

Recovering after bushfires – livestock management

The welfare of livestock after an emergency is the responsibility of the livestock owner. This includes the provision of on-going veterinary care as required and access to good quality clean water, suitable fodder and shade if possible. If these are not able to be provided, then livestock will need to be agisted or sold.

Ash containment

Ash may pose a risk to livestock due to potential impacts on pasture and water sources. If possible, livestock should be placed on pasture or fodder with the lowest ash burden. If this is not possible, livestock should be fed newly brought-in fodder or moved to properties outside the area affected by fire and ash.

Ash entering water sources, including creeks, dams and rainwater tanks, may affect water quality and increase the possibility of undesirable bacterial or algal growth. If water looks, smells or tastes unusual, alternative water sources for livestock should be sought. If rainwater tanks used for stock watering become contaminated with ash, then the tanks and associated roofs, gutters and pipes will need to be properly flushed and cleaned. It would be best to flush and clean equipment as soon as possible, so any new rainwater can be provided to livestock. Livestock owners should seek expert advice regarding flushing and cleaning equipment used for stock watering.

If livestock owners have any doubt about the quality of their pasture, fodder or water in the wake of the bushfires, they should seek expert advice.

Fodder

Make sure you have enough feed for the next 3-6 months. If not, options include:

- buy in extra feed – source weed free hay that is sourced locally if possible to prevent the introduction and spread of weeds.
- sell some or all stock

- agist stock, or
- consider confinement feeding to improve feed use efficiency and if paddocks are bare or low feed value

For fodder supplies contact your local stock agent or fodder store. Contact details can be found in telephone directories.

More information, practical guidelines and examples, for feeding and managing sheep through periods of feed shortage (drought, fire etc.) can be found by downloading the following publication.

“Feeding and managing sheep in dry times” www.wool.com/land/drought-resources/

Water

Please see the fire recovery land management leaflet.

If a dam receives a high level of sediment then it may be a problem. Owners should take action to reduce run off into dams by following the directions at:

www.pir.sa.gov.au/emergency_management/bushfires/recovering_after_bushfires

Algal blooms are a possibility especially as the weather is likely to warm up. SA Water can test for Algal blooms. It will cost the land owner around \$120 for initial testing and more if further testing is required.

Contact Australian Water Quality Centre at SA Water for the testing:

www.awqc.com.au/contact-us/contact-details

Agisting or Selling Livestock

Landholders should discuss agistment and selling options with their livestock agents who have extensive networks with other producers and branches. Landholders should inspect agistment areas for potential weeds and animal health issues prior to moving stock. This allows some management options to be developed on site and also on return of livestock to the home property. Landholders should also plan to visit the agisted stock on a regular basis to ensure animal welfare standards are maintained and ensure any potential issues are known prior to the return of stock. For example if weeds have seeded, sheep may need to be shorn and fed in confined area on return to the home property to reduce weed seed spread.

Moving and rounding up livestock

In moving or transporting stock from areas where fences and yards have been damaged by fire, temporary yards may need to be developed. Some livestock transporters and livestock agents may be able to assist landholders. Stock affected by the effects of the fire and the changed surroundings may also react differently and so need to be handled with care. Stock low in condition due to low feed availability or poor water quality may also need to be handled carefully.

Impact of recent rain

Recent rainfall across fire affected properties will promote regrowth of perennial pastures and also produced a germination of annual species. Landholders should consider controlling grazing to allow vegetative ground cover to establish. Stock can chase the green feed causing damage to soil cover and

lose condition when constantly moving with low feed intake. Confinement feeding of stock will so reduce the energy requirements of the animals and improve feed use efficiency.

Dams and Water Courses

On heavy textured sloping ground runoff following heavy rain will carry debris into dams fouling the water and making it undrinkable. Construct sediment traps above the dams in the water course. Hay bales, pegged down with droppers and covered with chicken wire is effective in trapping sediment and debris.

Fence around the dam and place shade cloth on the fence to stop contamination of ash and other material during strong winds.

Re-Fencing

This will be a priority for many landholders and the temptation is to get it done as quickly as possible. Where possible stop and think:

- Along fence lines limbs will be falling from burnt trees for quite a while.
- Heavy rain may wash fallen timber onto fences in creek lines
- The boundary fence is the only one that has to go back where it was. Do all of your other fences have to go back where they were? DO they have to be the same type of fence? Take the opportunity to rethink your paddock layout and improve it if possible. Consider fencing to soil type / production zones and include laneways to stock and machinery movement.

Blazeaid: will soon be establishing a Coordinating Centre for volunteers to assist with re-fencing on fire affected properties. Monitor the website www.blazeaid.com for the local contact mobile and email address for the Centre

Grapegrowers are donating broken vineyard posts which may be suitable for fencing on fire affected properties. Contact via email to James Hook at DJ's Growers; james@djsgrowers.com.au to register their need. Write "**POSTS NEEDED**" in the subject line so James can track and respond to them efficiently. The posts of up to 1.8m come as truck bundled.

Disposal

Landowners or farmers needing advice or assistance regarding appropriate burial locations that address environmental concerns, ensuring that water resources are protected, can contact the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on 8204 2004 or find further information at www.epa.sa.gov.au/environmental_info/waste_management/burn_damage

Additional information

More bushfire-related information for primary producers is available on PIRSA's website at www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecuritysa/emergencymanagement/bushfire_information

Additional resources can also be found on the following websites:

www.depi.vic.gov.au/fire-and-emergencies/recovery-after-an-emergency

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/bushfires