

Shearing Shed Design Note

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Number Three: Release Chutes

Traditional Design

Sheep often baulk at a release chute or gate. When this happens any obstruction will serve as a foothold. This will mean that the shearer has to work very hard and struggle to push the sheep out the chute or gate. The photograph below shows a large obstruction, however a sheep can gain a good foothold on a piece of wood only 5mm high.

How Big is the Problem?

A good gate or chute requires no effort - the sheep just walk away or slide down. To find out how much force is needed when a shearer needs to push the sheep past an obstruction, a chute was built with a small obstruction that the sheep could use as a foothold.

Experienced shearers pushed sheep out the chute while the forces were measured as shown in the photograph on the right.



Example of a Large Obstruction

Results

The results show that the shearer has to do a lot more than just push the sheep toward the chute. They must control a struggling animal. This means they must push and pull in all directions.

When struggling with the sheep many joints in the body are placed at risk.

For example the forces in the back were estimated to be about 25% greater than the recognised limits.

The risk of a back injury is even greater because the shearer has been stooped over for several minutes.



Testing the Force needed to Push a Sheep out the Chute

Recommended Release

The best release is one where no effort is needed by the shearer.

Chutes or level releases can be made easy to use by:

- Making sure there are no obstructions (like wood nailed across the entry to the chute) that could be a foothold for the sheep
- Making the chute large enough (about 600mm wide by 850mm high)
- Making the near side of the chute about 150-250mm from the downtube
- Cutting the chute about 150mm into the shearing board