

Animal health advice for producers in the

Hunter

Autumn 2019



Drought Update

Drought conditions are continuing throughout the Hunter with the Upper Hunter, in particular, facing a third winter of extreme dry. Water availability and quality is an ongoing issue for producers, with many having to make decisions to destock through lack of available water supply.

Hunter LLS is assisting producers with water quality testing as conditions change or new bores are being brought online. Contact your local office if you have enquiries regarding this.

Storms have given some rain to those lucky enough to be under the clouds but there has been little pasture growth as a result. Be aware that cattle will go searching for the green pick and lose weight as a result. Confine feeding until there is significant growth will benefit both paddocks and livestock.

Availability of feed for livestock through the coming winter is going to be limited so ongoing planning is essential. Many producers have been through plan A, B, and C, and are now down to plan E and F. The important thing is to keep planning! Feed testing is available to assess hay or grain for

nutrient value and also for toxins such as nitrate/nitrite and prussic acid. Costing for feeding should be based on \$/unit of energy, and results can be surprising, so this information can help guide decision making.

We continue to see good quality cattle coming through the saleyards, both fat stock and older animals, which is a credit to our local producers. Pregnancy rates in herds where early weaning has assisted cows with a rising plain of nutrition have been 90% or above. Where cows have been feeding calves through joining, results have been more variable depending on the fat score of the cows.

Finally, a reminder that routine management such as vaccination and drenching requirements are easily forgotten during the daily pressure of ongoing feeding. The District Vet team have still been seeing cases of clostridial disease, some of which have been linked to boosters being missed. Think of vaccination as cheap insurance!

For ongoing advice and support please contact your Local Land Service office on 1300 795 299.



Is it fit to load?

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards for the Land Transport of Livestock (the Standards) define specific requirements in relation to livestock transport in Australia. The Standards are enforceable. It is an offence to load and transport an animal in a way that causes, or is likely to cause, it unnecessary harm. These Standards replace the individual state/territory livestock transport provisions of the Australian model codes of practice for the welfare of animals, so there are now the same rules nationwide for livestock transport.

An animal is not fit for the journey if it:

- is not strong enough to undertake the journey
- cannot walk normally, bearing weight on all legs
- is severely emaciated or visibly dehydrated
- is suffering from severe visible distress or injury
- is in a condition that could cause it increased pain or distress during transport
- is blind in both eyes
- is in late pregnancy

If in doubt - leave it out!

If you identify an animal which meets any of the criteria on page two, then you must not transport it.

You can:

- treat the animal and transport when recovered and fit to load
- humanely destroy the animal, or
- consult a veterinary surgeon and then transport only under veterinary advice

Preparing livestock for transport correctly is a vital element of any journey. Well-prepared stock travel better, are less stressed and associated animal welfare issues are avoided.

Steps for preparing livestock for transport:

- plan the journey including rest stops and inspections
- know who to contact in case of an emergency
- make sure the facilities including yards, races, loading ramps and vehicles are well constructed and will not injure livestock
- handle livestock quietly and with minimum force – stress is cumulative

- segregate animals appropriately (e.g. horned animals, mothers with young, etc.)
- rest recently mustered livestock prior to loading It is the responsibility of the person in charge to ensure that animals are prepared correctly and will cope well with the entire journey.

The Standards also determine the maximum period of time that each species can be held off water during transport. This period includes mustering and any time off water in yards, as well as the journey itself. But, these are maximum limits - certain classes of animals, such as pregnant or young animals, or conditions such as hot dry weather could mean animals need even more regular access to water.

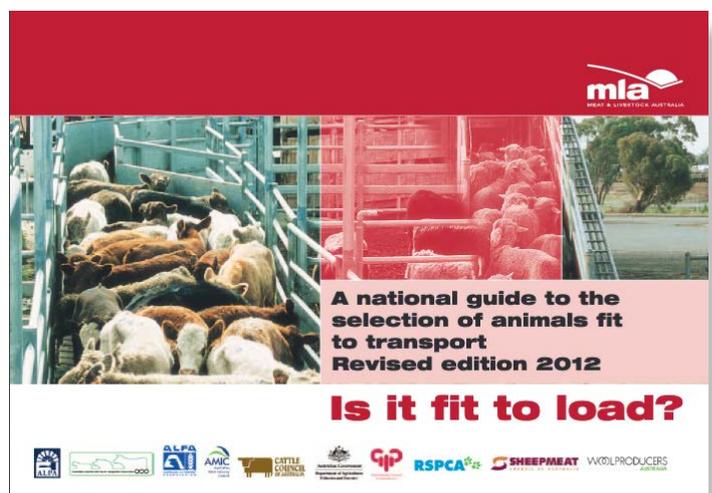
Transporters, drivers and agents should always seek information about how long animals have been off feed and water before loading. If it is likely that the journey will take more than 24 hours, then the date and time when animals last had access to water and when they were last inspected must be recorded by the person in charge. Written information about who to contact in an emergency must also be provided.

Dry feed such as hay but not green feed can be offered prior to loading even if water has been withheld. While food and/or water is on offer, make sure that there is enough space for every animal to access it, as shy feeders become an issue when space is limited. Consider giving electrolytes to animals during the preparation period as it may help prevent physical stress during a long journey.

This excerpt has been taken from the MLA's brochure A national guide to the selection of animals fit to transport Revised edition 2012

The full document is available at:

<https://www.mla.com.au/meat-safety-and-traceability/red-meat-integrity-system/red-meat-integrity-systems-newsletter/is-your-livestock-fit-to-load/>





Kikuyu poisoning warning

The decent rainfall experienced in the lower Hunter and Great Lakes districts in recent weeks has created suitable conditions for a repeat of last year's outbreak of kikuyu poisoning, and a number of cattle deaths have already occurred.

Kikuyu pasture can become poisonous when it is rapidly growing in late summer and autumn after a period of prolonged dry weather. The exact nature of the toxin in the kikuyu plant remains unknown and is subject to ongoing research.

Kikuyu poisoning damages the stomachs of cattle, resulting in a situation where fluid accumulates in the rumen, but can't be absorbed into the blood stream. As a result, affected cattle become severely dehydrated, but can't drink any more because their rumen is already full of fluid. Consequently, affected cattle are observed to drool and 'sham drink': that is, they stand at troughs and dams trying to drink, but unable to do so. Gut pain and staggering gait may be evident before they go down and die.

Previous outbreaks of kikuyu poisoning suggest that:

- affected kikuyu does not look any different to safe kikuyu
- affected kikuyu is likely to be less palatable to cattle, as they will avoid it if alternative feed is available
- cattle deaths occur in kikuyu paddocks where the cattle have no alternative feed available, or alternative feed runs out
- deaths seem to stop once cattle are removed from the affected pasture, or at least when they are offered alternative feed (silage or hay)
- the risk seems to subside after 3-4 weeks.

Cattle producers with high risk pasture (ie kikuyu paddocks containing little alternative feed) are strongly advised to consider temporarily shifting cattle to safer pasture or to provide cattle with alternative feed (hay or silage) if they continue to occupy kikuyu paddocks.

Local agronomist Josh Hack advises that ideal grazing management for kikuyu is to graze the plant at the 4,5 leaf stage, as this is when the kikuyu is at optimum quality. This strategy helps to avoid issues associated with grazing immature kikuyu. 4,5 leaf kikuyu will have substantially better nutrient balance than 2 leaf kikuyu. In good growing conditions kikuyu will put on a leaf every 4-5 days, so waiting until 4.5 leaf stage also maximises kikuyu yield for cattle production.

An additional warning, however, applies to provision of hay and silage: introduce it gradually if the cattle are unaccustomed to it, as there have been a lot of cattle deaths in the last 12 months caused by nitrate poisoning when unadapted cattle have been given sudden access to rich hay. The risk of nitrate poisoning can be reduced by including some carbohydrate in the diet, although that must also be done gradually and cautiously to avoid acidosis and enterotoxaemia.

Additionally, NSW DPI has advised that a significant proportion of sorghum samples tested in recent months have contained dangerous levels of prussic acid (cyanide), a poison which survives the hay-making process. Silage production reduces the prussic acid content of sorghum, and access to a sulphur lick can further reduce the risk.

Samples of pasture, hay and silage can be tested for nitrate and prussic acid levels to assess the risk that they pose to livestock.

Sudden change of diet can often spell disaster for ruminants, so should always be attempted gradually. If changes of diet are planned, ruminants should receive a booster 5-in-1 vaccination 2 weeks before the planned change to protect against enterotoxaemia (also called 'pulpy kidney'), as the protection conferred by vaccination only last for about 3 months.

Please report suspect kikuyu poisoning deaths to your local LLS office, as we continue to collect samples for research.





Leave The Bats In The Batfry

The extreme heat has caused flying foxes and bats to become unwell and fall from trees in many areas of the Hunter.

NSW Health Officials have issued a bat danger alert for the Hunter New England region with a person bitten or scratched every second day, including two by animals infected with Lyssavirus, which is a virus similar to rabies. This is a serious concern for those people who have been exposed. A few of these were wildlife carers, but some were unvaccinated members of the public, who are now at risk of a potentially fatal infection.

Bats may carry lyssavirus, which can be transferred to humans via a bite or scratch from an infected animal. Humans can also be infected via saliva from an infected animal if it gets in their eyes, nose or a cut in their skin.

Caution must be exercised when approaching flying foxes in these extreme temperatures. As flying foxes experience heat stress, they may exhibit unusual behaviour, including clustering or clumping, panting, licking wrists and wing membranes, and descending to lower levels of vegetation or to the ground. However, regardless of how the bat or flying fox appears, and whether they look sick or healthy, assume they are all carrying the deadly Australian Bat Lyssavirus, and do not approach them.

Black flying foxes tend to start dying above about 42 degrees celcius and grey-headed flying foxes above about 43 degrees celcius.

Bats may be carrying the rabies-like virus, Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV). The clinical symptoms are almost always as awful as rabies, and once the disease starts it can't be very effectively treated, and almost everyone effected dies.

People trying to help these animals don't realise that handling them can cause more harm, both for the animals and themselves. Experts, who are vaccinated and trained to handle these bats and flying foxes, must be called in to deal with bats in distress.

So far in 2019 in NSW, there have been 23 bat submissions to the laboratory to test for Australian bat lyssavirus. Three of these bats have tested positive. Australian bat lyssavirus is more typically seen in sick, injured or orphaned bats. People are more likely to have contact with debilitated bats as these bats may be found on or near the ground.

Flying foxes can also carry Hendra virus. Occasionally Hendra virus can spread from flying foxes to horses, and horses can then pass the infection on to humans. A small number of people who had very close contact with infected horses have developed Hendra virus infection. There have been no reported cases of Hendra infection in horses south of Kempsey. There is no evidence of bat to human, bat to dog, dog to human or human to human transmission.

Do not approach or attempt to handle these animals. If you see bats or flying foxes that appear to be unwell, please contact your local wildlife rescue group and they will send a vaccinated, trained person to assist the affected animals. Parents also need to speak to their children about the risks of approaching or handling bats.

If someone is bitten or scratched by a bat, NSW Health advises that they should clean the wound immediately with soap and water for at least five minutes, apply an antiseptic solution and see urgent medical advice.

Contact details of some local wildlife rescue groups can be found at: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/wildlifelicences/RehabFaunaContact.htm>

Pinkeye

Across the Hunter Region we are seeing a huge number of cattle with Pinkeye. The current conditions are ideal for the spread of this disease; dusty, flies, bright sunlight, physical irritation, poor immune status and drought feeding where animals are in close contact.

Pinkeye (infectious bovine kerato-conjunctivitis) is an incredibly painful bacterial infection of the eye. The bacteria, *Moraxella bovis* produces a toxin that attacks the surface of the eye and the surrounding conjunctiva eroding the surface and leading to aggressive inflammation of the eye which can result in blindness and loss of the eye if it goes untreated. The early signs of Pinkeye are a watery discharge from the eye, the membranes around the eye become red and a white spot (ulcer) develops on the surface of the eye. The infection can spread rapidly in the herd leading to impacts on the animal's welfare, weight gains and milk production.

Flies are attracted to the watery eyes, feeding on the infected secretions and then move from animal to animal, spreading the disease.

Prevention of disease is important to decrease the impacts of Pinkeye in your herd. Preventative measures include fly control and the use of Pinkeye vaccination 3-6 weeks before the Pinkeye season kicks off. Watch out for alerts from Hunter LLS warning that pinkeye is active in our area. The vaccine is called Piliguard Pinkeye Vaccine which aids in the prevention and severity of pinkeye in your herd. Be very careful when using this vaccine not to accidentally inject yourself.

Equine Herpes Virus (EHV) – Abortion

There are a number of different Equine herpes viruses that may infect horses. Equine Herpes Virus 1 (EHV-1) causes respiratory disease, abortion and neurological disease in horses and is a significant problem in horse industries around the world. Once infected with EHV-1, a horse becomes a lifelong carrier of the virus which may then reactivate and be shed during periods of stress.

A feature of EHV-related abortion is the so-called 'abortion storm', where an EHV-related abortion in a single mare may be followed a couple of weeks later by abortions in multiple other mares on the farm if strict biosecurity practices are not followed.

Since 1997 EHV-1 disease in Australia has been managed by a combination of vaccination programs and management practices in an attempt to reduce the risk of EHV-1 abortion storms.

Factors identified as being associated with EHV-1 abortion include:

- Stress – including transporting mares late in gestation

Cases of pinkeye should be treated as early as possible! Antibiotic ointments (Orbenin and Opticlox) that you would get through your private veterinarian work well. One third of a tube is applied to each eye, even if only one eye is affected. An eye patch glued on to cover the affected eye protects the eye from dust, UV light, physical irritation and flies. Animals with Pinkeye should be segregated and try to avoid yarding animals in dry, dusty conditions so as to minimise transmission to susceptible animals.

Further information on Pinkeye prevention, diagnosis and treatment is available here

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/103904/pinkeye-in-cattle.pdf

or speak to your private or district veterinarian.



- Mixing groups of pregnant mares late in gestation
- Co-mingling pregnant mares with barren mares and young horses (weanlings/yearlings etc)
- Failing to follow strict biosecurity and hygiene protocols following an initial EHV-1 abortion case
- Mares purchased pregnant and unvaccinated

Route of Infection:

Susceptible mares may inhale or ingest EHV-1 virus from the following sources:

- Aerosols, fluids or foetal matter from aborted mares
- Young horses with 'colds'
- Clinically healthy carrier horses
- Pasture, feed bins, water troughs, halters, rugs, bedding, floats and staff clothing that have been in contact with affected horses

After an abortion, mares clear the virus from their reproductive tracts in a few days, but can shed virus from their respiratory tract for up to 14 days.

The virus may remain infective in the environment and on horse hair for up to 6 weeks in cool, moist conditions.

Most studs will have an EHV policy in place for visiting mares. It is recommended that vaccination status be checked and preferably verified. Treating veterinarians should be able to state when vaccination has occurred, as vaccination is available only via veterinarians.

Vaccination

Horses in Australia may be vaccinated against EHV-1 and EHV-4 to help protect against respiratory disease and abortion. Due to the endemic nature of the disease in Australia's breeding and racing industries, it is recommended that ALL horses be vaccinated against EHV.

The intent of vaccinating pregnant mares is to help protect against abortion storms, and to reduce possible economic impacts.

The vaccine, Duvaxyn EHV 1,4 is approved for use in healthy horses and ponies, for the reduction of clinical signs of the respiratory diseases caused by EHV-1 and EHV-4, as well as for use as an aid in control of EHV-1 abortion when used with appropriate management practices.

A program of vaccination should encompass the following groups of stock and the following protocols are recommended when using Duvaxyn EHV 1,4:

Pregnant Mares

- Vaccinate in the 5th, 7th and 9th months of pregnancy
- All horses on breeding farms
- Empty mares, nanny mares/geldings – 6 monthly vaccinations after 2 initial priming doses

- Stallions and teasers – 6 monthly vaccination after 2 initial priming doses with one of these booster doses ideally timed for the start of the breeding season

Foals

- Priming course of 2 injections 4 weeks apart beginning from 4-6 months of age, followed by 6 monthly boosters

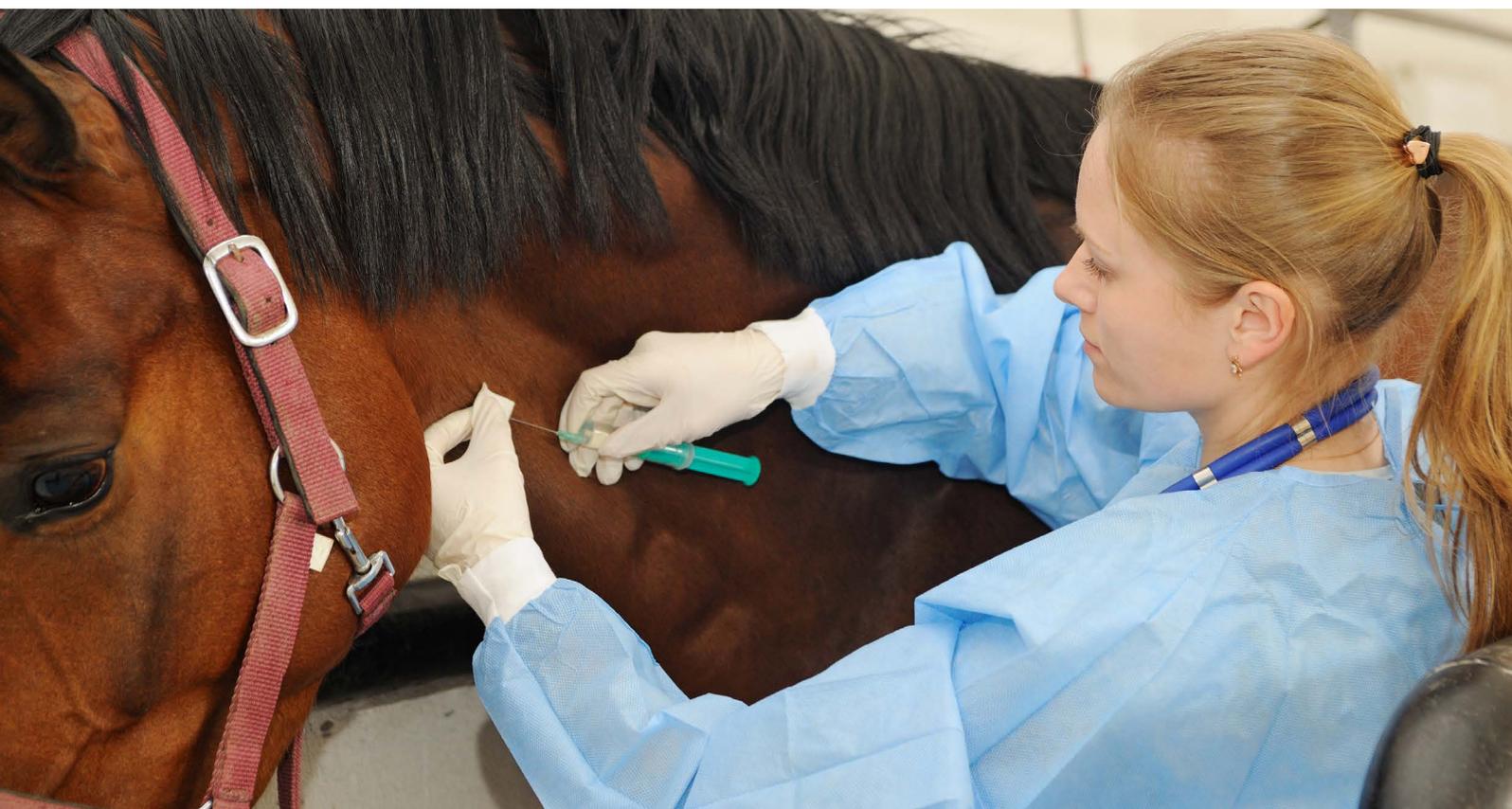
Breakers, racehorses in training, spelling farms and show/performance facilities

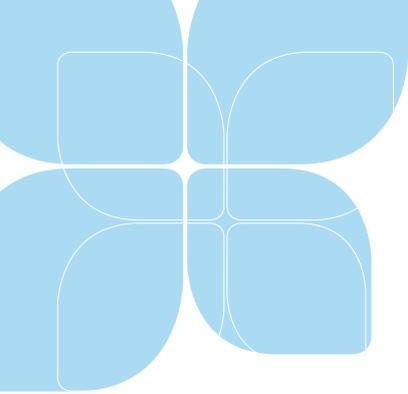
- Considered high risk for the respiratory form of the disease
- Vaccinate 6 monthly following 2 initial priming doses

Management of Abortion

- EHV is a NOTIFIABLE disease in NSW and must be reported to DPI
- SEND ALL ABORTED FOETUSES FOR LABORATORY DIAGNOSIS
- Immediately isolate the mare that has aborted and all in contact mares until a laboratory diagnosis is received
- Train staff what to do if an abortion occurs, including appropriate use of PPE (personal protective equipment)
- Keep abortion kits at several locations around the farm

During an outbreak, the movement of horses on and off your farm may be restricted. This will include the movement of horses to other farms to be covered by stallions or for foaling and the movement of horses for sales. Talk to your veterinarian about how best to protect your horses.





Dairy Farmers get a New Dairy Assurance Score

Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) has unveiled a revised risk-profiling score in February 2019 to assess and manage the likelihood of Bovine Johne's disease (BJD) in dairy cattle.

The revised Johne's Disease Dairy Score has been developed in consultation with industry veterinarians, Animal Health Australia and State Dairy Farming Organisations to:

- Provide an easily interpreted score for dairy farmers to profile their risk of BJD;
- Enable farmers to introduce or sell dairy animals with some assurance as to their BJD status; and
- Clarify how vaccination can be used to control and reduce risk of BJD.

This revised score commences immediately but has transitional arrangements until September 30, 2019 for herds with low risk of the disease.

The new system includes three outcome levels to BJD management (first steps-progressing, managed risk of clinical disease, and managed risk of infection).

There are eight scores within these levels to be obtained, with this revised score including both vaccination and testing interventions for farmers wanting to improve the score of their herd.

The Dairy Score, which was last revised in March 2016, has been developed to meet the specific needs of the dairy industry.

It is vital for all farms to have an active biosecurity plan that meets industry assurance and regulatory requirements.

Explanatory notes on the new 2019 arrangements and a summary of requirements to achieve and maintain the various score levels are available by emailing info@australiandairyfarmers.com.au

UPCOMING EVENTS

Bredwell Fedwell

The workshops focus on the following:

- Improved understanding of how to use genetic information to improve enterprise profitability.
- How to develop a breeding objective for your cattle enterprise including the use of percentile band tables
- Better management of female nutrition for reproductive performance and her profitability; and
- Skills in assessing cow condition

MONDAY 6TH MAY - URBAN ANGUS - WALLAROBBA

TUESDAY 7TH MAY - MEREWETHER - GLOUCESTER

THURSDAY 9TH MAY - TIVOLI ANGUS - MERRIWA

Practical sessions include condition scoring, feed budgeting, developing breeding objective and bull selection.

Participation fee: \$25 per person (inc GST)

Refreshments and a workbook will be provided.

Subsidised by MLA and Hunter Local Land services.

RSVP by **Friday 3rd May** via the link

<https://hunterlls.wufoo.com/forms/z1dve9bj0n4mvqs/>

Here's how to contact your district vet:

Jim Kerr – Tocal

0439 185 275

Kylie Greentree – Maitland

0428498 687

Kristi Arnot – Singleton

0409 758 823

Lyndell Stone – Wingham

0429 532 855

Jane Bennett – Scone

0427 322 311

For more information about Hunter Local Land Services:

 **1300 795 299**

 **admin.hunter@lls.nsw.gov.au**

 **www.lls.nsw.gov.au**

 **www.facebook.com.HunterLLS**

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