

BUFFALO FLY

The buffalo fly (*Haematobia irritans*) is a small blood sucking parasite which infests cattle and buffalo. The buffalo fly was accidentally introduced into Northern Australia in the mid-nineteenth century. By 2000 infestations had begun to be seen as far south as the mid north coast of NSW. Buffalo fly is spreading south as the fly was detected on several properties in the Maitland area in 2010/2011.



Buffalo flies are grey coloured, blood sucking insects about 4mm long.

Lifecycle:

Adult buffalo flies live for 10-20 days on the hair coat of the host animal. Females lay their eggs in fresh cattle dung, and then return to the host. Eggs hatch into larvae in the dung and develop into young adult flies. Young adult flies can emerge as soon as 10 days after egg laying in optimal conditions. Optimal conditions are a hot and humid climate, with temperatures between 25 & 35 degrees Celsius. Buffalo flies may disappear in cold weather or their numbers may be greatly reduced.

Effect on cattle:

Irritation caused by buffalo flies can lead to distress, disruption to grazing time and hide damage from constant rubbing. Production losses result from permanent hide damage, lowered weight gain and lowered milk yield. It is estimated that dairy cattle with a moderate level of infestation have their milk yield reduced by 0.5 litres per cow per day.

Treatment and control:

Treatment is recommended if you estimate that there are 30 or more flies on a dairy cow, or when there are an estimated 200+ flies on beef cattle. An integrated control program with non-chemical methods used in conjunction with strategic chemical treatments is recommended.

Non-chemical control options:

1. Buffalo fly traps.

- ⇒ This trap can reduce fly numbers on cattle by 60-70%.
- ⇒ It is simple to build.



2. Allergic cattle.

⇒ Some animals are intensely irritated by small numbers of flies. Consider culling these animals.

3. Dung beetles.

⇒ Dung beetles bury dung pats which make it difficult for buffalo fly eggs to survive.

Chemical control options:

Application method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Ear Tags	Effective for 10 or 16 weeks. Usually only need to tag cattle once per season.	Tags must be removed at 10 or 16 weeks (failure to remove tags may promote resistance).
Sprays	Relatively cheap.	Multiple treatments throughout the season are required. Can be difficult to apply correctly.
Pour Ons	Easy to apply. Many also treat worms and lice.	Some products are expensive. Requires repeated treatments.
Back rubbers	Low cost and labour. Self treatment.	No control over dose per animal.

For further information:

- Contact your district veterinarian.
- MLA recommendations for integrated buffalo fly control can be found at:

<http://www.mla.com.au/Publications-tools-and-events/Publication-details?pubid=737>