

Electronic Identification of Sheep and Goats

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Traceability of sheep and goats underpins Victoria's reputation for quality by helping protect our livestock industries from the potential impact of diseases. Good traceability can help capitalise on market opportunities associated with food safety and provenance.

Victoria will work with the industry to phase in an electronic National Livestock Identification System (Sheep & Goats) from 1 January 2017.

If you have further questions, more information is at www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/sheepEID by calling 1800 678 779 during business hours or by emailing eid.support@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

What is changing?

Sheep and goats in Victoria must currently be identified with a visual NLIS (Sheep) tag. Sheep and goats born on or after 1 January 2017 must be identified with an electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag before being dispatched to a saleyard, abattoir, knackery, or another property with a different Property Identification Code (PIC).

Why is traceability of sheep and goats important?

Sheep and goats act as vectors in the spread of infectious disease such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), anthrax and other diseases that have potentially significant market access and human health impacts.

It is essential that sheep and goats of interest are able to be located quickly and accurately to manage and minimise the spread of disease or the impacts of a food safety related emergencies, e.g. associated with chemical contamination.

The current system is not sustainable and not capable of meeting agreed traceability performance standards for livestock. This has been demonstrated in a number of exercises and trials involving sheep from all states.

How quickly will this change occur?

The phasing in of an electronic system will start on 1 January 2017. In mid-2017, all saleyards, knackeries and abattoirs will be required to read electronic tags and upload the information to the NLIS database.

Why is the change necessary?

The introduction of mandatory electronic tagging of sheep and goats is a critical reform that will enable the prompt tracing of animals during disease and food safety emergencies.

Victoria's decision will significantly improve its ability to track sheep and goats in the event of an animal disease emergency or a food safety event, protecting existing and future market access opportunities.

The Victorian Sheep and Goats Identification Advisory Committee (SGIAC), a non-statutory committee established to provide advice on matters relating to NLIS (Sheep & Goats), supports the implementation of an electronic NLIS (Sheep & Goats).

As outlined in the national Decision Regulatory Impact Statement (DRIS), released in December 2014, it is not cost effective for Victoria to implement an enhanced visual system.

In addition, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) has recommended implementation of a new electronic traceability system for sheep and goats.

Victoria sheep and wool production is valued at over \$2 billion, with products sold in profitable local and export markets. Implementing mandatory electronic identification of sheep and goats will provide trading partners with increased confidence in the safety and origin of Victorian products, protecting and enhancing access to these markets.

Why is Victoria changing now?

While the NLIS (Sheep & Goats) is a national system, each jurisdiction has a different approach. A meeting of Agriculture Ministers agreed in October 2014 that jurisdictions could transition to electronic NLIS (Sheep & Goats) or enhance the existing visual based system.

The current Victorian visual, mob-based system does not meet nationally agreed traceability standards and enhancements are not practical or cost effective for Victoria. Only an electronic NLIS system will deliver the standards of traceability required to protect our livestock industries and underpin Victoria's reputation for quality. VAGO and SGIAC supported this finding.

How will industry be consulted and supported?

The government is committed to working closely with all parts of the supply chain in implementing the new system. SGIAC and the government have developed draft electronic NLIS (Sheep & Goats) standards for consultation with industry. Industry will be consulted on the design of a transition package which will include funding.

Will the technology work?

Yes. There has been significant research conducted in Victoria related to sheep and goat electronic identification (EID) technology and its use in the supply chain. EID technology currently exists and is functioning in Victoria for on-farm production and abattoir systems.

Similar systems have been in place and operating effectively for several years internationally. The former Primary Industries Ministerial Council, now Agriculture Ministers Council, also stated that there are “no insurmountable technical barriers to the implementation of electronic identification in sheep and goats.”

What are electronic tags?

Electronic tags contain a transponder encoded with a unique unalterable number that can be quickly read electronically using suitable reading equipment. NLIS (Sheep) tags are used for the identification of both sheep and goats. There are no tags accredited specifically for use in goats.

Sheep and goats must be identified with only one electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag at any point in time.

Electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags are issued for use on a specific PIC and must not be applied to sheep and goats on a property assigned a different PIC unless approved in writing to do so by an authorised Agriculture Victoria officer.

How many types of tags are there?

There are two types of electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags accredited for the permanent identification of sheep that contain a transponder – one piece tags or two piece tags.



Examples of one piece electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags



Example of two piece electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags

Who will the new requirements apply to?

The requirements will apply to persons:

- responsible for the management, husbandry and/or dispatch of sheep or goats; or
- who receive and transport sheep or goats from premises including Victorian farms, residential properties, feedlots, saleyards, holding depots, artificial breeding centres, veterinary practices, export depots, knackeries, abattoirs and agricultural show venues.

What animals must be electronically tagged?

All sheep and goats that are born in Victoria on or after 1 January 2017 must be tagged with an approved electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag before they leave the property of birth.

The use of electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags on sheep and goats born before 1 January 2017 is voluntary.

Can I still tag any of my animals with a visual tag?

Yes. Sheep and goats born before 1 January 2017 can be identified with a visual NLIS (Sheep) tag.

Are there any tagging exemptions?

Tagging exemptions apply to:

- a. rangeland (feral) goats introduced into Victoria in transit directly to an abattoir for immediate slaughter
- b. Saanen, British Alpine, Toggenburg, Anglo Nubian, Melaan and Australian Brown dairy goat breeds
- c. the Elf breed of goats

Electronic tagging exemptions apply to:

- a. sheep and goats born before 1 January 2017
- b. sheep and goats born after 1 January 2017, on a property outside of Victoria and that are subsequently transported to Victoria provided that they are identified at the time of entry into Victoria in accordance with the legal requirements in the jurisdiction from which they were dispatched.

Will feral goats need to be tagged?

No.

Do I need to transfer livestock movements from Property to Property?

Not yet. Unlike cattle, there is currently no requirement to record and upload property to property movements to the NLIS database.

What are Property Identification Codes (PICs)?

A property identification code or PIC is an eight character code allocated by the department, or the equivalent authority in other states/territories, to identify a livestock producing property. A PIC is a legal requirement if you have livestock.

You can order a PIC at <https://pic.agriculture.vic.gov.au>.

What is the NLIS database?

Australia's NLIS database is used to register electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags prior to their dispatch by manufacturers to producers, and to receive, process, store and facilitate the prompt retrieval of information relating to the movement of sheep and goats between properties.

The business rules governing the operation of the NLIS database, and information on the process for opening a database account, are available at www.nlis.com.au

Through their database account, industry participants are able to register movements involving livestock between properties in accordance with their obligations under these rules.

Further information about the operation of the NLIS database can be obtained by contacting the database helpline on 1800 654 743 during business hours.

How is the change being delivered?

Changes will start from 1 January 2017. All sheep and goats likely to have been born in Victoria after the commencement date that have been introduced onto a Victorian property and that are not identified with a visual or electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag, must be tagged with a pink electronic NLIS (Sheep) post-breeder tag before leaving that property.

For introduced sheep and goats that are untagged and not identified with an electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag, the person responsible for the animals must have evidence, e.g. an accompanying National Vendor Declaration form containing age or date of arrival information, if they wish to claim that the animals were born before the commencement date and do not need to be identified with an electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag.

How do I purchase electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags?

Producers can purchase electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags by visiting the Agriculture Victoria website at www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/nlis.

You will need to enter your Property Identification Code (PIC) and phone number. Payment is by credit card and tags will typically be delivered within 10 working days of the order being received.

What do electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags cost?

Agriculture Victoria currently retails the cheapest electronic NLIS tags in Australia thanks to a competitive tendering process.

To minimise the impact of this change, the Victorian Government will ensure that the price of tags is cost neutral to farmers in the first year.

How do I apply electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags?

Electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags must be applied in accordance with the supplier's instructions. Tags may be attached to either the right ear or left ear of sheep and goats.

I have sheep/goats born before 1 January 2017- do they have to be identified with an electronic tag?

No. Sheep and goats born before 1 January 2017 can continue to be identified using a visual NLIS (Sheep) tag.

What equipment must a producer have?

A tag applicator and electronic tags are all that is needed to meet legislative requirements. Other equipment, such as a tag reader, may be used to assist with on-farm decision making, but the use of additional equipment is an individual business decision.

I keep sheep/goats on my property as pets - do I need to comply with the new rules?

Yes. The new rules apply to:

- persons owning and/or managing a property on which sheep or goats are bred, agisted, reared or kept
- persons responsible for the husbandry of sheep or goats
- persons owning and/or managing sheep or goats moving off or onto a property at any point of the animal's life for any reason
- persons owning sheep and goats kept as pets.

I am moving my sheep/goats interstate - do they need to be identified with electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags?

Unless an exemption applies, sheep and goats born on or after 1 January 2017 being dispatched to an interstate location must be identified with an electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag.

Sheep and goats may be dispatched from a property without an electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag if:

- a. The person in charge has received permission in writing from an authorised Agriculture Victoria animal health or veterinary officer because their sheep or goats cannot be safely tagged on the property on which they reside prior to dispatch, or
- b. There is an extreme emergency such as imminent threat from a bushfire or floods, in which instance minimum information must be recorded and reported to the NLIS database within fourteen days of the date of departure of the sheep or goats, or
- c. The goats are rangeland (feral) goats and are leaving a property operating under a traceability plan approved in writing by Agriculture Victoria.

What are the tagging requirements for sheep and goats moving into Victoria from another state or territory?

Sheep and goats entering Victoria for sale or slaughter will need to be identified in accordance with the requirement of the State from which they are sourced, which in the short and medium term is likely to continue to be via the use of a visually readable tag.

What are the tagging requirements for sheep and goats moving from Victoria to another state or territory?

Producers consigning sheep or goats to other states will need to identify them in accordance with Victorian legislation, namely by means of an electronic tag if born on or after 1 January 2017. These arrangements will ensure that Victorian saleyards and processors are not disadvantaged by producers choosing to consign their animals to other states during Victoria's transition to an electronic system.

Can I order NLIS (Sheep) tags with serial numbers, or printed with my property name, along with my PIC?

Depending on the style of tag and the options offered by the manufacturer, serial numbers and/or property names can be printed on the opposite side of the NLIS (Sheep) tag to your PIC and the NLIS logo.

Can I sell a group of sheep or goats born before 1 January 2017 with some having visually readable NLIS (Sheep) tags and others having electronic NLIS (Sheep) tags?

Yes, if there are sheep or goats in a consignment that were born in Victoria before 1 January 2017 and are tagged with visually readable tags, they can be sold in mobs containing sheep or goats with electronic tags.

What happens if a consignment, or part consignment, of sheep or goats arrive at the saleyard without NLIS (Sheep) tags?

The person responsible for dispatching sheep or goats without an NLIS (Sheep) tag to a Victorian saleyard has committed an offence under the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, and may be fined.

It is recommended that all Victorian saleyards selling sheep and goats have saleyard NLIS (Sheep) Post-breeder tags. Agents must ensure that the sheep or goats that arrived without NLIS (Sheep) tags are identified with the saleyard NLIS (Sheep) Post-breeder tag prior to sale of the livestock.

Agents must ensure that the full details of the NLIS (Sheep) Post-breeder tags used, including the individual serial number of the tags, is provided to the saleyard superintendent (for uploading to the NLIS Ltd database) and recorded on the relevant paperwork.

How will saleyards record sheep with electronic tags?

There will need to be changes to the way saleyards operate to accommodate electronically tagged sheep.

The grants package and consultation process will support saleyards to make the necessary changes.

Are there benefits to my business or is this just another extra cost?

The adoption of electronic tagging has the potential to drive innovation in the processing sector and on the properties of producers willing to use the technology for flock management and performance recording purposes.

Electronic identification simplifies the recording of production related information leading to better on-farm decision making. By minimising the need to physically handle sheep and goats during the reading of tags, stress and the risk of injury to animals and staff at all points in the supply chain is reduced.

Electronic identification technology can provide producers with the opportunity to better manage their flocks and secure a competitive advantage for Victoria's sheep meat industry in domestic and export markets.

I am a stock agent, what does this mean for me?

The consultation process will include livestock agents as key players in the supply chain. Many stock agents have readers and provide services to their cattle producer clients.

I transport sheep and goats, what does this mean for me?

Transporters will be consulted as the new system is introduced. Many transporters have readers because they are already servicing cattle producers.

What will be required for processors/abattoirs?

Victoria has approximately 28 abattoirs that process sheep or goats. Most already have tag readers that were either installed to support carcass tracking systems or because they process bobby calves, which are required to be identified with an electronic NLIS (Cattle) tag. Many sheep processors have already identified market access opportunities arising from a mandatory electronic system that ensures effective traceability.

When will all sheep and goats be tagged by?

This is a phased implementation over many years.

Only sheep and goats born on or after 1 January 2017 must be identified with an electronic NLIS (Sheep) tag before being dispatched to a saleyard, abattoir, knackery, or another property with a different PIC.

It is estimated that all sheep and applicable goats in Victoria will be electronically tagged by 2020-21.