

# SHEARING

Shearing usually takes place once a year and most woolgrowers employ specialist shearing teams, who travel across Australia shearing sheep for a living.

Depending on the number of sheep, a shearing team can include two or more shearers, one or two woolhandlers and a wool classer.

## The penner-up

During shearing, sheep are brought in from the paddocks to the yards around the shed, ready for penning up.

The penner-up is responsible for keeping the pens (yards) in the shearing shed full of sheep, ready for the shearers.

When the sheep have been shorn, they leave the shed, are counted, and may be treated to prevent diseases before being taken back to the paddocks.

## The shearer

Each shearer has their own stand, electrically-driven machine handpiece and small pen of sheep, called a catching pen.

Shearers take a sheep from their catching pen and position it at their stand for shearing.

Shearers remove the **fleece** with a number of long strokes with the handpiece. After the **belly**, leg and face wool have been removed and collected by the woolhandler, the body of the **fleece** comes off as one piece.

## Fast facts

- A professional shearer can shear more than 140 sheep a day.
- After shearing off the wool from the belly, legs and face, the rest of the fleece is removed in a single piece.
- Fleeces are sorted at shearing according to their quality.

## The woolhandler

As soon as the **fleece** has been shorn, the woolhandler gathers up the fleece and throws it across a large table.

The woolhandlers skirt the **fleece**. Skirting removes the lower-quality edges of the **fleece**, which are kept separate from the main fleece wool. This can include **necks and pieces**, and soiled wool.

The remaining **fleece** is rolled and given to the wool classer.

## The wool classer

The wool classer sorts the wool into five main categories — **fleeces, necks, pieces, bellies** and locks.

**Fleeces** are also sorted into lines (groups) according to their micron.

The classed wool is placed in nylon bags and compressed in the wool

press to make bales. All the bales are sealed and marked with a brand that identifies the woolgrower, the classer and the type (breed and category) and quality of wool inside.



**Shearing handpiece:** Shearers use a specially-designed electric handpiece to remove the fleece.



**Skilled professionals:** Shearers are highly-skilled professionals who undergo intensive training in order to be able to shear safely and efficiently.



**Crutching:** Removing the wool from around the sheep's bottom helps prevent flystrike and staining of the fleece wool.



**Wigging:** Removing the wool from around the eyes helps ensure sheep can see clearly.

## Crutching and wigging

Crutching and wigging is similar to shearing, but usually takes place well before shearing and is carried out for a different reason.

Shearers use the electric handpiece to remove wool from around the sheep's bottom (crutching) and face (wigging).

Woolgrowers crutch their sheep to reduce the amount of wet manure

and urine that sticks to the wool around sheep's bottom.

This wetness can attract blow flies, which lay their eggs, leading to **flystrike**.

Wigging is done at the same time as crutching and removes any wool around the face that could stop the sheep from being able to see.

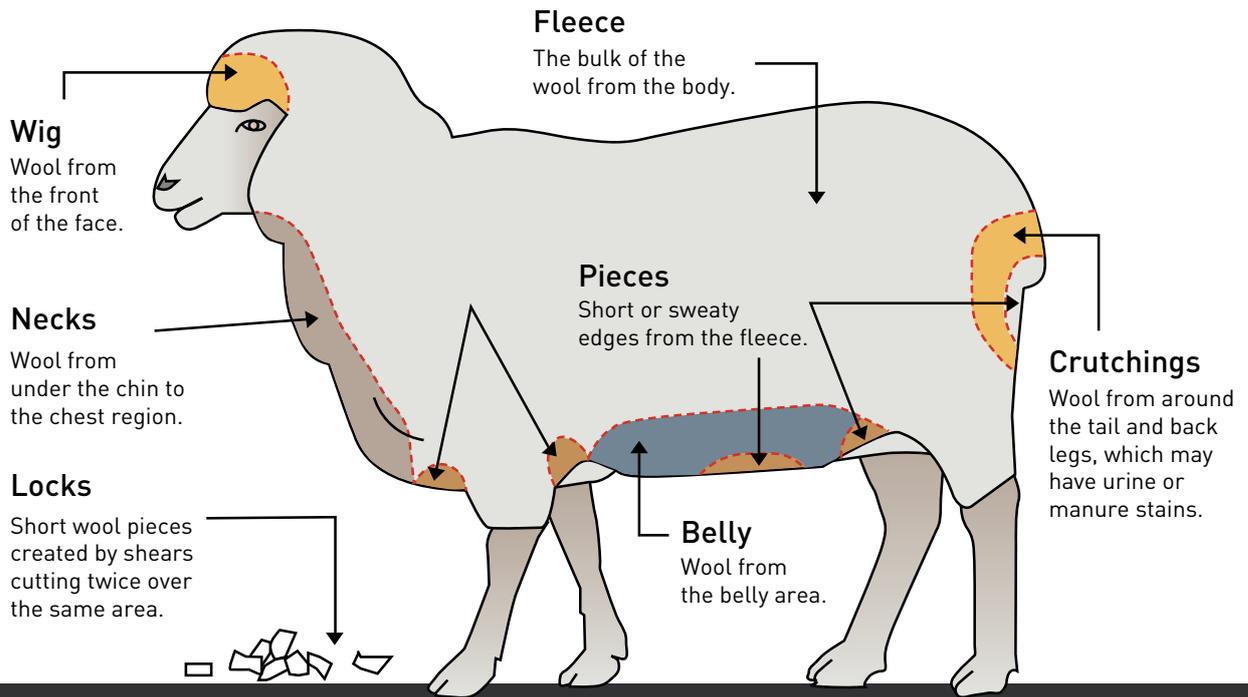
## Glossary

**Belly** — short wool underneath the stomach of the sheep. This wool is kept separate from the fleece as it is less valuable and is processed differently.

**Fleece** — the main wool covering the sheep's body. The fleece usually comes off in one large piece, which is thrown across the wool table for skirting.

**Flystrike** — a condition in sheep where blowflies lay their eggs into soiled wool. Fly larvae hatch and burrow into the flesh of the sheep. In severe cases sheep can die from flystrike.

**Necks and pieces** — short lengths of wool shorn from around the neck and legs of the sheep.



Source: Adapted from The Story of Wool, Kondinin Group

## Parts of the fleece

### More information

For more information about shearing, go to:

- [learnaboutwool.com](http://learnaboutwool.com)
- [woolmarklearningcentre.com](http://woolmarklearningcentre.com)

