

Supporting guidance for Away Wintering Sheep

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For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#).

Introduction

The [Away Wintering Sheep](#) option supports the regeneration of heather and other moorland vegetation by reducing or removing the grazing pressure during the winter months.

Sheep must be removed from the hill and wintered on a different holding not under the business ownership and they cannot be moved onto the in by ground of your holding.

It is only breeding stock from your hill flock which can be funded to away winter. These sheep must return to the main hill flock after the away-wintering period

This is the period during which dwarf shrubs are most likely to be damaged by browsing as the shortage of more palatable grasses drives stock and deer to eat the woody shoots and stems of heather, blaeberry and other mountain shrubs and small trees.

High herbivore pressure can suppress the growth of heather and other plants, and lead to loss of cover of these plants in favour of more grazing-resistant grasses.

It can also result in excessive trampling which in turn could lead to erosion of the peat soil.

If your hill is split into separate LPID's, include all LPIDs where Away wintering is taking place and ensure the Moorland Management Plan clearly explains this.

Target away wintering to those areas of hill at risk of winter grazing pressure.

If you are applying for continuation of away-wintering previously funded under a legacy Nature Scot or Scottish Government agri-environment scheme, you must demonstrate that away-wintering is still required to maintain the habitat in good condition.

How to increase the success of this option

- away winter the sheep that are hefted to the area targeted for improvement and not sheep selected across the whole flock
- consider the impacts away wintering will have on deer grazing and if the area is unfenced, how neighbouring sheep, cattle or deer may graze the area
- manage any remaining sheep, cattle and deer to secure the benefits of the reduction in stock number. Once the flock has been reduced the natural instinct of the remaining animals will be to redistribute to fill the space. You may need to avoid this redistribution, discourage sheep from hefting to the target area or encourage them to graze elsewhere by changing your shepherding, feeding practices and other moorland activities
- consider areas of high grazing or trampling pressure arising from concentrations of stock feeding or sheltering from bad weather
- heather is an easy species to monitor. Look at the percentage of summer shoots which are grazed during the winter. A check in the spring before the ewes return will show if the option is being effective

How to calculate your baseline flock number for away wintering

In your plan provide details of the total number of ewes, gimmers and hoggs recorded on the holding as of 1 December for the three years prior to application.

If you have recently acquired the holding, you cannot apply for away wintering, as you do not have three years sheep figures.

For succession cases, (where all land and stock transfer to a new owner), you must consult RPID before applying for this option and they will advise if you are eligible.

Payment can only be made for sheep away-wintered in addition to those that are traditionally away wintered.

If you already have an agri-environment agreement containing away-wintering and wish to continue to receive payments for away wintering you must be able to demonstrate that this is required to keep the target area in good condition.

Stock away wintered without agri-environment support falls under the definition of stock traditionally away wintered and cannot be claimed.

You are required to keep an annual record of all stock movements in your management diary.

Further information

For more information see [A Guide to Upland Habitats: Surveying Land Management Impacts - Volumes 1 and 2](#) from NatureScot.

Stocking levels appropriate to each site will vary with factors such as habitat, aspect, soil type, local climate and altitude. The [Supporting guidance for Moorland Management](#) provides help on stocking levels in the different moorland habitats.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Introduction	Revised text stating sheep must be removed from the hill and wintered on a different holding not under the business ownership and they cannot be moved onto the in bye ground of your holding.
How to calculate your baseline flock number for away wintering	Revised text stating in your plan provide details of the total number of ewes, gimmers and hogs recorded on the holding as of 1 December for the three years prior to application.

Previous versions

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