 clients, 176 now waiting for contracts to be signed.

The grass root support of deer farmers for this programme is great. This programme will succeed because of veterinary initiative with clients. The Game Industry Board must be acknowledged for their far sighted attitude in promoting this programme to this point. While we have an excellent programme, implementation has not occurred.

I trust this time next year we can look back, and forward with equal enthusiasm and say year one went well.

# Process for Certification of Non-Veterinary Velveters

## Farmer flow chart

