

# Animal health advice for producers in the Hunter

## FACTSHEET



## MANAGING PAIN IN CALVES DURING DISBUDDING AND CASTRATION

We have recently received a number of queries about different methods of pain relief available for use in calves when disbudding and castrating. A couple of new products are now available to assist producers and it is great to see increased interest and use of pain relief by producers for these essential, but painful, husbandry procedures.

Providing adequate pain relief is best practice for cattle of all ages. It provides improved welfare outcomes for the animal with a range of production and marketing benefits.

Adequate pain management, reduces pain and stress in the animal, promotes more rapid wound healing, reduces complications, generally increases weight gain, and improves consumer perceptions of welfare for livestock production. This is increasingly important and is crucial to maintaining consumer and community support for livestock production – sometimes called our “social licence to farm”.

A recent NFF poll highlights the disconnect between rural and urban Australia with 83% of Australians having no connection to agriculture but 95% of people viewing farm animal welfare a concern. The interest and uptake in pain relief, by producers, for husbandry procedures clearly demonstrates that our farming values match those of our city consumers.

So what are the options available to producers for both dairy and beef animals? Producers can have their private veterinarian perform these procedures using sedation and a variety of very effective pain relief methods.

Alternatively, producers can perform these procedures themselves using a combination of readily available products that have recently come onto the market.

1. Veterinarians can perform these procedures for producers either through a short calf sedation allowing multiple procedures to be performed quickly whilst the animal is “asleep” or in the standing animal/calf cradle.

Both methods usually involve;

- **Nerve blocks** (local anaesthetic such as lignocaine is injected around the nerves and tissues of the horn bud or testes. This removes sensation and pain for several hours; and
- **Anti-inflammatories** can also be given via either the injectable or oral route to provide longer term pain relief (24 hours) by minimising inflammation.
- **Antiseptic agents and flystrike control:** Prevent infection and reduce damage due to flies.

The veterinarian approach has the benefit of blocking pain prior to the action of disbudding, for example. Whereas the Producer applied pain relief approach, outlined below, works on numbing the area immediately after the surgical procedure

2. Producers, who are skilled and trained in the technique of disbudding and castration, can also perform these procedures, in animals under six months of age) using “producer applied” pain relief products; such as Trisolfan® and Buccalgesic®. These pain relief products have different but complementary modes of action and when used together in combination offer a sound approach to pain relief in cattle husbandry.

**Trisolfan®** is a relatively new product. It is a gel that is applied immediately after dehorning or castration onto the surgical wound site and into the inguinal canal during castration. This product is available from Produce stores.

Trisolfan® numbs the surgical area as it contains two topical anaesthetics (lignocaine and bupivacaine) as well as adrenaline that reduces bleeding and prolongs the local anaesthetic effect. It also includes centrimide - an antiseptic to guard against infection.

This product was originally registered for use in Mulesing, tail docking and castration in sheep. But is now also registered and used for disbudding and castration in calves. Trisolfen provides rapid onset (but shorter duration) pain relief by numbing the surgical site. It can be used singly or in combination with oral anti-inflammatory medication such as Buccalgesic® which has a slower onset but a longer duration of action.

**Buccalgesic®**, is a second product now available to producers. It is an oral anti-inflammatory gel (available from your private veterinarian) that is deposited between the gum and molar teeth to provide anti-inflammatory pain relief at a systemic level.

Whilst providing adequate pain relief is best practice in calves and cattle of all ages, it is mandatory when dehorning or castrating cattle greater than six months old (According to Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Cattle) and must be performed by a veterinarian.

Banding horns must not be performed as it does not adequately stop blood supply to horns. Dehorning using caustic agents are only for calves less than two weeks of age with at least four hours separation from the mother and other calves, and dry conditions after application.

Elastrator rings for castration are also only suitable when castrating very young calves ie less than two weeks of age.

Please note that horn tipping is not considered dehorning. It involves removal of the non-sensitive non-vascular horn tissue only. Tipping lacks many of the benefits of dehorning as tipped horns still cause bruising to other animals.

Further information on disbudding and castration can be found in the MLA manual "A guide to best practice husbandry in beef cattle". We have copies of this booklet in our LLS offices or it is available for download at <https://futurebeef.com.au/wp-content/uploads/A-guide-to-best-practice-husbandry-in-beef-cattle-Branding-castrating-and-dehorning.pdf>

Further information on Trisolfen is available at;

<https://www.growsolutions.com.au/en/products/products-details.php?id=427>

Dairy Australia has some good videos of the process at;

<https://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/farm/animal-management/animal-welfare/calf-welfare>

For more information please contact your private or District Veterinarian.



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