



Monday 10 May 2010

It never rains, it pours...

Mostly, it's a blessing: vast inland areas of NSW and Queensland are being progressively soaked as floodwaters move down the Darling and tributary systems.

And across western QLD and NSW, the rain has brought one of the best seasons in decades; there is a green tide of grasses and shrubs, and marshes and farm dams are being replenished after many hard drought years.

However, it won't necessarily be Eden; the floods and rains will bring on a range of pests and diseases that farmers and land managers will need to deal with, including:

- drench-resistant worms
- footrot and lice
- blowflies
- reproductive diseases, like vibrio and pestivirus
- bloaty pastures
- pinkeye and mycotic dermatitis ("dermo")
- clostridial diseases, like blackleg
- cheesy gland and scabby mouth
- noxious and poisonous weeds
- insect worry
- viral diseases carried by biting insects, like 3-Day sickness and meningitis
- an increase in feral pigs, foxes, and dingoes, and predation of lambs



Picture: View to the QLD border from far north west NSW – Greg Curran NSW DPI

These may arrive either due to the spread of floodwaters or as stock are brought back into inland regions. Either way, pastoralists may not have seen these problems for a long time.

For more information on Farm Biosecurity visit www.farmbiosecurity.com.au

NSW Department of Primary Industries veterinary officer Greg Curran believes that attention to farm biosecurity is the key.

“Simple biosecurity measures such as checking the disease background of re-stocker animals, temporary quarantining and monitoring of new or returning stock, and regularly checking pastures and animals in the paddock will allow graziers to take maximum advantage of the floods.”

Greg Curran identifies a number of areas where graziers can consider biosecurity measures to achieve this:

Livestock purchasing - vendors offering restocker animals for sale should complete and sign an Animal Health Statement for each consignment.

(See <http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/toolkit.cfm>). This Statement must be made available for prospective purchasers to inspect. The Statement records disease information and any treatments the stock may have received.

Worms - If buying or agisting sheep and cattle from cooler areas, they are likely to have worms and those worms may be resistant to some drenches. Get veterinary advice on a drenching plan.

“Graziers need to keep an eagle eye out for worms, as current conditions are out of the ordinary.” said Greg.

Mosquito-borne diseases – receding flood waters boost mosquito numbers and they can cause a range of viral diseases in animals. Greg advises producers to keep an eye out for bovine ephemeral fever or three day sickness, and to consider vaccinating valuable breeding animals.

Footrot – the introduction of infected sheep into a clean flock can lead to infection. Warm wet conditions in green pasture can make the disease develop further so it is important to carefully inspect all sheep introductions.

Lice – Lice can be introduced through newly purchased or agisted animals, as well as stray stock crossing damaged boundary fences. Inspect purchased sheep carefully and consider treatment before them mixing with uninfected flocks. Inspect all sheep regularly for infestation.

Bovine and ovine Johnes disease (BJD and OJD) – be aware of exclusion zones and where purchased or agisted stock have come from. Assess the risk of OJD and BJD before purchasing or agisting. Make sure of “Beef Only” Health Statements if bringing cattle back from BJD Control Zones. When bringing sheep into the OJD Exclusion Area, obtain and forward completed Sheep Health Statements to your LHPA. Declarations on OJD status for sheep brought into the OJD Exclusion Area must be sent to LHPA for risk assessment.



Picture: pasture growth in far north west NSW – Greg Curran NSW DPI

National Livestock Identification System (NLIS)

“It is important that people recognise and comply with NLIS when moving cattle and sheep. Our markets and our biosecurity depend on being able to rapidly and accurately tracking and finding any exotic diseases like BSE and Foot and mouth disease, and chemical residues,” Greg said.

Reproductive diseases – cattle returning from agistment could be infected with diseases such as vibriosis and BVDV without showing any obvious signs. Sheep might bring ovine brucellosis back from agistment.

Weeds and poisonous plants – alongside the mass emergence of grasses and other edible herbage, there will be a wave of weeds to contend with. These include poisonous plants and noxious weeds, including new species, which arrive via seeds in floodwaters or on livestock.

Constant monitoring of rangeland pasture composition to identify the level of undesirable plants is required, as is monitoring livestock for signs of ill-health. Flooding may bring overgrowth of blown grass and the risk of floodplain staggers, for example.

If you see anything unusual on your property call: the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 or the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

For information about farm biosecurity measures you can take, see:
<http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au>

ENDS