The purpose of this Advice Notice is to inform Accredited Enterprises and Exporters that the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee (AMILSC) has confirmed a change to the current Lamb definition after extensive industry consultation. This change will take effect from **1 July 2019**.

**BACKGROUND**

The Lamb definition is currently defined within various Commonwealth, State and Industry regulations and standards. All industry stakeholders have been engaged in this process and the necessary communications and training packages are now available.

The communication process has been discussed and approved through EMIAC consultation and the relevant State Regulatory Authorities.

**DEFINITIONS – BASIC CATEGORY**

The revised *Basic Category* definitions as stated below will be updated in current export legislation and relevant state legislation, AUS-MEAT Language publications, documents and posters.

**Lamb** means meat derived from an ovine animal that:

a) is under 12 months of age; or  
b) does not have any permanent incisor teeth in wear.

**Mutton** means meat derived from:

a) a female ovine animal that has at least one (1) permanent incisor tooth in wear; or  
b) a castrated male ovine animal that:

i) has at least one (1) permanent incisor tooth in wear; and  
ii) shows no evidence of secondary sexual characteristics.

**Ram** means meat derived from:

a) an entire male ovine animal that:

i) has at least one (1) permanent incisor tooth in wear; or  
ii) shows evidence of secondary sexual characteristics; or  
b) a castrated male ovine animal that shows evidence of secondary sexual characteristics.
DEFINITIONS – ALTERNATIVE CATEGORY

The revised Alternative Category definitions as stated below will be updated in current AUS-MEAT Language publications, documents and posters.

**Young Lamb** means a young female or castrate male ovine that:
- a) has 0 permanent incisor teeth (in addition);
- b) has no eruption of permanent upper molar teeth.

**Hogget** means meat derived from:
- a) a female or castrate male ovine animal that has one (1) but no more that two (2) permanent incisor teeth in wear; and
- b) in males shows no evidence of secondary sexual characteristics.

**Ewe** means meat derived from a female ovine animal that:
- a) has at least one (1) permanent incisor tooth in wear.

**Wether** means meat derived from a castrate male ovine animal that:
- a) has at least one (1) permanent incisor tooth in wear; and
- b) shows no evidence of secondary sexual characteristics.

DEFINITION – IN WEAR

The industry agreed definition for ‘in wear’ permanent incisor teeth:

A permanent incisor is considered ‘in wear’ if:
- a) it touches the upper pad when the sheep’s mouth is closed; or
- b) it is above the height of the milk teeth either side of the permanent incisors.

RESPONSIBILITY

In Export Establishments, Basic Category is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture (the department). The department will require an update to the Approved Arrangement to incorporate age determination requirements and the effective determination of ‘in wear’ permanent incisor teeth.

In Domestic Establishments, Basic Category is the responsibility of the respective State Regulatory Authority (SRA). Each SRA may require an update to the Approved Arrangement to incorporate age determination requirements and the effective determination of ‘in wear’ permanent incisor teeth.
IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

The sheep industry has compiled a range of resources to inform producers and other industry stakeholders about the new definition which is available on the Sheep Producers Australia Website.

AUS-MEAT has also developed an animated Lamb definition learning resource, currently available to individual processors and RTO’s to incorporate into Competence, Awareness and Training programs which is available on the AUS-MEAT Website.

As the new definition includes age criterion (under 12 months) it is the responsibility of each Accredited Enterprise (Packer) and/or Exporter to ensure that all importing country requirements are adequately covered (i.e. Sheepmeat age requirements) and any required verification / certification processes that may be necessary.

Use of the NLIS Sheep and Goats Visual Tags can also be considered as a guide to assist with the identification of eligible livestock.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Attached is an industry fact sheet jointly prepared by Sheep Producers Australia (SPA) and Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC).

Should you have any queries on the revised lamb definition contact the respective industry organisations as outlined below:

- **SPA** Tel: (02) 6269 5610 or Email: admin@sheepproducers.com.au
- **AMIC** Tel: 1300 000 000 or Email: admin@amic.org.au

For any queries about this advice contact **AUS-MEAT** Tel: (07) 3361 9200 or Email: ausmeat@ausmeat.com.au

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*This advice has been prepared in consultation with the AMILSC.*
What’s changing?
The definition of lamb is changing in Australia.
The current definition of lamb is ‘A female, castrate or entire male that has 0 permanent incisor teeth’.

The new definition is ‘an ovine animal that:
(a) is under 12 months of age; or
(b) does not have any permanent incisor teeth in wear.’

This means a lamb is able to cut one or both of its permanent central incisor teeth, as long as they are not in wear.

Why is the change occurring?
The current definition gives producers no warning light about when a lamb stops being a lamb – the moment a permanent incisor erupts, the lamb is downgraded to hogget.

Rather, the new definition gives producers greater certainty and a definitive signal to make moves to market their lambs. Producers will have generally less than a month from the time of eruption to when permanent incisors are in wear.

The new definition is also consistent with New Zealand’s definition – Australia’s biggest lamb competitor in export markets. The change serves to even the playing field between the two countries.

Who initiated the change?
The change to the definition was first announced by Sheep Producers Australia in March 2018, following extensive consultation with producers and other industry stakeholders.

The change has been endorsed by the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee. Current members of the committee include the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Australian Meat Industry Council, Sheep Producers Australia, Cattle Council of Australia, Australian Lot Feeders’ Association and the Retail Council of Australia.

When will the change take place?
The new definition will apply from 1 July 2019, once it has been changed in Australian export legislation and then in the legislation of NSW and WA.
How do I apply the change?
The process for checking whether lambs comply with the new definition is via a visual inspection – the same process used to verify lambs against the current definition.

A permanent incisor is considered ‘in wear’ if:

- it touches the upper pad when the sheep’s mouth is closed
- it is above the height of the lamb’s milk teeth either side of the permanent incisors.

How is eating quality affected under the new definition?
Eating quality has been at the centre of the decision about whether to change the current definition of lamb.

A more major change to the lamb definition (for example, where two fully erupted permanent incisor teeth are in wear) was not pursued by the industry because of the risk of consumers having an unsatisfactory eating experience.

In contrast, research has shown that lamb under the new definition was as acceptable to consumers as lamb under the current definition. Peer-reviewed research\(^1\) (Wiese et al. 2005) found that a minor change to the definition of lamb – such as one or two permanent incisors having erupted but **not** being in wear – produced no discernible difference in eating quality compared with lambs with only milk teeth.

How will the new definition affect the variability of lamb quality?
It’s true that lambs under the new definition can be slightly older than the case now. But under the new definition, the length of time a lamb is considered a lamb could be extended by **less than a month**\(^2\).

If customers desire young lambs, they can request a category that already exists in the AUS-MEAT Language that accounts for lambs without permanent incisors – YOUNG LAMB (YL).

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2 approximately 30 days, according to Holmes Sacket (2018), Assessment of the economic impact on stakeholders and industry from extending the lamb definition, p. 4