



## Barbers Pole Risk

A recent investigation for one of our producers was a timely reminder to get on top of pre-lambing drenches. Swans Veterinary Services was called as 14 ewes had recently died, some of which while driving them up to the yards for scanning. The ewes were seen to be ataxic and lethargic before progressing to recumbency and death. A post mortem was performed on two of the ewes which was heavily subsidized by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development TSE program. The most recently deceased ewes were used for testing, along with blood samples from live but affected ewes. The live sheep were noted to be pale.

The significant findings of the post mortem included a notable amount of Barbers Pole worms in the abomasum. These could be visualized as a slow moving swirl in the abomasal fluid due to the movement of the worms. Also noted were chronic thickening to the heart muscle which was potentially due to parasitism. The intestines were inflamed which is another consequence of a worm burden. As the ewes were showing neurologic symptoms of ataxia prior to death, a plant toxicity or unseasonal case of ARGV was considered. No abnormal plant material such as 1080 was found in the rumen and ARGV testing was negative. Both ewes were carrying early single pregnancies and were in good condition.

The faecal egg counts were an average of 600epg which is on the low end of what can be a significant burden for Barbers Pole. As many producers know Barbers Pole sucks blood out of the tissues and can therefore cause and anaemia progressing to the ataxic and lethargy symptoms that were noted prior to death. A 'mectin' based drench was recommended as soon as possible. Following the drench it was reported the ewe deaths had dropped off.

As Autumn is a critical time for getting worm burdens under control, now is the time to carry out a pre-lambing drench to avoid deterioration and deaths in your flocks in winter. If you suspect Barbers Pole, checking affected sheep for pale gum colour, or opening a deceased sheep to check to the abomasum (4<sup>th</sup> stomach for worms) is recommended. A youtube video that can help you pair the correct stomach appearance and what to look for can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVXIib6vETk> Faecal egg counts can be performed to assess a herd's risk and help guide which drenches are most appropriate. If you are unsure if a worm burden is affecting your flock our veterinarians are happy to assist and conduct an investigation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Katie Kreutz  
Swans Veterinary Services