BLOWFLY STRIKE: A FIELD SURVEY OF THE NEW ENGLAND REGION

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The blowfly strike problem of southern Australia was studied in 1972-1976, breech strike was found to be the major problem, occurring in spring and autumn while body strike, associated with fleece rot in N.S.W. and mycotic dermatitis in other states, was only a problem of wet years (Murray 1980; Murray and Ninnes 1980; Murray and Wilkinson 1980; and Watts et al. 1979).

A postal field survey of the New England region was conducted to assess the magnitude of the flystrike problem and to determine the relationships between the incidence of strike and factors including - the length of the strike risk period, sheep type, management practices and selection and culling criteria. Data were obtained from 200 sheep producers and analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Science (Nie et al. 1975).

Sheep in the New England region were reported to be at risk to strike for around five months each year, depending on rainfall, temperature, sheep type and shearing time. The incidence of strike was found to be directly related to the length of the risk period \( P < 0.01 \). Breech strike affected up to ten percent of sheep and was associated with urine, afterbirth and faecal stain. Body strike, associated with conformational faults and fleece rot, had an incidence of five percent in young Merino sheep but major outbreaks may occur every 3-4 years depending on autumn rainfall. The total cost of flystrike was found to be $656/sheep in the flock or $2500/producer/year. Eighty six percent of producers jetted sheep as a regular practice, Vetrazin being the preferred chemical. Sixty three percent of producers mules sheep, the common practice was mulesing at the hogget stage with the radical operation. The practices that minimised the incidence of strike included - prevention of scouring, mulesing at marking time with the modified plus tail strip operation, jetting in February, shearing in November, culling of body struck sheep and selection of resistant animals on the basis of strike incidence and fleece characters (colour and structure). Five percent of producers have significantly \( P < 0.05 \) reduced the incidence of strike in their flocks through the selection of resistant animals combined with culling of struck sheep and strategic timing of jetting and shearing this approach appeared to have longterm benefits.

The nature of the flystrike problem has changed little since the 1972-1976 surveys. The use of jetting and mulesing has increased without any reduction in the strike problem. The longterm solution appears to be the selection of resistant animals combined with strategic timing of routine management practices such as shearing, crutching and jetting.

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