

Tips for safely transporting flood affected livestock



Extra care is required when transporting cattle, sheep and goats that have been through flood waters and restricted food intake to prevent stock going down in trucks due to low energy and mineral levels.

Moving stock to safe paddocks through sale or agistment is often the best option until their home paddocks are again safe and usable. After severe flooding many properties may not be suitable to carry stock for weeks or months. Considerable fence, road and farm equipment repairs are often required making it difficult to manage stock. In addition, good pasture regrowth takes time on water-logged soils.

Transporting flood affected stock does require a few extra preparatory steps. These steps may delay the trip for a day or two but will mean that stock have the best chance of arriving upright and in good health. **Do not load stock that are unlikely to make it to their destination without going down during transport.**

The primary need stock will have is adequate energy from a couple of days consumption of good quality feed pre-transport. Re-assess their fitness to load after this and act accordingly. Additional feed provision may be required or the journey amended so that it is shorter or with more breaks. For female stock, they might have the added metabolic demand of pregnancy or lactation. Sound pre-feeding to build muscle glycogen and restore mineral reserves becomes particularly crucial in those animals. It may not always be apparent that stressed and flood affected female stock are pregnant or lactating so err on caution and ensure good quality feed is consumed prior to transport.

Pregnant or lactating stock, off feed, are at a particular risk of going down in the truck, or in the days after arrival, not only due to low energy stores but depleted calcium and magnesium levels. These minerals are normally consumed in good quality feed every day but without constant intake can become critically low as they are depleted from the body in milk. They may also not have the body fat reserves that dry stock can call upon for energy. Stock suffering low calcium and magnesium levels can have metabolic issues and may appear aggressive with muscle twitching, have cold extremities, become recumbent (often with a characteristic S kinked neck) leading to coma and death, if treatment is not provided.

Tips for transporting flood affected stock;

Ensure all stock are fit to load as outlined in the MLA Guidelines. If in doubt, leave them out **see MLA publications**

- Ensure all stock to be transported have at least a day or two of consumption of good quality hay. If potential feed is straw or stubble-like it is unlikely suitable for high demand breeders or even dry stock that are now under conditioned. As a guide, livestock require 2% of their bodyweight a day in good quality hay. A pregnant 500kg cow will require about 10kg plus a day to account for wastage. A 40kg goat requires 1 kg day as fed. (see <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/nutrition/costs-and-nutritive-value/feed-cost-calculator> or the **Drought Feed calculator app** to help with feeding decisions and working out different livestock requirements <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/content/agriculture/emergency/drought/drought-feed-calculator-app>



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Continued – Tips for transporting flood affected stock;

- Feed fodder off the ground (feeder rings are useful) to minimise mud contamination of the feed which can harbour scour causing bacteria and move the feeder to a new position each day, if possible.
- Flood affected fodder is not suitable feed as it will have spoiled through moisture, heat, bacterial and fungal contamination and deteriorated energy content. (**Buying hay or silage after a flood, fire or drought – visual assessment** (nsw.gov.au)_
- Ensure all stock consume their requirements. Smaller stock and shy feeders might need to be presented with additional bales.
- Consider offering lactating breeders a calcium/magnesium lick and salt prior to transport. This can be as simple as an agricultural lime/salt mix with magnesium source added, if available.
- Following a period of good feed intake cattle should look bright and alert and easily load onto trucks.
- If sending stock to saleyards please liaise with your agent and ensure they have feed in the yards overnight and again the next day if there is a delay in departure after the sale or a long trip is intended. This is important even in non-flood times for pregnant and lactating stock. If high metabolic demand breeders are without feed in the day prior to delivery, during sale day and again post-sale transit they can suffer metabolic disease and go down on the truck or the days after arrival.
- If at risk stock are being transported, talk to your veterinarian and be prepared to treat down stock with oral ruminant energy solutions (Ketol or Ceton are some options). Subcutaneous injection of a 4 in1 energy mineral solution might also assist if they are clinically hypocalcaemic or hypomagnesaemic. After treatment let them sit calmly until treatment takes effect (several hours) until they can get up.
- If they are unable to regain footing, seek veterinary help. It is not appropriate to drag down cattle off a truck. Stock that are unlikely to make it to their destination without going down in the truck should not be loaded.
- All livestock transported in NSW must have NLIS tags and be accompanied by an NVD (National Vendor Declaration). Exemptions exist for transporting unidentified stock in emergency situations to save the animal's life. Please ensure you record such movements on NLIS movement documents. Unidentified stock leaving the property of refuge and moving back to their original property within 7 days can do so unidentified. Your LLS office can assist with information.
- Be aware of the loading densities for different classes of stock (age, stage of gestation, young at foot, horns, partitions required etc) more information can be found at the 'Code of Practice for livestock transport' <http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/land-transport/>
- It is important transport is well planned to ensure stock can cope with the trip. Attention should be given to the route, stops required to check stock, time off feed and water, who is there for delivery, appropriate facilities such as a ramp to get off the truck and good feed and water ready on arrival.
- In the days following delivery, flood affected stock require frequent monitoring and care.
- Enact the receival farm's biosecurity plan for quarantine of new stock.
- Deworming should be considered as stress of flooding can reduce immunity and resilience to worm burdens. However, relaxing the standard Biosecurity protocol of 5 in 1 clostridial disease vaccination on arrival might be in order, if they are stressed/weakened livestock, as they might respond poorly to vaccination and shouldn't be put through further husbandry practices until they have settled in and been strengthened by a few days food.
- Under emergency flood responses AASFA (Agriculture and Animals Services) Veterinarians are available to help, your Local Land Services District Veterinarian, livestock officer or Private Veterinarian are all great sources of information.