

## Dehorning – What you need to know

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HORNED cattle cause a number of issues in a livestock enterprise.

They cause more bruising and damage to other cattle around them, cause mobs of cattle to be less settled, do more damage to infrastructure, are harder to handle in the yards and when trucking, yarding or feeding they need more space around them. They also pose more danger to the handler.

The easiest way, albeit a long term option to deal with horned cattle is to use polled sires to breed horns out of the herd. This is relatively easy with British breeds, although the genetics are more complicated in Bos Indicus breeds of cattle.

There are several methods to dehorn cattle that will depend on the age of the animal and the size of the horns.

- The younger the animal is at dehorning the better for the animal. There is less risk of infection, the animal does not suffer as much decreased weight gain and the easier it is on the handler.
- A cool dry day should be selected for dehorning. Hot weather increases bleeding and wet weather can increase the chance of infection. Dehorning can be performed as soon as the horn bud is visible.
- Prior to two months of age the horn bud has not attached to the skull of the animal so dehorning at less than two months will result in less scarring and bleeding.

For the welfare of cattle it is recommended that cattle are dehorned using heat cautery, scoop dehorners or gauging. Chemical methods of dehorning are not acceptable on any cattle.

When dehorning, animals over six months of age should have local anaesthetic; however, they can be tipped without anaesthetic in order to reduce the damage they can do to other stock.

For more comprehensive information on how to perform different methods of dehorning and the advantages and disadvantage of each, please refer to the [MLA guide on Best Practice Husbandry of Beef Cattle - Branding, Castration and Dehorning](#) or speak to your local veterinarian.