CHAPTER 12

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Surgical Procedures in the Industry

12.1 The pig industry utilises a number of husbandry practices which involve surgical procedures. The debate in this area involve the risks to the welfare of all of those treated weighted against potential benefits to the proportion which avoid suffering from injury. The main areas of contention are the clipping of piglets 'milk teeth' and tail docking. Husbandry procedures in the industry involve:

- castration;
- tail docking;
- clipping of 'needle' teeth;
- nose ringing;
- animal identification;
- tusk trimming; and
- restraint of large stock.

12.2 The Model Code of Practice (Appendix 8) outlines procedures to be followed when undertaking surgical procedures.[1]

12.3 The general view of ANZFAS and RSPCA Australia is that those surgical animal husbandry techniques that only benefit the human handler of the animals concerned, or that are performed only to overcome the deleterious effects upon animals of severe animal husbandry regimes, should not be performed.[2]

12.4 ANZFAS argues that until the last few years there has been little objective information available regarding the level of pain and stress imposed on animals by the various mutilations currently in use. Millions of animals are mutilated annually in

Australia under the euphemism of 'animal husbandry' yet little evidence is available to show which procedure or combination of procedures currently in use is the most humane; and whether the best available techniques inflict a level of pain and/or stress which is acceptably low.[3]

Castration

12.5 Castration was a common practice but is rarely undertaken now. This is because most pigs are now sold before boar taint develops. Where pigs are slow growing (occasionally in extensive systems) it may still be undertaken. The NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries submitted that in New South Wales fewer than one per cent of pigs are now castrated and there are legal restrictions associated with the castration of boars more than two months of age.[4]

12.6 Castration of male pigs intended for slaughter is generally unnecessary under present day production and marketing conditions because animals can achieve marketable size before any problems of undesirable sexual behaviour or 'boar taint' in the meat are met.[5]

12.7 The Code of Practice recommends that castration should be avoided whenever possible.[6]

12.8 Mr Kirsop representing the NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries explained in evidence that the trend away from castration is due to the growth of intensive production and the move to selling pigs by fat depth. When pigs were mostly grown extensively in paddocks they were sexually mature before they reached market weight. The problem of boar taint becoming apparent in the meat after eight months was an issue at that time.[7] A barrow is fatter than a gilt or a boar. When the industry moved to carcass classification it saw the benefit of not castrating.

12.9 The vast majority of pigs are now being sold at five and a half to six months before they are sexually mature. Mr Treacey from the Victorian Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs commented in evidence that industry practice changed very quickly once an assessment was made that the absence of castration was not going to affect the quality of the product.[8]

12.10 The RSPCA and ANZFAS view is that should castration of mature animals be considered necessary in some instances they should be given the same consideration as is given to companion animals. Castration should be performed only by a specially trained person using local anaesthetic and appropriate analgesia.[9]

Tail Docking

12.11 The practice of tail docking is used to prevent or treat the problem of tail biting and cannibalism in young and adult pigs. The causes of the problem are poorly understood as it can occur in a range of intensive and extensive husbandry situations.[10]

12.12 ANZFAS is totally opposed to taildocking arguing that the issue is intimately connected with the general conditions under which pigs are kept. It argues that tail biting is essentially a management problem and should be treated as such. ANZFAS considers that implementation of its recommended reforms would obviate any need for tail docking.[11]

12.13 The RSPCA Australia is generally opposed to the docking of the tails of any species of animal with the exception of sheep or in the cases of irreparable injury or disease to the tail. However it adopts the position that as a minimum requirement routine tail docking of pigs should be humanely performed by trained operators.[12]

12.14 The Code of Practice states that where tail biting is a problem, all aspects of the environment, feeding and management should be investigated to identify the contributing factors so that remedial action can be taken. The Code specifies that the procedure should be carried out before pigs are seven days of age where it is being performed as a routine preventive measure.[13] AFWA submitted that no detailed investigation of the response of the piglets to the procedure appear to have been made but general observation strongly suggests that piglets less than seven days old suffer only minor trauma from the procedure. This body argued that tail docking usually provides an effective insurance against the outbreak of tail biting and that given our lack of understanding of the causal factors the continued use of the procedure within the provisions of the Code of Practice is warranted.[14]

12.15 No-one contributing to this inquiry disputed that an outbreak of tail biting is a serious welfare situation. It is unpredictable, frightening and horrible to see. Dr Hutson, confirming that it is not possible to reproduce an outbreak experimentally because there seems to be so many factors contributing to an outbreak stated in evidence that:

> ... There seem to be two sorts of general phases. What happens is that you have growing pigs and general redirected exploratory behaviour or, if you like, just random munching - they start randomly chewing on things in the immediate environment which might be, say, the tail or the ear of another pig. If you chew on an ear you are likely to get some sort of retaliation; if you chew on a tail you find that is probably a safer sort of target. At that stage there is no danger of an outbreak of tail biting but as soon as a wound appears and there is blood, and the pig starts squealing and then waves its tail around, that is a very attractive, powerful stimulus to other pigs to seize and bite, and suddenly you have an explosion of tail biting behaviour.[15]

12.16 Discussing the causes Dr Hutson said that at the random munching stage it might be boredom, crowding, and so on. Once the tail is bitten and the pig waves it about there could be other causes such as diet. Attraction to blood on the bitten tail could be a cause in leading to a massive outbreak.[16]

12.17 Dr Cutler (DARA) expressed the view that tail biting is a consequence of keeping animals together in pens and that it probably does not matter whether they are inside or outside. What matters is that an outbreak included results in 'great gaping holes in the rear of the animal' developing.[17]

12.18 Dr Blackshaw confirmed the cannibalism horror; pigs eating right into the hindquarters, and expressed the view that clipping off the end bit of the tail, "the bit that swings around" removes the temptation to bite. She argued that this end bit has few nerve endings and pigs are not always aware it is being bitten while blood is drawn. A bite on the tail further up is felt immediately and evasive action taken.[18]

12.19 In taildocking part of the tail (one to two thirds of length) is removed when piglets are less than one week of age, to reduce the incidence of tailbiting. More than 85 per cent of producers dock the tails of their pigs. It is considered to be a routine preventive measure. The NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries submitted that it has been shown that the incidence of tailbiting is considerably reduced by docking, and therefore painful injury to the tail and often serious secondary infections (which can travel up the spinal cord and affect the whole pig) are avoided.[19]

Teeth Clipping

12.20 Clipping of 'needle' teeth involves the sharp premolar teeth of piglets being clipped at the gumline within the first 2 days of life, to reduce injury to piglets and to the sow's udder, as piglets fight for the best teats. More than 90 per cent of

producers perform this practice as a routine preventive measure. The NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries submitted that this practice results in less facial injury and general infection in suckers and less damage to sow's udders which can result from severe laceration and infections.[20]

12.21 AFWA submitted that when conducted properly clipping of needle teeth injures no soft tissue and general observation strongly suggests that such use of the procedures causes little more distress than that involved in restraining piglets. The submission stressed that work by Wilkinson and Blackshaw (1987) showed that the growth rate and nursing behaviour were not affected by teeth clipping and that continued use of the procedure within the guidelines of the Code of Practice is warranted.[21]

12.22 Discussing the Wilkinson and Blackshaw study ANZFAS submitted that teeth clipping is a procedure which has become rapidly entrenched without good scientific data. ANZFAS quotes from one of the study findings of 16 sows and their litters:

> As nursing behaviour, damage scores of the sows and litters and growth rates were not affected by the teeth clipping regime, it appears that the decision to clip teeth does not cause undue stress.[22]

12.23 ANZFAS argues that this finding could be paraphrased 'since clipping doesn't make any difference, go ahead and clip'. It is then up to the animal protectionists to prove that something is bad to have it stopped.[23]

12.24 ANZFAS highlights the fact that the study cites a Bundaberg farmer who left piglets unclipped for a trial period and experienced more teat damage. The farmer concerned was apparently not convinced that not clipping was the cause of the increased damage and speculated that seasonal environmental factors may have been responsible.[24]

12.25 ANZFAS considers the issue of teeth clipping is tightly tied to the general conditions under which pigs are kept.

12.26 Mr Hassab from the NSW Department of Agriculture stated in evidence that teeth clipping is essential for a number of reasons.

> ... It reduces the scarring and infection that would occur on piglets' faces when they are competing for a teat. These teeth are razor sharp and when a sow has a big litter obviously the competition for teating, for milking and for sucking is extremely high. Also these teeth quite often damage the udder of the sow. So it can cause infection on the udder and that can cause a reduction of milk flow. In terms of the animals being infected from hitting each other on the face with these sharp eyeteeth, the losses from this can be quite dramatic. I have seen quite a number of piglets die as a result of this infection because it has not been picked up quickly enough ... this situation occurs not only in intensive situations but also in sows that farrow in a paddock situation as well.[25]

12.27 Industry representatives argue that damage incurred is the same in feral pigs. The battles for teat order occur in the wild in just the same way with just the same damage.[26] All pigs scrap initially as they settle into their hierarchy and then whenever that hierarchy is challenged.[27]

12.28 Industry representatives and government extension officers stated in evidence that the greatest stress involved in teeth clipping is handling. The actual clipping, done with a small pair of nail or bolt cutters is a quick and simple process.

Other Practices

12.29 The practice of nose ringing is performed in some extensive piggeries to prevent rooting and undermining of sheds and fences. A ring is placed either through the nasal septum in front of the cartilage (as with a bull ring) or vertically, through the top of the cartilage on the snout. Effect on the pig welfare is discomfort if the pig engages in rooting activity.

12.30 Identification practices are described below:

a) slap branding (tattooing) is a mandatory practice for all pigs sold for slaughter, to identify origin of pigs should disease or pesticide residues be discovered;

b) ear tattooing is a mandatory practice for stud breeders to identify pigs individually;

c) ear tags may be used to identify adult stock for ease of management;

d) body tattooing is sometimes performed as a backup, in case of loss of ear tags;

e) piglets may be ear notched or punched within the first 7 days of life, to identify their genetic bloodlines.[28]

12.31 Identification is necessary for rapid tracing of the source, essential for disease control (particularly exotic diseases), and for tracing chemical residues. Property identification (slap brand) is mandatory for marketing. Pigs can be left without individual identification, but this makes management more difficult, and may slow genetic progress.[29]

12.32 Tusk trimming is considered to be responsible management practice. Tusks of boars are cut at the gum line to avoid damage to sows, other boars and handlers.[30]

12.33 It is occasionally necessary to restrain large stock to perform minor surgery. The practice generally is to place a noose around the upper jaw, and tie the rope to a raised immovable object. The pig will pull back and usually stand immobile. This procedure is considered to produce less stress than other methods in both the pig and the handler.[31]

Conclusion

12.34 The Australian Veterinary Association's view is that while all of these 'minor' surgical procedures involve some pain and thus stress, veterinarians believe that the stress will be transient if procedural capacity is high, and that the results enhance welfare of the pig. The procedures rely on the skill of the operator. There is a requirement for experience and dexterity, for instruments to be in a high state of readiness and of clean sanitary methods.[32]

12.35 Dr Johnston, representing the Australian Veterinary Association, stated in evidence that veterinarians are happy with stock persons carrying out the procedures as long as they have been shown the correct way and as long as they are confined to the early period of the pigs life. His view was that if such procedures were confined to veterinary surgeons they would not be done because of the cost involved.

> If that were the case, an awful lot of suffering would be caused to the pig population because those minor procedures had not been carried out.[33]

12.36 The Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals supports this view arguing that each husbandry practice involving mutilations to animals must be considered individually, and the risks to the welfare of all of those treated weighted against potential benefits to the proportion which avoid suffering from injury.[34]

12.37 The debate on this issue was summed up in the submission to this inquiry from Professor Egan and Dr Hutson from the Animal Production Section of the School of Agriculture and Forestry at the University of Melbourne. They argued that in the main, apart from actions taken to prevent disease, the manipulation of individual and group behaviour of animals is at the base of practices involving methods of confinement and procedures such as castration, tail docking and tooth trimming. The practices are aimed against what is seen as causes or consequences of aggressiveness, curiosity, and boredom, as preventive measures.

In intensive systems, surgical action is undertaken on very young animals by skilled, trained personnel to minimize the effects on the growth of the animal. The trauma is real, although transient and alternative ways to address the problems are actively sought. Understanding the behavioural basis and identifying the means to modify the behaviour form the best approach. They stressed that there is a need to ensure that research in this area is given every recognition and encouragement.[35]

12.38 The Committee has inspected a range of confinement systems and observed surgical procedures and agrees with this comment and perspective.

12.39 Accepting that the causes of tail biting are poorly understood the Committee's view is that the problem clearly is a consequence of keeping pigs closely penned whether in or out of doors. While tail biting may be a sign of poor welfare the welfare implications of an outbreak are such that there seems to be little choice in the matter. The Committee agrees that the continued use of the tail docking procedure within the provision of the Code of Practice is warranted. The Committee, noting that taildocking involves some pain and stress, **recommends** that stockpersons are properly trained in the procedure, so that the task is undertaken with dexterity and with as little trauma to the pig as possible. The Committee **recommends** that further research into the causal factors of tailbiting be undertaken as the issue is so closely linked to overall aspects of pig welfare in close confinement production.

12.40 On the issue of teeth clipping the Committee believes that due to the potential for milk and piglet loss which can result from infections of needle teeth lacerations the continued use of the teeth clipping procedure within the provision of the Code of Practice is warranted. However the Committee is surprised at the high susceptibility to infection which apparently occurs in intensive systems and noting the emphasis placed on the health benefits of intensive production, **recommends** that further research be conducted into the underlying reasons for infection that necessitates teeth clipping.

ENDNOTES

1. Model Code of Practice for The Pig, p. 9-10. See Appendix 8.

2. Evidence, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, p. S9090.

3. Evidence, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. S8854-5 and S8904-S8921.

4. Evidence, NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p. S8698.

5. Evidence, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p.S 8941

6. Model Code of Practice, op. cit., p. 9.

7. Evidence, NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p. 9256.

8. Evidence, Victorian Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, p. 9407.

9. Evidence, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, p.S9094, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p.S 8916

10. Evidence, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 8940.

11. Evidence, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 8852, p. 8917.

12. Evidence, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Australia, p. S9096, S9102.

13. Model Code of Practice, op. cit., p. 9.

14. Evidence, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, pp. 8940-8941.

15. Evidence, Dr Hutson, University of Melbourne, pp. 9499-9500.

16. ibid., p. 9500.

17. Evidence, Victorian Department of Agricultural and Rural Affairs, pp. 9399-9400.

18. Evidence, Dr J. Blackshaw, University of Queensland, p. 6855-6.

19. Evidence, NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p. 8699.

20. ibid.

21. Evidence, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. S8941.

22. Evidence, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 8916.

23. ibid.

24. ibid.

25. Evidence, NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p. 9249.

26. Evidence, Australian Pig Industry Policy Council, pp. 9425-9426.

27. Evidence, Mr Brian Healy, NSW Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, p. 9253.

28. Evidence, NSW Department of Agriculture, p. S8700.

29. ibid., p. S8701.

30. ibid.

31. ibid., p. S8702.

32. Evidence, Australian Veterinary Association, p. S9029.

33. ibid., p. 9581.

34. Evidence, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 8940.

35. Evidence, p. S8928.