

Animal Health Update

South East Local Land Services
January/February 2020

LOCAL DISEASE WATCH

Alex Stephens District Veterinarian Yass.

I have no doubt that we will all remember this summer for the rest of our lives. The impact of the fires on top of the drought and water shortages has amplified the stress on our producers and animals. The importance of having a plan, making decisions and using all the support that is offered your way is exemplified.

District vets in the South East, with support from vets in other regions have been working for months now on the fire front assisting in the assessment and where necessary the destruction of **fire affected stock**. A big thank you in particular to Mark Doyle, Evelyn Walker and Lou Baskind, as well as all the vets and biosecurity staff who have come to help us from out of our area.

Just as importantly they have been working with the biosecurity and agriculture teams to ensure that fire affected producers have accessed emergency fodder and understand the requirements for fodder that their stock will have over the oncoming months.

Many producers found themselves in a situation, due to the sudden loss of their stock feed and the ongoing drought where they **must now feed a 100% maintenance** allowance and have lost much of their fencing and may also have water shortages. In many cases partial or complete destocking has been the best plan. Those stock that are remaining are best held close at hand where they can access water and be regularly and most easily fed. This also assists to protect pastures and allow them to best recover.

Early weaning of calves will allow you to best utilize your available feed. Information prepared for the drought is extremely useful in a post fire situation and two of the most useful resources have been the [drought and supplementary feeding app](#) and the [managing drought guide](#).

Also helpful is the fact that we have **funding available** to put towards getting your **feed tested** if you have purchased feed that has not come with a **feed test result**. Knowing exactly the protein and energy values of your feed is the only way to accurately calculate rations.

After a fire has burnt through your property it is important to keep your pets and livestock safe from the **increased risk of chemical hazards**. In the Riverina area there have been reports of arsenic poisoning from cattle licking at the ash from treated pine logs which may contain copper chrome arsenate. Burnt lead batteries also pose a significant risk of lead poisoning. For more information: [Bushfire recovery managing chemical contaminants](#).

Difficulties with water have been dominating other enquiries. Producers have been struggling with both drying dams, where weaker or smaller animals like to get stuck, algal blooms and bore water running dry or becoming very hard. At the LLS office there are water test kits available and also some **funding for water testing**. Please see the articles and multiple links below relating to water quality.

Other enquires have been in relation to stock not doing well in **feedlot situations**. These are rewarding consultations, sometimes it is the ration, sometimes the water quality and on occasions diseases such as pink eye in cattle and respiratory disease in both cattle and sheep. Any animals in a feedlot situation should be supplemented with Vitamin A injection every 3 months to avoid an ill thrift deficiency syndrome. Please contact us if you are worried about the performance of your stock.

On an animal welfare basis, please remember that you are the eyes and the ears of the industry. If you as producers see cases of underfeeding, particularly if you fear that an animal's life is at risk, it is important that you report this to the RSPCA. LLS district vets then support the RSPCA to make feeding recommendations and assessments.

FIRE AFFECTED LIVESTOCK AND HORSES

Lou Baskind District Veterinarian Palerang

Local Land Services have been involved in the Animal and Agricultural Services Functional Area (AASFA) of the ongoing fire emergencies in NSW. As part of this role, vets and biosecurity officers assess livestock and horses that have been fire affected.

In the immediate wake of fire, livestock that show signs of obvious distress must be promptly treated by a veterinarian or humanely destroyed. Animals that do not warrant immediate euthanasia may be candidates for retention and nursing, provided that appropriate care, facilities, water and feed will be available to them.

Livestock and horses can be affected by fire in a multitude of ways. The primary impact can cause burns, smoke inhalation, injuries from attempted escape, and may destroy feed and water sources. Subsequent effects are sometimes overlooked and include lameness, eye problems, respiratory problems, complications with wound healing, gastrointestinal problems, urinary problems, flystrike, mastitis, and reproductive problems. Smoke induced airway injury, even in animals that have no obvious external burns, can take up to 6 weeks to heal.

If you have livestock and horses that were fire affected and have been retained for care it is important you reassess them daily for the first 10 days, and then every 2-3 days ongoing.

Recovering animals should be placed in an area with soft even ground and access to good shade. Feed and water should be easily accessible. Feed quality is very important, as healing requires protein. Green pasture, green crop, or good legume hay should be provided. If none of these are available, reconsider the retention of these animals as they are likely to deteriorate without appropriate nutrition. Provide ample clean water because a well-hydrated animal can clear debris from their lungs more effectively.

Check that male animals are able to urinate, and that calves are able to feed. Calves may need to be removed and hand-reared if the mother's teats are painful. Minimise dust. Use fly repellants to protect wounds from flystrike. Minimise handling, stress and transport.

Please seek veterinary attention for any animals that are showing signs of distress or pain, or are not improving.

For more information on ongoing consequences of fire impact in livestock or horses please contact your local district veterinarian (contact details below).

PREVENTING DAM CONTAMINATION AFTER FIRE AND DROUGHT

Henry Clutterbuck District Veterinarian Goulburn

Drought and recent fires have left dams at risk of contamination after a heavy rain event. Now is the perfect time to prepare your dams for any rain that may eventuate.

Heavy rainfall events can result in surface water flowing in to dams carrying with it organic matter. This matter can make unpalatable for stock. After 48hrs organic matter will sink and provide an ideal nutrient source for bacteria and algae that can lead to blue-green algae bloom. Ideally to prevent this floating organic matter can be removed from dam surfaces ASAP using a boom.

Emergency treatment of contaminated dams may be required if an algal bloom does occur. Treatment can be done by aeration, chemical treatment and use of barley straw. Aeration will reintroduce oxygen into the water. This process will occur naturally after 2-3 weeks once organic matter is removed.

A variety of chemicals are available for the treatment of contaminated dams. Alum and Ferric alum are common treatment options. See [Primefact 1337](#) for more details.

Barley straw releases chemicals that inhibit blue-green algae. Barley straw treatment is not harmful to plants, fish or crustaceans. The high carbon-to-nitrogen ratio of barley straw means that when it breaks down it uses available nitrogen in the water. It also releases chemicals which are active against blue-green algae.

Prevention

Preventing organic matter entering dams can be done using:

- silt traps at the dam entrance
- stable vegetation groundcover leading to the silt trap, with grazing control
- netting or fencing upslope of the dam to trap wind-borne or water-borne material
- surface water earthworks to manage heavy water flows leading to the dam.

For additional information please contact your nearest Local Land Services office.

Additional Resources:

https://riverina.lis.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1188314/farm-water-quality-and-treatment-algae.pdf

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/water-management/contaminated-farm-dams?nopaging=1>

LIVESTOCK WATER: YOU MUST GET IT RIGHT!

Helen Smith and Fiona Leech Agriculture Advisors

It's a sobering statistic that the Bureau of Meteorology recorded the lowest annual rainfall in 29 years of records at Braidwood Race Course in 2019. It's vital to consider the practical implications. Minimal run-off and recharge of farm dams has seriously impacted farm stock water supplies.

Budget: quantity and quality

Knowing where water is on farm and how much is available is vital during drought. Doing a water budget is equally as critical as a feed budget. It is not a feasible practice to be carting water to livestock for extended periods: it is financially, physically and emotionally draining.

Past experience is important: know your water sources, including reliability, storage capacity and ability to hold water. However with the extreme weather we are experiencing, review your situation, as past experience may not apply to the current conditions. Make sure that the water is available where the animals can and will access it.

A water budget takes into account evaporation from storages, seepage, native and feral animal usage, water taken for fire-fighting, and fouling. A calculation using numbers of livestock and their predicted water intake will determine a timeframe for which the water will last.

You may need to put in place a plan to destock as water runs low. Do not wait until the stock water runs out, as this is an extremely concerning animal welfare issue.

Summer rainfall events and heavy thunderstorm activity may provide run-off water: storms have provided some relief in areas around Braidwood. Unfortunately these are highly localised, and the run-off also brings debris, manure, ash etc. which fouls the water collected. Once the debris settles or is partially removed, water is usually suitable for stock to drink. Due to the increased nutrient content, monitor for algal growth (particularly blue-green algae). Contact your nearest LLS office for assistance with water quality, including testing for livestock consumption.

Further information is available [here](#).

Water conservation

As on-farm water storages move to critical levels you can act to conserve water. Shifting and consolidating water will reduce evaporation losses and allow shallower dams to be cleaned out. Troughing water out of dams achieves better extraction and reduces the risk of stock getting stuck. Troughing via a header tank is also worth considering in order to reduce evaporation.

The summer months can see evaporation rates anywhere from 30 to 50% of dam capacity. In recent years evaporation rates have exceeded past records due to increased temperatures and wind. Protection, such as vegetation around the dam, will help reduce evaporation rates. In extreme cases managers have covered dams to prevent evaporation loss.

Consider whether you have the time and money to upgrade your watering system. Again, this may not be feasible at the point of running out, and planning ahead will achieve the best outcome for you and your livestock. For drought affected farmers there is an On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate scheme available via the [NSW Rural Assistance Authority website](#) or by phoning 1800 678 593.

BEEF CALF MORTALITY SURVEY

Carolina Munoz PhD MSc DVM Research fellow Faculty of Vet and Ag Sciences University of Melbourne

Survey participants required for this project, which is funded by MLA. It aims to understand trends in beef herd size and reproductive management practices, quantify calf mortality rates and identify potential risk factors that contribute to neonatal beef calf mortality in Southern Australia.

The project involves a 30 min survey, paper-based, which can also be completed online. Printed copies with reply paid envelopes can be sent if needed. Farmers that complete the survey will get a summary report of key findings and also have the chance to win one of the five prizes valued at \$500.

Please follow the link to the survey [Beef Calf Mortality Survey](#) or email Carolina on
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