



A REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL VELVET HARVEST SCHEME

Adrian Campbell

This paper provides a brief review of the National velvet harvest scheme and is presented on behalf of the National Velvet Standards Body (NVSB)

1. Registration and Certification

We have seen a steady increase in registrants in the training programme this season. Many of those participants who had not completed certification in the 1993/1994 season took the opportunity to do so this season.

The figures for Registration and Certification are as follows

	March 1994	March 1995	% Increase
Programme Registration	1282	1433	12%
Certification Complete	1034	1213	9%

There are currently 106 farmers who initially registered in the programme who for a variety of reasons decided to go no further. The NVSB is at this time trying to clarify their position with the supervising veterinarians involved. The NVSB has been advised of a number of withdrawals from the programme and the main reasons for these have been retirement and leaving the deer industry.

2. 1994/1995 Season Audit

A 7% audit of the Velvet Training Programme was completed in the 1994/1995 season although the original target for audit was 20%.

There were two main reasons for this:

- 1 The time of the season the audit was conducted
- 2 Some of the auditors did not participate

Final AWAC and CVO approval for the audit procedures was granted in December 1994 and the audit was carried out over the months of January and February 1995. The audit team comprised of farmers and veterinarians who also act as "Assessors" in the "On Farm Quality Assurance Programme" initiated by the NZ Game Industry Board. Because of the late start to the audit some of the farmers

selected to participate in the audit were unable to do so, as velveting had been completed on their property for the season

Six of the auditors selected either had reservations with the contractual arrangement or were unable to participate due to other influences. Farmers originally selected in the areas they would have audited, were therefore unable to be included. However, both of the above problems have been resolved and should not occur in the future.

Generally the NVSB audit was well received by farmers and vets alike. As a "trial run" the audit was effective in highlighting areas for improvement in both audit methods and procedures for the 1995/1996 season.

Only few major issues of non-compliance were highlighted in the audit. A degree of variability between auditor standards was revealed.

3. 1995/1996 Audit Proposal

It is proposed to conduct an audit of the programme in the 1995/1996 season, at a level of 20% of scheme participants certificated prior to the 1995/1995 season.

The number of audits conducted within a relatively short time frame last season suggests that next season's target figure of 20% will be easily achieved.

The audit will be conducted in a similar manner to the "trial run" for the 1994/1995 season. Farmers will be selected and advised prior to the commencement of the velvet harvest season. This will allow any farmers who are unable to meet audit requirements (left industry etc) to be replaced.

The audit will be conducted by the audit team approved by the Chief Veterinary Officer in December 1994. The contractual reservations held by some auditors have been addressed and a full complement is expected for next season. Auditors have received further training from the NVSB which should overcome the concerns resulting from last season's individual auditor variation.

The audit team will be led by two lead auditors, one based in North Island and one in the South Island. It is expected the lead audit role will be filled by veterinarians and applications are currently being sought.

4. Programme Compliance

Compliance within the training programmed falls into three main areas

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| 1 | Financial Status | "fees paid" |
| 2 | Drug Reconciliation | "declaration page returned" |
| 3 | Annual Supervisory Visit | "visit undertaken" |

Drug record declaration pages are still being received and a repeat of last year's 100% compliance in this area is hoped for.

There have been 825 annual visit records received to date by the NVSB which represents 80% of the velveters certificated in the previous season. While there is bound to be a percentage of farmers paperwork outstanding and a number of farmers not continuing this season, the estimated shortfall of approximately 10-15% is seen as unsatisfactory.

The farmers who have not complied with the annual visit requirement will be advised that they are unable to velvet in 1995/1996 without direct vet supervision until such time as the visit has taken place. Such velveters will also be subjected to a mandatory targeted audit. Further failure to comply with this requirement will result in revocation of certification. Then to re-enter the programme, retraining will have to be undertaken and passed.

5. Industry-wide Compliance

The NVSB has received several reports of farmers who are velveting outside the programme either, (a) without drugs or, (b) with drugs sourced illegally. As such reports come to hand the information is passed onto either, MAF Qual (Welfare) or the ARB, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Of concern to the NVSB is that the ARB appears to do little to follow up these apparent illegalities due to a lack of contingency funding. There is certainly no established protocol either by way of farmer education or prosecution.

The only case acted on from the 1994/1995 season has been left to the Veterinary Surgeons Board to consider. Arguably for veterinarians, the possible penalty imposed by the VSB would far outweigh any imposed under Animal Remedies legislation.

However a dual approach is essential to send the right message to the industry as a whole.

MAF Qual (Welfare Section) continues to handle alleged reports of welfare abuse passed on by the NVSB.

To this end the NVSB is assisting MAF Qual in funding their Survey of Velvet Harvesting.

Last year's survey of the Te Anau and South Auckland regions yielded areas requiring investigation.

As recent as May 1995 NVSB has met with MAF Qual to conclude a meaningful outcome of the South Auckland/Te Anau survey, the current Canterbury Province survey and other related issues.

Growing intolerance by veterinarians and other deer industry people towards removal of spiker velvet without analgesia has initiated talks with MAF Qual. This is currently being sought as a priority for 1995/1996.

6. Other Issues

By way of oversight, the Animal Remedies Board neglected formally to adopt the NVSB as its agent for the programme controlling Xylazine/Yohimbine under the Velveting Regulation 1994. The unfortunate consequence to this was that the NVSB is still operating in an arena of voluntary

membership and voluntary compliance This was remedied by ratification at the June 1995 ARB meeting.

7. Review of the Programme

Invitation to suggest refinements to the training programme have been offered through Update Bulletins and Stagline

By the 31st May, no written submissions had been received

To that end no changes to the programme are envisaged. The 1995/1996 velveting season will be one of consolidation, of ensuring goals previously set are achieved and providing factual proof of the programme standards

8. Concluding Comments

The NVSB believes the National Programme is progressing satisfactorily with refinement occurring each season

Procedures such as an effective audit including a lead audit are yet to be fully implemented but the programme is well positioned for that to be fulfilled in 1995/1996 Total Industry Compliance is likely to be some time away. However, procedures are being implemented to achieve a maximum participation in the programme and with the AWAC Code of Recommendations for Velvet Antler Harvest Arguably this may or may not ever be 100% Advice and feedback from veterinarians is invited on any of the issues raised in this report

