

# LIVESTOCK HEALTH AND PEST ANIMAL MATTERS

## Pigs are carnivores — and they like to eat lamb!



Feral pigs will attack lambs leaving few remains.  
Photo: Peter Fleming, DPI

The exponential rise in the price of lambs in the past decade has changed the way many sheep enterprises are run. With these higher prices, many sheep producers are looking closely at the lamb marking percentage in their flocks.

When considering disappointing lamb marking results, lamb losses due to feral pig predation are often overlooked and paid little attention relative to their impact.

Feral pigs cause immense destruction to the agricultural sector. Their estimated annual cost is in excess of 100 million dollars. They destroy livestock and crops and spread disease. In the North West, one of their major impacts is the predation of newborn lambs. We should view a pig as a carnivore, such as a wild dog, when thinking about their impact on livestock.

Several major studies have shown the impacts of predation. One local study near Goodooga compared the loss of lambs by using electric fences to exclude pigs. Losses as high as 42% were discovered. Some pigs were shot and autopsied, with lamb bones being found in their stomachs. Other studies have found losses of around 30%.

Predation by pigs is not always an obvious cause of loss. This is because the carcass is rarely found. Feral pigs are estimated to have even larger impacts on twin lambs. These lambs are five to six times more likely to be targeted. Being a predator, pigs will also unsettle ewes resulting in mismothering and further losses.

The North West LHPA can provide valuable assistance with shooting and baiting programs. These are a very cost effective means of providing control. Although we can never get rid of all feral pigs, research has shown that by keeping pig numbers down, livestock losses can be greatly reduced.

### Sundry Services

Did you know that the North West LHPA has a portable NLIS race reader that can be hired?

Did you know that we have portable sheep yards that can be hired?

Did you know that we also have pig traps available for landholders to use on loan, free of charge?

### Fox baiting

Rangers have been very busy with fox baiting in the past six weeks as landholders undertake their pre lambing baiting activities. Don't forget that fox baits are available free of charge (conditions apply) so talk to your local Ranger about organising a group in your area.

**Did You Know?** North West LHPA rangers issued 6020 fox baits in April.

Offices: 101 Barwan Street, PO Box 18 Narrabri NSW 2390 T (02) 6792 2533 F (02) 6792 1738  
203 Balo Street, PO Box 253 Moree NSW 2400 T (02) 6752 8012 F (02) 6752 4368  
75 Fox Street, PO Box 32 Walgett NSW 2832 T (02) 6828 1047 F (02) 6828 1507  
19 Stephen Street, PO Box 13 Wyallda NSW 2402 T (02) 6729 1528 F (02) 6729 1716  
8 Evans Street, PO Box 44 Inverell NSW 2360 T (02) 6722 3091 F (02) 6721 0517 [www.lhpa.org.au](http://www.lhpa.org.au)

## Feral pigs in our sights

Another round of aerial feral pig control was completed by North West Livestock Health and Pest Authority Rangers in the Border Rivers & Gwydir CMA Gwydir and Lower Gingham wetlands project area during April. A further 1250 pigs were destroyed in the project area involving 71 properties. This follows on from the 1352 pigs destroyed in February.

The Mehi Catchment Pig Control Project is scheduled to commence early in June. This will encompass an area that adjoins the Gwydir & Lower Gingham program to the south. In effect, this means that the entire area from the Carnarvon Highway to south of the Gwydir Highway is now involved in a coordinated pest animal project. The response from landholders has been very encouraging. The Mehi project will involve 55 landholders and cover 73 properties.



Currently our Rangers are involved in the pig control component of the Warren to the Barwon Sustainability Project. This project involves aerial control of feral pigs in priority areas adjacent to the Macquarie Marshes as well as the drainage lines into the marshes including the Macquarie River. A total of 1452 pigs were destroyed in the initial aerial shoot on properties adjacent to the Marshes and on properties in drainage lines to the north. LHPA District Veterinarian Libby Read was also involved collecting samples from pigs in the hope we can better understand the migration habits of feral pigs. This project has been funded for the next two years and will provide pig control measures for landholders in the program area.

Now is an ideal time to embark in a 1080 pig poisoning program. Free feeding of pigs is very successful at this time of year as alternate food sources are very limited. If you have any old grain in silos, start strategically placing it around your property where there is evidence of pig activity. The North West LHPA now has motion sensor cameras which can be set up on free feeding stations to assist in determining the amount of bait to be administered in the final poison feed.

## Obstructed urethra? Nobody wants that!

Uroliths (bladder stones) were recently diagnosed as the cause of deaths in wether sheep and a wether goat on separate properties in the eastern area of the North West LHPA.

Although the exact chemistry is poorly understood, uroliths are formed in the bladder in response to imbalanced dietary mineral concentrations. This most commonly occurs when grain or pellets are fed without the addition of lime. Occasionally, as in these cases, it occurs on pasture. In the north west, it is often seen during a "cold snap", where it is associated with reduced water intake.

In ewes and rams, uroliths usually pass through the urethra with the normal flow of urine. In wethers however, the urethra is much narrower due to castration and the stones can become stuck. If the stones block the urethra, urine builds up in the urethra and bladder causing discomfort, irritation and eventual rupture. Once the urethra or bladder ruptures, urine leaks into the tissues and death quickly follows. Early signs include a sick animal with swelling around the pizzle and dribbling urine.

A prompt investigation of suspect cases allows measures to be taken to prevent further losses. This might include encouraging water intake with salt and/or diet modification.

A wether with a swollen pizzle and "water belly" resulting from a ruptured bladder.



## Leptospirosis. Are you vaccinating with 7 in 1?

While assisting a pest animal project near Carinda, the opportunity was taken to test a number of feral pigs for leptospirosis (lepto). Not surprisingly, most of the samples were **positive**.

Lepto commonly causes abortions in cattle. It can also affect humans causing a serious, influenza-like disease.

Lepto is spread via the urine of affected pigs and cattle which contaminates pasture. Prevention is simple. Two vaccinations are required initially (4 to 6 weeks apart) followed by yearly boosters.

It is hoped to survey feral pig populations in other areas of the Authority as the opportunity arises.

## Consider the risks when grazing cereals

As winter approaches, many cattle are moved onto forage cereals such as oats, barley and wheat. Whilst this has many advantages for weight gain, there are some risks to consider.

### **Pulpy Kidney (Enterotoxaemia):**

This disease is caused by the bacteria *Clostridium perfringens* which is normally present in the gut of cattle, sheep and goats. When a change in feed occurs, such as movement of cattle onto cereal pastures for fattening, bacteria begin to overgrow and release a toxin. Cattle are often simply found dead in the paddock, and the disease can be mistaken for bloat. A complete vaccination course with 5 in 1 is very effective prevention.

### **Grass tetany and slow calvers**

Grazing cereal crops can result in low blood concentrations of both magnesium and calcium. If an animal becomes clinically affected it often presents as sudden death; but there can be convulsions and neurological signs, including aggressive behaviour and convulsions, if cases are seen alive.

In cows, an increase in dead or stillborn calves may be the only sign of low blood calcium which can lead to prolonged, slow calving. Heifers are most often affected.

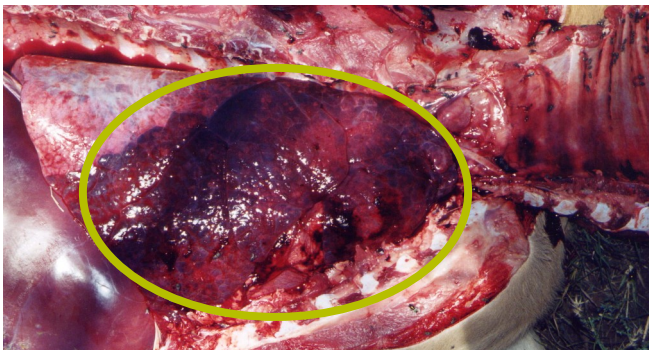
Low blood magnesium and calcium can usually be prevented by supplementing with a lick mixture of equal parts salt, magnesium oxide (Causmag®), and lime.

### **Transport stress with purchased cattle**

Pneumonia is the most common disease that results from transport stress and increased stocking rates. It commonly affects younger cattle between 6 and 24 months which is typically the age group traded onto forage crops.

Other syndromes that can result from transport include joint infections, abortions, transport tetany (similar to grass tetany) and plant poisonings resulting from naïve or hungry stock gorging on unfamiliar plants.

Prevention of transport stress diseases is aimed at reducing the predisposing factors. Minimizing transport time and overcrowding of yards are important as well as gradual dietary changes (for example, loading up with hay before allowing hungry stock access to crops).



Pneumonia in a weaner grazing oats following transport stress. The dark area circled is non-functional lung tissue.

## BUFFALO FLY: Where to now for the North West LHPA?

Buffalo Fly is one of Australia's most serious cattle health problems, and while it is not a regulated disease, there is much an official Livestock Health service (that is, your LHPA) can do to assist beef producers in managing the problem.

Over the past two years the North West LHPA has been asking for reporting of, and mapping the spread of buffalo fly. This has given us an overview of the buffalo fly problem. However more accurate data is needed, and over the next few seasons the North West LHPA will be conducting an active surveillance program.

Buffalo Fly has been steadily moving south, adapting to cooler climates, ever since its introduction to the Northern Territory in 1825. By the late 1980s it was as far south as Ballina in NSW but it had not crossed the Great Divide in either NSW or southern Queensland. Since then, buffalo fly has started moving west.

Over the last few years, buffalo fly has been reported in some areas of the North West LHPA, but it has not been widespread.

In March and early April this year however, buffalo fly swept through the North West LHPA. Virtually the whole area was affected with the more western parts of the region perhaps the most dramatically infested. Predictions that buffalo fly numbers would dramatically reduce as soon as we had cooler weather were confirmed, with most infestations clearing up with the cold snap in mid May.

As a late season problem, many herds were able to stop production losses by the application of a single treatment.

There are a number of questions that need to be answered following this event:

Are we going to have buffalo fly every year?

Are they likely to be in numbers that require treatment?

When in the season are they likely to arrive?

Why are these questions critical? Because they indicate the difference between buffalo fly being an occasional, late season problem that can be handled by a single treatment compared with it being a serious beef livestock health issue that requires costly, strategic management programs early in the season.

In order to gather more information so that these questions might be answered, the North West LHPA is looking for active co-operators from across the Authority to monitor buffalo fly data over the coming seasons. When this data is interpreted in relation to climatic conditions, we will be able to develop specific advice for our area. We have already made connections with scientists in the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation (QAAFI) to assist with this project.

**Note: The information contained in this newsletter is of a general nature only and does not constitute specific advice.**

**For all queries relating to livestock health or pest animal control, please contact your local North West LHPA office.**

# Livestock Movement Documents.

## Which one should you use?

When cattle, sheep and goats are transported, livestock movement documents are needed to meet two regulatory requirements. The first are stock theft deterrence requirements under the Rural Lands Protection Act and the second to comply with NLIS requirements under the Stock Disease Act. Both a Travelling Stock Statement (TSS) and National Vendor Declaration (NVD) meet these requirements.

However, to complicate matters there are situations where industry demands that a NVD be used, due to the additional Quality Assurance information it contains. These situations include when stock are sold and/or moved to a saleyard, feedlot or abattoir.

Finally the MLA's Livestock Production Assurance quality assurance program, which underpins the NVD, requires that the NVD be used as a livestock movement document.

**In summary, while either a TSS or an NVD meet the legal requirements, industry expectations determine that almost always an NVD should be used.**

Horses generally only require a TSS if being transported for sale.

To find out more about approved movement documents and their purpose, please contact your local LHPA.



## Anthrax - the sleeper.

In recent years anthrax has become quite well known on the worldwide stage as a potential bioterrorism agent. It is a common cause of human deaths in many third world countries where protein-starved villagers take the opportunity to feast on an animal that dies unexpectedly.

Anthrax is a disease which can affect a wide range of species including humans. It is caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a very hardy bacteria which forms spores in soil that can survive for many decades.

Much of the North West LHPA lies in the "anthrax belt", an area known for anthrax cases throughout settled history. While many years can occur between cases, any sudden deaths that occur in sheep or cattle should be investigated to rule out this disease.

North West LHPA District Veterinarians now have access to a testing kit that can "exclude" anthrax before conducting an autopsy. It is very important **not** to conduct an autopsy on an animal that has been killed by anthrax as the environment is contaminated by opening the carcass.

If you have any unexplained deaths in your stock, please call your District Veterinarian for advice. Anthrax presents a significant human health risk as well as killing livestock. Best to be safe!

Animals killed by anthrax may have a "strawberry jam" spleen. Photo: 2011 5th year UQ students.



## Mouse Alert!

The Mouse population has exploded in the south of the state and we are seeing evidence of a considerable build up of numbers in the North West. Landholders are urged to contact their local LHPA office if they are experiencing mouse problems around sheds or in cropping situations.

We still have limited stocks of Racumin 8® for control of mice around sheds and Bromodiolone for perimeter baiting around crops. In-crop infestations can be treated with Zinc Phosphide (Mousoff®). This bait type is available from rural suppliers. Because of the demand in the south of the state, bait supplies are very difficult to procure so plan ahead and give your local Ranger a call to report infestations and discuss control options. Under the new NWLHPA pest animal initiatives, these baits are supplied to ratepayers free of charge – conditions and limits apply.

**Did You Know?** A single breeding pair of mice can produce 500 offspring in 21 weeks given favourable breeding conditions.



Mouse highway in a fallow paddock.