



## **Managing buffalo fly on the North Coast**

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Yes that annoying little pest of cattle is back – the buffalo fly. Long term advice has been for cattle producers to hold off their use of buffalo fly tags until after Santa has come and gone. This good advice is to match the duration of action of the chemical with the season of the fly and help avoid development of resistance to chemicals in the fly population. If necessary, sprays and pour-ons can be used to control flies before and after the use of ear tags. Fly tags should also be removed in May. Leaving them in will only encourage them to not work in future years.

75% of producers seek initial advice for buffalo fly control from a retail store. Unfortunately only 8% seek the advice of a veterinarian. Are you making an informed choice? Are there other options for fly control? How do you reduce the use of chemicals? What control method suits you best?

The buffalo fly is an annoying biting pest of cattle that we have had to put up with on the North Coast of NSW since 1978. Surveys by the North Coast LHPA indicate that 30-40% of producers see it as one of their most significant livestock health problems. The fly was accidentally introduced to northern Australia in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and spent the next 100 years spreading to wherever it could easily live. There is no hope of eradicating the pest so producers need to develop effective control strategies to protect production and welfare of their cattle.

The North Coast LHPA has developed decision making tools that are used to give producers advice on suitable control strategies. For buffalo fly the first decision is whether you need any treatment at all. Some producers use chemicals simply out of habit. If your cattle have less than 100 flies on each side and no “fly worry”, treatment is not needed. Once you establish that control is needed you can decide whether you mainly favour non-chemical control or chemical control. All producers should attempt to reduce their reliance on chemicals and use some non-chemical control methods. Learning about and purchasing dung beetles, selecting less prone stock, culling allergic animals, organic back-rubbers, tunnels and traps are some non-chemical methods. Black, large framed stock are commonly reported as being the most prone to buffalo fly. Allergic animals are irritated by only a few flies and are best to cull because they make us think we need to treat the whole herd earlier than necessary.

For chemical control producers need to be aware of the three main chemical groups: Synthetic Pyrethroids (SP), Organophosphates (OP) and Macrocylic lactones (ML). If you've had products not work in the past you need to know what chemical group they were. There's no point in buying largely the same thing again. In general, SP products have been less

effective against buffalo fly for some time now. An annual rotation system between chemical groups is highly recommended. Previous advice was to use OPs for two years and then an SP for one year. With the release of a ML tag last year a suitable annual rotation to try may be ML, ML, OP and then SP.

It's essential to consider whether or not you are planning to sell stock soon. If so you need to select chemicals that have a nil or short withholding period. Nobody wants an insecticide in their steak! Moxidectin, as a ML pour-on has a nil withholding period – as do most of the ear tags.

If you wish to avoid chemicals with more safety and environmental issues then avoid organophosphate and carbamate sprays and rubs. If you want to keep your dung beetles alive then only some of the ear tags and moxidectin pour-ons are good choices. If you have limited time and are willing to pay for a convenient and safer option then ear tags and modern ML pour-ons are best suited to you. If cost is more important than safety and convenience then the use of regular organophosphate sprays may suit you better.

Pests and diseases are best controlled when neighbours and localities work together. If you would like to invite your local LHPA district veterinarian to discuss buffalo fly or any other livestock health topic with you and other farmers contact your nearest LHPA office.

A fact sheet about buffalo fly is available at

[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/110915/buffalo-flies-and-their-control.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/110915/buffalo-flies-and-their-control.pdf)

