



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

## Lamb Welfare

# Consultation on proposed changes to castration and tail docking methods

12 January 2026



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

 Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



Department of  
Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs

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We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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# Overview

## Scope

We are seeking views on reforming the legislation on lamb castration and tail docking.

Animal welfare is a devolved policy responsibility. We are proposing that reforms to lamb castration and tail docking would be implemented on a UK-wide basis, so that a consistent approach is adopted across the UK. The proposals outlined in this consultation relate to the relevant legislation on lamb castration and tail docking in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Our policy proposals relate to sheep under all husbandry systems. The word 'sheep' refers to all ovine stock, and an animal under 6 months is considered to be a lamb.

## Audience

Anyone may respond to the consultation. Those who may have an interest include:

- academic institutions
- animal welfare organisations
- consumers
- farm assurance schemes
- farming organisations
- livestock markets or auctioneers
- local authorities (LAs)
- retailers
- sheep abattoirs
- sheep farmers
- trade bodies
- the veterinary profession

## Responding to the consultation

This consultation starts on 12 January 2026 and closes on 9 March 2026. Any responses received after this date will not be analysed.

Please respond to this consultation using the [Citizen Space consultation hub](#).

If you are unable to use Citizen Space, you can download the consultation documents and return your response by email to [Lamb-Castration-and-Tail-Docking@defra.gov.uk](mailto:Lamb-Castration-and-Tail-Docking@defra.gov.uk) or in writing to:

Lamb Castration and Tail Docking Consultation, Farm Animal Welfare Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Seacole Building 2nd Floor, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF.

Please note, any responses sent by post **must** have arrived at the above address by the closing date of the consultation (9 March 2026) to be counted. Any responses received after this date will not be analysed. To ensure your response is included in the analysis, please consider responding electronically, either online via Citizen Space or by email.

We recognise that respondents may choose to use some standardised text to inform their response. Campaigns are when organisations (or individuals) coordinate responses across their membership or support base, often by suggesting a set of wording for respondents to use. Campaign responses are usually very similar or identical to each other. For this consultation, campaign responses may be analysed separately to other responses to ensure the breadth of views received can be summarised effectively and efficiently. All campaign responses will be taken into account in the final analysis of public views and campaigns help provide an indication of the strength of feeling on an issue. The preferred route for all respondents to provide their views (including where a response is based on a campaign) is via the Citizen Space consultation hub.

## Introduction

This is a joint consultation on proposals to amend the relevant legislation on lamb castration and tail docking and is being issued by Defra on behalf of the UK government, the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive.

The UK government, the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive are committed to the welfare of animals at all stages of life. Mutilations, such as castration and tail docking, are routinely carried out within the sheep sector with the aim of meeting a range of husbandry objectives, including safety, efficiency, and disease prevention. They are, however, painful procedures. The government intention is to reduce the prevalence of mutilations and safeguard animal welfare where these procedures are properly justified.

There were 30.5 million sheep and lambs recorded in the United Kingdom on 1 June 2025. Lamb castration and tail docking are common management practices in this sector, although there is a lack of information on their exact prevalence.

The Animal Welfare Committee (AWC), an independent, expert committee of Defra and the Scottish and Welsh Governments, has considered the implications of castration and tail docking for the welfare of lambs. It has produced three reports on this topic, in 1994, in 2008, and most recently in [2022](#). Several recommendations were made in the most recent report, including to reduce routine castration and tail docking and to permit the use of new devices for castrating and tail docking lambs that have been shown to be less detrimental to welfare than traditional methods.

Castration and tail docking of lambs is carried out by the sheep industry for a range of reasons. The decision to carry out either procedure should be informed by the reason relied on for carrying out the procedure, whether the pain that will be caused by the procedure can be adequately justified and whether alternative management strategies are available to avoid the use of the procedure in the first place. While the current Code of Practice for the Welfare of Sheep (there are similar codes for [England](#), [Wales](#), [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#)) already highlights the importance of assessing the necessity of these procedures, we intend to update it with enhanced guidance to support more robust justifications for their use. Changes to the codes would be consulted on separately.

## Legislation

The [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#) for England and Wales, [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) for Scotland and [Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#) for Northern Ireland make it an offence in any part of the UK to carry out a procedure which involves interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of an animal otherwise than for the purpose of its medical treatment. However, the offence does not apply where such a procedure is permitted by regulations made under those Acts<sup>1</sup> and is carried out in accordance with those regulations. The following regulations contain exemptions for lamb castration and tail docking, and the conditions under which these are permitted to be carried out:

- England: [The Mutilations \(Permitted Procedures\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#) (MRE)
- Wales: [The Mutilations \(Permitted Procedures\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2007](#) (MRW)
- Scotland: [The Prohibited Procedures on Protected Animals \(Exemptions\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2010](#) (PPR)
- Northern Ireland: [The Welfare of Animals \(Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2012](#) (WAR)

These regulations should be read in conjunction with the following legislation, which applies to:

- England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
  - [Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#) (VSA)
- Scotland
  - [Protection of Animals \(Anaesthetics\) Act 1954](#) (PAA)

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<sup>1</sup> Section 5(4) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Section 20(5) of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and Section 5(4) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The legislation allowing the castration and tail docking of sheep differs in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. These differences are outlined in Annex B.

## Proposals

Our proposals seek to ensure that, where castration and tail docking is carried out, pain caused to the animals by these procedures is appropriately minimised.

We recognise that it may not be possible to avoid castration or tail docking in some situations. To reduce the pain caused by either procedure in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are proposing to increase the accessibility of new methods currently used in Scotland that have been shown to be less harmful to welfare than traditional methods. We are also proposing to require the use of pain relief for methods that are known to cause significant pain. Finally, we would set restrictions on who can carry out each method, how and when. These proposals are based on scientific evidence as outlined in Annex C.

These proposals would be implemented through legislation made by UK government and each devolved government. The existing legislation in each nation, which sets out conditions under which lamb castration and tail docking are permitted to be carried out, would need to be amended to achieve this. There are currently some differences in the legislation. Our aim would be to ensure a consistent approach across the UK.

## Options

This consultation is accompanied by a de minimis assessment (Annex A) which considers a range of policy options regarding the implications of castration and tail docking on the welfare of lambs. An initial “long list” of viable options was developed and appraised based on our policy objectives and critical success factors. This included extreme options, such as doing nothing or fully banning castration and tail docking, alongside non-regulatory approaches and proportionate regulatory reforms.

If nothing is done, legislation across the administrations will continue to be inconsistent, and lamb welfare may continue to be compromised through the perpetuation of the current practice of rubber ring castration and tail docking without pain relief. The full ban option, which would prohibit all castration and tail docking, was retained as a comparator but ruled out as a preferred approach. It does not reflect the nuanced evidence base or sectoral need. There remain cases, such as where there is a high risk of flystrike, where these procedures may still be justified. A ban could therefore result in unintended harms to welfare.

The non-regulatory option would be to update Codes of Practice in [England](#), [Wales](#), [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) with new guidance on best practice for castration and tail docking. While we still intend to update the Codes as part of the wider package, this option alone was discounted. It would not rectify the legislative inconsistency between administrations or remove outdated statutory provisions that are inconsistent with current

welfare science. We also consider that legal obligations are necessary to bring about meaningful change in this sector and enable proportionate enforcement.

Options were discounted to arrive at the preferred option, which is to amend relevant legislation to achieve consistency between the administrations and safeguard sheep welfare where these procedures are properly justified.

## 1. Using methods that do not cause significant pain

In some instances, it may not be possible to eliminate the need for castration and tail docking. If a procedure is still considered to be necessary, then methods that do not cause significant pain should be used, or suitable pain relief should also be provided.

All methods of castration and tail docking cause pain, which can be both **acute** (short duration) and **chronic** (long duration). Scientific evidence regarding pain caused by each method can be found in Annex C. Although pain from tail docking is considered to be less than that from castration, it is still considerable. When these procedures are carried out together, they cause more pain than either one alone.

Below, we outline the current and novel methods of lamb castration and tail docking, the evidence on the pain associated with each method and other factors which may reduce pain and improve lamb welfare.

### Current methods

#### Rubber ring

Castration and tail docking are most commonly performed using rubber rings without anaesthesia or analgesia. The rubber ring method involves using an elastrator to apply a tight rubber ring around the neck of the scrotum, or tail to the desired length. This cuts off the blood supply and causes the tissue below the rubber ring to shrivel and fall off. While this method is cheap, easy, and effective, there is extensive evidence (Annex C) that lambs can experience acute pain for up to 4 hours, as the rubber ring contracts slowly to its original size, and chronic pain for more than 40 days, as the tissues shed and wounds heal.

The current 7-day age limit on the use of rubber rings dates back to when it was believed that younger animals of various species felt less pain than older animals. More recent evidence (Annex C) suggests that young lambs are equally or even more sensitive to pain than older lambs, but may not have the behavioural repertoire to express this pain.

Short scrotum castration is a method that involves using an elastrator to place a tight rubber ring around the neck of the scrotum, similar to the rubber ring method, but with the testes pushed up close to or into the inguinal canal. The testes are subject to a higher temperature than in the scrotum, and so the lamb is rendered infertile. This method is considered to cause less pain than rubber ring castration, but it may still be more painful

than the combined castration method (see below) or rubber ring castration with injected local anaesthetic (Annex C). There is also a risk that the testes may partially descend, and lambs may become fertile if the rubber ring is not placed carefully. This method is more routinely used in New Zealand and Australia.

### **Clamp (for example, Burdizzo)**

This method of castration involves using a clamp to crush the spermatic cords and blood vessels in the neck of the scrotum. The clamp can be applied on each spermatic cord individually, or across the entire neck of the scrotum, so that the tissues underneath the crush die and fall off. Although still painful, this method can cause less “unavoidable” acute pain than rubber ring castration due to nerves being crushed when the clamp is applied, and it offers improved wound healing and reduced chronic pain (Annex C). Clamp application requires a skilled operator and there is the risk of an unsuccessful castration or injury if used inappropriately.

### **Combined method (i.e. rubber ring and clamp together)**

Pain from rubber ring castration and tail docking can be reduced by using the “combined method”, which is a combination of both rubber ring and clamp (for example, Burdizzo) methods. This provides the benefits of a rubber ring (an effective seal) and a clamp (reduced immediate pain). Although still painful, this method can cause less acute pain than standard rubber ring castration due to nerves being crushed when the clamp is applied, and it offers improved wound healing and reduced chronic pain (Annex C). However, performing two procedures on each lamb is cumbersome and time-consuming, and there is evidence that, in some applications, combined method castration can cause as much acute pain as that caused by rubber rings alone (Annex C). Pain alleviation depends on the application of the clamp (for example, location and number of seconds applied); this method is most effective when the clamp is used once across the full width of the scrotum or tail, to prevent pain transmission from tissues below the crush.

### **Surgical (i.e. knife)**

This method involves castrating or tail docking by cutting with a knife or blade. For castration, this may involve complete removal of the testicles via an incision in the scrotum. Surgical castration and tail docking is considered to cause significantly more distress than any other method (Annex C), particularly if performed without local anaesthetic, and isn't thought to be common practice since the development of rubber rings.

In animals over three months this is the likely procedure that a veterinary surgeon would use for castration and tail docking, with appropriate administration of anaesthesia and analgesia. As with all methods, there must be a rational and justifiable reason for requiring the surgery to be undertaken.

## **Hot iron**

This method of tail docking involves severing the tail by cautery using a heated chiselled metal device designed for the purpose. This method is considered to cause less pain than rubber ring docking due to pain receptors being destroyed in the burnt tissues, although it still causes increased pain sensitivity and chronic pain (Annex C).

## **Novel methods**

### **ClipFitter**

This method of castration and tail docking involves applying a “clip” across the full width of the scrotum or between tail vertebrae using a precision compound-lever plier. It mimics the “combined method” by staying on until the dead tissue is shed, like a rubber ring, and crushing the spermatic cords and nerve supply, like a clamp. This provides an effective seal and causes immediate desensitisation of the tissues below the clip. A recent Defra-commissioned study (Annex C) found that the clip method in young lambs reduced acute pain from castration to the level of uncastrated lambs. Clip castration was also less acutely painful than the current practice of rubber rings in young lambs, even when ringing was performed with both an anaesthetic and an analgesic, and is highly likely to be less painful than rubber ring use in older lambs. Clips may also be used in place of rubber rings for short scrotum castration. Clip tail docking in younger and older lambs caused a similar level of pain to ringing with an anaesthetic and analgesic. The clip method also resulted in improved wound healing and reduced chronic pain.

### **Numnutes**

This method of castration and tail docking involves using a device to inject a local anaesthetic into the scrotal neck or tail at the same time as applying a standard rubber ring. A recent Defra-commissioned study using Numnutes with procaine (Annex C) found that this method can mitigate acute pain from tail docking but is less effective against acute pain from castration. This is in line with other published findings (Annex C).

### **Impregnated Bands**

Rubber rings impregnated or coated with a local anaesthetic called lidocaine have been found to cause less acute pain than standard rubber rings, but they can still cause more acute pain than standard rubber ring use with an injected local anaesthetic (Annex C). It should also be noted that lidocaine is not currently authorised for use on sheep in the UK; see “administering pain relief for procedures” section.

## **Stockmanship**

Good stockmanship is key to ensuring high standards of animal welfare. It is therefore of great importance that anyone performing castration and tail docking is competent and appropriately trained to do so, in order to minimise harm. However, some procedures that are higher risk and known to cause significant pain, should only be carried out by a vet.

## Age limits

Published Code of Practice guidance for the welfare of sheep currently states that castration should not be performed on lambs until the ewe-lamb bond has become established. This is because acute pain from castration and tail docking can preoccupy and debilitate young lambs, particularly those less than 24 hours old, such that they fail to ingest protective amounts of colostrum. This can put lambs at increased risk of disease and mortality (Annex C). Some farmers may castrate and tail dock early due to the misconception that young lambs feel less pain than their older counterparts, when they may simply not have the behavioural repertoire to demonstrate their pain. Due to these risks, we propose a requirement for lambs to only be castrated and tail docked after the first 24 hours of life.

There are several reasons that farmers may want to castrate and tail dock lambs at an older age. In hill systems, lambs may be born on the hill with gathering delayed to prevent potential mismothering, misadventure and injury. Lambs are typically gathered, castrated and tail docked at an average of six weeks of age. However, there is evidence that the castration of older lambs by ringing is associated with the development of painful lesions, due to the increasing size of the scrotum, which, when constricted, can give rise to chronic inflammation, sepsis and pain until the tissue falls off and healing occurs (Annex C).

The decision as to whether these mutilations are necessary should be taken at an earlier age for lowland and more intensive flocks, as the risks of early gathering do not apply.

## 2. Administering pain relief for procedures

If pain from castration or tail docking cannot be avoided, steps should be taken to alleviate it. There is extensive evidence that the combined use of short-acting pain relief, such as local **anaesthetics**, and long-acting pain relief, such as **analgesics** like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can be effective on pain from castration and tail docking. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the use of anaesthetics and analgesics for different methods. Our proposals would require pain relief to be administered in respect of particular methods of castration and tail docking which are known to cause significant pain.

Currently, the only local anaesthetic authorised for use in sheep in the UK is procaine, which is formulated in combination with adrenaline to increase its effectiveness. There are no authorised NSAIDs. However, the veterinary cascade, a legislative provision in the Veterinary Medicines Regulations, allows veterinary medicines authorised for different food-producing species to be used in sheep to avoid causing unacceptable suffering in cases where there are no suitable products authorised for sheep. Potential anaesthetic and analgesic agents for use in lambs during castration and tail docking in GB are currently under review by the government to address the paucity of available authorised treatment options. This review includes the use of lidocaine, a local anaesthetic that is currently not authorised, nor recommended for use under the cascade, in sheep in the UK.

In certain circumstances, veterinary surgeons may prescribe pain relief above the minimum required by law. For example, when lambs are being castrated or tail docked at an older age and may be at risk of larger chronic inflammatory lesions.

## Consultation questions

### Confidentiality and data protection

#### Complaints procedure

All complaints about the consultation process should be submitted to the Consultation Coordinator via email: [consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk). To meet with Defra's service standard, all complaints will be responded to within 15 days of receipt.

#### Using and sharing your information

How we use your personal data is set out in the [consultation and call for evidence exercise privacy notice](#) with the following changes:

#### Who we share your personal data with

The proposals outlined in this consultation relate to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and therefore information provided in response, including personal information, will be shared with relevant policy officials in the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

#### Other information

This consultation is being conducted in line with the [Cabinet Office Consultation Principles](#).

### About you or your organisation

#### 1.a) Would you like your response to be treated as confidential (required)?

- Yes
- No

#### 1.b) If you answered Yes to this question, please give your reason(s):

[Multiple line answer component]

#### 2. What is your name?

[Single line answer component]

**3. What is your email address?**

[Email address answer component]

**4. Are you responding as an organisation or an individual (required)?**

- Individual – You are responding with your personal views, rather than as an official representative of a business, business association or other organisation
- Organisation – You are responding in an official capacity as a representative of a business, business association or other organisation

**5. If you are responding as an individual in Question 4, where are you based/if you are responding as an organisation in Question 4, where is your organisation's headquarters (required)?**

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- Not UK-based (Europe)
- Outside Europe

**6. If you are responding as an organisation in Question 4, what is the name of your organisation?**

[Single line answer component]

**7. Which option best describes your reason for taking part in this consultation?  
Please select all that apply.**

- Academic
- Animal welfare organisation
- Consumer
- Farm assurance scheme
- Farming organisation
- Livestock market or auctioneer
- Local authority (LA)
- Retailer
- Sheep abattoir
- Sheep farmer
- Trade body
- Veterinarian
- Other – please specify below

[Single line answer component)

# Methods of castration and tail docking

## Surgical castration and tail docking

### Our proposal(s)

If significant pain from a procedure cannot be avoided, then steps should be taken to alleviate it. In recognition of the significant pain caused by this method, and to achieve consistency across administrations, we are proposing that surgical castration and tail docking of lambs using a knife or blade may only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.

### Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):

- What is this method?
  - This method involves castrating or tail docking by cutting with a knife or blade. For castration, this may involve complete removal of the testicles via an incision in the scrotum. This includes combined clamp and knife use.
- Does this method cause significant pain?
  - Surgical castration and tail docking is considered to cause significantly more distress than any other method and is thought to be performed less often since the development of rubber rings. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method.
- Is pain relief effective?
  - There is extensive evidence that the combined use of short-acting pain relief, such as local anaesthetics, and long-acting pain relief, such as analgesics like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can be effective on pain from castration and tail docking. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the use of anaesthetics and analgesics for this method.
- What is the current legislation?
  - Surgical castration and tail docking may currently be carried out on lambs under 3 months by any person of or over the age of eighteen in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (VSA). In Scotland, it must only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon (PPR). Anaesthetic is required for surgical tail docking in England (MRE) and Wales (MRW), but not Scotland or Northern Ireland.
  - Castration of lambs over 3 months by any method, including surgical, must only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon (VSA). Anaesthetic is required for this procedure in England (MRE), Wales (MRW) and Scotland (PAA), but not Northern Ireland. See "Age Limits" for our proposals on castration over 3 months.
  - Tail docking of lambs over 3 months by any method, including surgical, may be carried out by any person of or over the age of eighteen in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (VSA). In Scotland, it must only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon (PPR). Anaesthetic is required for this procedure in

England (MRE), Wales (MRW) and Scotland (PAA), but not Northern Ireland. See “Age Limits” for our proposals on tail docking over 3 months.

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.**

**8.a) Surgical castration of lambs should only be permitted when carried out by a veterinary surgeon with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – a veterinary surgeon should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**8.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**9.a) Surgical tail docking of lambs should only be permitted when carried out by a veterinary surgeon with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – a veterinary surgeon should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**9.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

## **Rubber ring castration and tail docking up to 3 months**

### **Our proposal(s)**

If significant pain from a procedure cannot be avoided, then steps should be taken to alleviate it. In recognition of the significant pain caused by this method and the lack of evidence that younger animals experience less pain than their older counterparts, we are proposing that rubber ring castration and tail docking of lambs up to 3 months may only be carried out with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic, and a removal of the 7-day age limit. We propose the age limit is extended to lambs up to 3 months old. This would also apply to the use of the Numnutes device, impregnated bands and short scrotum method.

	Age	By Whom	Pain Relief
Current legislation in England and Wales	May be carried out on an animal aged not more than 7 days	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Scotland	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Anaesthetic required over 7 days
Current legislation in Northern Ireland	May be carried out on an animal aged not more than 7 days	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months</b>	<b>By stockkeeper over 18</b>	<b>Effective anaesthetic and analgesic required</b>

#### Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):

- What is this method?
  - Castration and tail docking are most commonly performed using rubber rings without anaesthesia or analgesia. This method involves using an elastrator to apply a tight rubber ring around the neck of the scrotum or tail. This cuts off the blood supply and causes the tissue below the rubber ring to shrivel and fall off.
- Does this method cause significant pain?
  - There is extensive evidence that lambs can experience acute pain for up to 4 hours, as the rubber ring contracts slowly to its original size, and chronic pain for more than 40 days, as the tissues shed and wounds heal. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method.
- Why are Numnutes, impregnated bands and short scrotum castration included?
  - Evidence shows that castration with Numnutes can cause as much acute pain as a rubber ring without anaesthetic. Although Numnutes can reduce the acute pain caused by tail docking, analgesics like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are still required to alleviate residual and longer-lasting pain from rubber ring use. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method.
  - Evidence shows that while short scrotum castration can cause less acute pain than standard rubber ring castration, it still causes more pain than standard rubber ring castration with an injected local anaesthetic. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method.

- Rubber rings impregnated or coated with a local anaesthetic called lidocaine have been found to cause less acute pain than standard rubber ring use, but they can still cause more acute pain than standard rubber ring use with an injected local anaesthetic. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method. Lidocaine is not currently authorised for use in sheep in the UK.
- Is pain relief effective?
  - There is extensive evidence that the combined use of short-acting pain relief, such as local anaesthetics, and long-acting pain relief, such as analgesics like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can be effective on pain from castration and tail docking. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the use of anaesthetics and analgesics for this method.
- What is the current legislative situation?
  - Rubber ring castration and tail docking may currently be carried out on lambs under 7 days without pain relief in England (MRE), Wales (MRW), Scotland (PAA) and Northern Ireland (WAR). In Scotland, this method may be used up to 3 months with an anaesthetic (PAA). In all administrations, it may be carried out by any person of or over the age of eighteen (VSA).
- Why is there a 7-day limit?
  - The current 7-day age limit on the use of rubber rings dates back to when it was believed that younger animals of various species felt less pain than their older counterparts. More recent evidence suggests that young lambs are equally or even more sensitive to pain than older lambs, but may not have the behavioural repertoire to express this pain.
  - This restriction may motivate farmers to castrate lambs before they have decided whether they will be kept beyond puberty, resulting in the unnecessary castration of many ram lambs.

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.**

**10.a) Rubber ring castration of lambs up to 3 months should only be permitted with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted for as long as 3 months
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**10.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**11.a) Rubber ring tail docking of lambs up to 3 months should only be permitted with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted for as long as 3 months
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**11.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**12. What actions are needed from government and relevant stakeholders to support industry in moving away from this method?**

[Multiple line answer component]

**Clamp castration up to 3 months**

**Our proposal(s)**

If significant pain from a procedure cannot be avoided, then steps should be taken to alleviate it. In recognition of the pain caused by this method, we are proposing that clamp castration of lambs up to 3 months may only be carried out with an effective analgesic. While both local anaesthetic and analgesic would be ideal practice for clamp castration, the main welfare concern is the longer-term inflammatory pain caused by this method. For practical purposes, we therefore propose that an analgesic is preferred over an anaesthetic.

	<b>Age</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Pain Relief</b>
Current legislation in England and Wales	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Scotland	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Northern Ireland	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months</b>	<b>By stockkeeper over 18</b>	<b>Effective analgesic required</b>

## **Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):**

- What is this method?
  - This method of castration involves using a clamp to crush the spermatic cords and blood vessels in the neck of the scrotum. The clamp can be applied on each spermatic cord individually, or across the entire neck of the scrotum, so that the tissues underneath the crush die and fall off. Clamp application requires a skilled operator and there is the risk of an unsuccessful castration or injury if used inappropriately.
- Does this method cause significant pain?
  - Although still painful, this method is considered to cause less pain than rubber ring castration due to nerves being crushed when the clamp is applied. It can cause less "unavoidable" acute pain than rubber rings and improve wound healing compared to rubber rings. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method.
- Is pain relief effective?
  - There is extensive evidence that the combined use of short-acting pain relief, such as local anaesthetics, and long-acting pain relief, such as analgesics like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can be effective on pain from castration and tail docking. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the use of anaesthetics and analgesics for this method.
- What is the current legislative situation?
  - In all administrations, clamp castration of lambs up to 3 months may be carried out by any person of or over the age of eighteen (VSA) without pain relief.

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.**

**13.a) Clamp castration of lambs up to 3 months should only be permitted with an effective analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should also be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**13.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

## Combined method castration and tail docking up to 3 months

### Our proposal(s)

If significant pain from a procedure cannot be avoided, then steps should be taken to alleviate it. In recognition of the significant pain that can be caused by this method, we are proposing that combined method castration and tail docking of lambs up to 3 months may only be carried out with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.

	Age	By Whom	Pain Relief
Current legislation in England and Wales	May be carried out on an animal aged not more than 7 days	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Scotland	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Anaesthetic required over 7 days
Current legislation in Northern Ireland	May be carried out on an animal aged not more than 7 days	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months</b>	<b>By stockkeeper over 18</b>	<b>Effective anaesthetic and analgesic required</b>

### Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):

- What is this method?
  - This method is a combination of both rubber ring and clamp (for example, Burdizzo) methods. It provides the benefits of a rubber ring (an effective seal) and a clamp (pain-relieving action). However, performing two procedures on each lamb is cumbersome and time-consuming. This method is most effective when the clamp is used once across the full width of the scrotum or tail, to prevent pain transmission from tissues below the crush.
- Does this method cause significant pain?
  - This method is considered to cause less pain than rubber ring castration due to nerves being crushed when the clamp is applied. However, there is evidence that combined method castration can cause as much acute pain as that caused by rubber rings alone, with pain alleviation depending on the application of the clamp (for example, location and number of seconds applied). Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method.

- Is pain relief effective?
  - There is extensive evidence that the combined use of short-acting pain relief, such as local anaesthetics, and long-acting pain relief, such as analgesics like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can be effective on pain from castration and tail docking. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the use of anaesthetics for this method.
- What is the current legislative situation?
  - Combined method castration and tail docking involves the application of a rubber ring, so it may currently be carried out on lambs under 7 days without pain relief in England (MRE), Wales (MRW), Scotland (PAA) and Northern Ireland (WAR). In Scotland, this method may be used up to 3 months with an anaesthetic (PAA). In all administrations, it may be carried out by any person of or over the age of eighteen (VSA).

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.**

**14.a) Combined method castration of lambs up to 3 months should only be permitted with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted for as long as 3 months
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**14.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line text]

**15.a) Combined method tail docking of lambs up to 3 months should only be permitted with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted for as long as 3 months
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**15.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line text]

## Clip castration and tail docking up to 3 months

### Our proposal(s)

If a procedure that causes significant pain is necessary, it should be substituted by another, less painful method if possible. For example, substituting the clip method for the rubber ring method would significantly reduce the pain associated with castration and tail docking. In recognition of this, and to achieve consistency across administrations, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland we are proposing to allow clip castration and tail docking of lambs up to 3 months with an appropriately sized clip for the size of lamb without any requirement for pain relief, as is currently the case in Scotland. Although ideal practice may involve the use of the clip method with injected local anaesthetic and analgesic, we recognise that the clip method alone is less painful than the current practice of rubber ring use in young lambs and highly likely to be less painful than widely-practised rubber ring use in older lambs, as well as with fewer wound issues. For this reason, we are not proposing to mandate the use of pain relief in order to provide a practical solution for farmers that is less detrimental to welfare.

	Age	By Whom	Pain Relief
Current legislation in England and Wales	May be carried out on an animal aged not more than 7 days	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Scotland	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Northern Ireland	May be carried out on an animal aged not more than 7 days	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months with an appropriately sized clip for the size of lamb</b>	<b>By stockkeeper over 18</b>	<b>Not required</b>

### Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):

- What is this method?
  - This method of castration and tail docking involves applying a “clip” across the full width of the scrotum or between tail vertebrae using a precision compound-lever plier. It mimics the “combined method” by staying on until the dead tissue is shed, like a rubber ring, and crushing the spermatic cords and nerve supply, like a clamp. This provides an effective seal and causes immediate desensitisation of the tissues below the clip.

- Does this method cause significant pain?
  - A recent Defra-commissioned study (Annex C) found that the clip method in young lambs reduced acute pain from castration to the level of uncastrated lambs. Clip castration was also less acutely painful than the current practice of rubber rings in young lambs, even when ringing was performed with both an anaesthetic and an analgesic, and is highly likely to be less painful than rubber ring use in older lambs. Clip tail docking in younger and older lambs caused a similar level of pain to ringing with an anaesthetic and analgesic. The clip method also resulted in improved wound healing and reduced chronic pain.
- Is pain relief effective?
  - There are no studies on the use of anaesthetics and analgesics with this method.
- What is the current legislative situation?
  - ClipFitter is regarded as a novel device with a mode of action not foreseen when the legislation restricting the use of rubber rings or other devices to constrict the flow of blood was being developed.

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.**

**16.a) Clip castration of lambs up to 3 months should be permitted without an effective anaesthetic or analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**16.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**17.a) Clip tail docking of lambs up to 3 months should be permitted without an effective anaesthetic or analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**17.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

## Hot iron tail docking up to 3 months

### Our proposal(s)

If significant pain from a procedure cannot be avoided, then steps should be taken to alleviate it. In recognition of the pain caused by this method, and to achieve consistency across administrations, we are proposing that hot iron tail docking of lambs up to 3 months may only be carried out with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.

	Age	By Whom	Pain Relief
Current legislation in England and Wales	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Anaesthetic required
Current legislation in Scotland	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Northern Ireland	May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months	By stockkeeper over 18	Not required
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>May be carried out on an animal aged up to 3 months</b>	<b>By stockkeeper over 18</b>	<b>Effective anaesthetic and analgesic required</b>

### Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):

- What is this method?
  - This method of tail docking involves severing the tail by cautery using a heated chiselled metal device designed for the purpose.
- Does this method cause significant pain?
  - This method is considered to cause less pain than rubber ring castration due to pain receptors being destroyed in the burnt tissues, although it still causes inflammation and increased pain sensitivity. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the pain caused by this method.
- Is pain relief effective?
  - There is extensive evidence that the combined use of short-acting pain relief, such as local anaesthetics, and long-acting pain relief, such as analgesics like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can be effective on pain from castration and tail docking. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the use of anaesthetics and analgesics for this method.
- What is the current legislative situation?

- In all administrations, hot iron tail docking of lambs up to 3 months may be carried out by any person of or over the age of eighteen (VSA). Anaesthetic is required for this procedure in England (MRE) and Wales (MRW), but not Scotland or Northern Ireland.

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.**

**18.a) Hot iron docking of lambs up to 3 months should only be permitted with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – this method should not be permitted under any conditions
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**18.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

## Stockkeeper training

We are aware that stockmanship is a key factor in ensuring high standards of animal welfare. It is therefore of great importance that anyone performing castration and tail docking is competent and appropriately trained to do so, in order to minimise harm.

### Our proposal(s)

In recognition of the impact of good stockmanship on animal welfare, we are proposing that castration and tail docking may only be carried out by a person who has been provided with suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training so that they are competent and appropriately trained to perform the procedure.

**19.a) Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.  
Castration and tail docking of lambs should only be performed by a trained and competent stockkeeper.**

- Agree
- Disagree
- Not sure

**19.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**20. What makes a stockkeeper trained and competent? Please select all that apply.**

- On-farm training
- Contracted (i.e. outsourced) training
- Formal accreditation
- Access to protocols (i.e. for providing pain relief)
- Other – please specify below

[Multiple line answer component]

## Age limits

### Castration and tail docking in young lambs

#### Our proposal(s)

In recognition of the risks of castration and tail docking to young lambs, we are proposing that castration and tail docking may only be performed after the first 24 hours of life.

#### Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):

- What are the risks of these procedures to lambs aged under 24 hours?
  - Acute pain from castration and tail docking can preoccupy and debilitate young lambs, particularly those less than 24 hours old, such that they fail to ingest protective amounts of colostrum. This can put lambs at increased risk of disease and mortality. There is also evidence that early castration (at one day of age) can enhance future pain perception. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the risks of these procedures to lambs aged under 24 hours.
- Why would these procedures be performed on lambs aged under 24 hours?
  - Some farmers may castrate and tail dock early due to the misconception that young lambs feel less pain than their older counterparts, when they may simply not have the behavioural repertoire to demonstrate their pain. This may also be motivated by the 7-day limit for rubber ring castration and tail docking in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and for rubber ring castration and tail docking without anaesthetic in Scotland.
- What is the current legislative situation?
  - Published guidance for the welfare of sheep currently states that castration should not be performed on lambs until the ewe-lamb bond has become established. However, there is no legal minimum age limit for these procedures under any administration.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

#### 21.a) Castration of lambs should only be permitted after the first 24 hours of life.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Not sure

**21.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**22.a) Tail docking of lambs should only be permitted after the first 24 hours of life.**

- Agree
- Disagree
- Not sure

**22.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

## **Castration and tail docking over 3 months**

### **Our proposal(s)**

In recognition of the risks this procedure poses to older animals, and to achieve consistency across administrations, we are proposing that castration and tail docking of lambs over 3 months may only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.

	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Pain Relief</b>
<b>Castration</b>		
Current legislation in England and Wales	Veterinary surgeon only	Anaesthetic required
Current legislation in Scotland	Veterinary surgeon only	Anaesthetic required
Current legislation in Northern Ireland	Veterinary surgeon only	Not required
<b>Tail docking</b>		
Current legislation in England and Wales	Stockkeeper over 18	Not required
Current legislation in Scotland	Veterinary surgeon only	Anaesthetic required
Current legislation in Northern Ireland	Stockkeeper over 18	Not required

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Veterinary surgeon only</b>	<b>Effective anaesthetic and analgesic required</b>
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**Fact banks (explanatory text that can be opened and closed):**

- What are the risks of these procedures to older lambs?
  - Castration of older lambs by ringing is associated with the development of painful lesions, due to the increasing size of the scrotum, which, when constricted, can give rise to chronic inflammation, sepsis and pain until the tissue falls off and healing occurs. Annex C outlines scientific evidence on the risks of these procedures to older lambs.
- Why would these procedures be performed on older lambs?
  - There are several reasons that farmers may want to castrate and tail dock lambs at an older age. In hill systems, lambs may be born on the hill with gathering delayed to prevent potential mismothering, misadventure and injury. Lambs are typically gathered, castrated and tail docked at an average of six weeks of age.
- What is the current legislative situation?
  - In all administrations, castration of lambs over 3 months must only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon (VSA). Anaesthetic is required for this procedure in England (MRE), Wales (MRW) and Scotland (PAA), but not Northern Ireland.
  - Tail docking of lambs over 3 months may be carried out by any person of or over the age of eighteen in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (VSA). In Scotland, it must only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon (PPR). Anaesthetic is required for this procedure in England (MRE), Wales (MRW) and Scotland (PAA), but not Northern Ireland.

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.**

**23.a) Castration of lambs over 3 months should only be permitted when carried out by a veterinary surgeon with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – a veterinary surgeon should not be required
- Disagree – castration should not be permitted over 3 months
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**23.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**24.a) Tail docking of lambs over 3 months should only be permitted when carried out by a veterinary surgeon with an effective anaesthetic and analgesic.**

- Agree
- Disagree – an anaesthetic should not be required
- Disagree – an analgesic should not be required
- Disagree – a veterinary surgeon should not be required
- Disagree – tail docking should not be permitted over 3 months
- Disagree – another reason or multiple reasons (please specify below)
- Not sure

**24.b) Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

## Impact assessment

### General feedback

**25.a) Do you agree with the estimates and assumptions presented in the consultation-stage de minimis assessment (for example, time, cost, uptake of new methods, feasibility of pain relief use)?**

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

**25.b) If you answered 'No', please explain your reasoning. Where possible, provide alternative estimates or examples from your experience (for example, costs, procedure times, uptake of new methods).**

[Multiple line answer component]

**26. Are you currently a sheep farmer or representing sheep farmers?**

- Yes
- No [skip to further comments section]

## Castration practices

**27. Do you currently perform castration on your farm?**

- Yes
- No [skip to tail docking practices section]
- Prefer not to say

**28.a) Which castration method do you primarily use?**

- Rubber ring
- Short scrotum
- Clamp (for example, Burdizzo)
- Combined rubber ring and clamp
- Clip (for example, ClipFitter)
- Surgical
- Prefer not to say
- Other – please specify below

[Multiple line answer component]

**28.b) On average, how long does it take to castrate each of your lambs (in seconds)?**

[Numerical answer component]

**28.c) How many people are typically involved in carrying out castration on your farm?**

[Numerical answer component]

**28.d) At what age are your lambs usually castrated?**

- Less than 1 week
- 2 to 4 weeks
- 5 to 7 weeks
- 8 to 10 weeks
- Over 10 weeks
- Prefer not to say

**28.e) Do you currently use pain relief?**

- Yes
- No

**28.f) If legislation were introduced requiring pain relief for castration methods known to cause significant pain (for example, rubber ring), would you continue to castrate?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

## Tail docking practices

### 29. Do you currently perform tail docking on your farm?

- Yes
- No [skip to farm management and welfare risks section]
- Prefer not to say

### 30.a) Which tail docking method do you primarily use?

- Rubber ring
- Combined rubber ring and clamp
- Clip (for example, ClipFitter)
- Surgical
- Hot iron
- Prefer not to say
- Other – please specify below

[Multiple line answer component]

### 30.b) On average, how long does it take to dock each of your lambs' tails (in seconds)?

[Numerical answer component]

### 30.c) How many people are typically involved in carrying out tail docking on your farm?

[Numerical answer component]

### 30.d) At what age are your lambs usually tail docked?

- Less than 1 week
- 2 to 4 weeks
- 5 to 7 weeks
- 8 to 10 weeks
- Over 10 weeks
- Prefer not to say

### 30.e) Do you currently use pain relief?

- Yes
- No

### 30.f) If legislation were introduced requiring pain relief for tail docking methods known to cause significant pain (for example, rubber ring), would you continue to dock tails?

- Yes
- No

Not sure

## Farm management and welfare risks

**31.a) Have you experienced significant issues with blowfly strike on your holding in recent years?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**31.b) Do you currently have the ability to separate ewes and rams on your holding if needed?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**31.c) If you send sheep to slaughter, what age are they typically?**

[Multiple line answer component]

**31.d) Do you currently send male lambs to slaughter before they reach puberty (for example, to avoid potential issues like ram taint)?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**31.e) Do you foresee any practical or infrastructure barriers to changing castration or tail docking practices if legislation were introduced (for example, gathering earlier, administering pain relief, switching methods)?**

[Multiple line answer component]

## Veterinary access and cost assumptions

**32.a) Would a requirement for veterinary involvement in some procedures (for example, surgical castration or docking) affect your ability to carry out these practices?**

Yes – significantly

Yes – somewhat

No

Not sure

**32.b) If yes, please explain how it would affect you (for example, cost, logistics, timing):**

[Multiple line answer component]

## Further comments

**33. Please provide any comments or evidence on the environmental impacts the proposed policy may have.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**34. Please provide any comments or evidence on the equality impacts the proposed policy may have.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**35. Please provide any comments or evidence you feel should be considered concerning the socio-economic impact the proposed policy may have on both producers and consumers. Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]

**36. Please provide any further considerations you feel should be noted when considering this policy proposal. Please explain your answer.**

[Multiple line answer component]