

FACT SHEET

BUSHFIRE RESPONSE – LIVESTOCK



livestock
health &
biosecurity
VICTORIA



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

The first priority after a bushfire is personal safety and wellbeing. Do not re-enter your property until it is safe, and seek assistance during the recovery period.

Once notified, relevant Government staff will attend properties to help assess stock, determine appropriate action and provide advice on disposal of carcasses. Await their instructions, but euthanise any animals that are unconscious, unable to rise or suffering from obvious lung damage.

Stock should be separated into non-salvageable, salvageable with care, and not injured mobs.

It is recommended that you capture images of injured or deceased stock for insurance purposes.

Salvage for slaughter may be an option for some stock which are mildly affected and assessed by a vet as suitable for transport and slaughter.

WHAT NEXT AFTER A BUSHFIRE?

This bushfire response information is designed to help you make practical decisions about looking after and managing your livestock, focusing on the steps after the immediate response.

After the initial stock assessment, it can help to break decisions into short- and medium-term actions.

Short-term decisions can be made around:

- ▶ locating and securing remaining stock
- ▶ monitoring and treating stock, and determining whether you have sufficient labour to help with these tasks
- ▶ water and feed decisions, such as prioritising water, avoiding ash contamination, what is available, how long it will last, and whether you need to import any feed or water
- ▶ the need to re-locate stock by agisting, selling, setting up containment areas, and making sure stock movements are accurately recorded on the NLIS database
- ▶ the state of facilities, equipment, fences and yards, such as prioritising quarantine areas, avoiding chemical residues or contamination.

Then, in the medium-term take the time to re-assess and make decisions about:

- ▶ improving water quality and meeting ongoing feed requirements for production, including feed budgeting
- ▶ agisting, selling or continuing to feed stock in containment areas to help address feed shortages
- ▶ pasture recovery, management and the need to re-sow.

MONITORING AND TREATING STOCK

Salvageable stock should be treated with antibiotics, pain killers and wound treatments. Continue to monitor them to ensure they access water and feed. Reassess every few days, euthanise any that are deteriorating and return healed animals to main flock or herd.

Watch out for deterioration in breathing due to lung damage and secondary infections of burns, flystrike in burnt animals, and damaged teats where stock shouldn't be bred from again.

WATER AND FEED

Access to water is the top priority. Water sources should be checked for suitability as ash run-off into dams, creeks and rainwater tanks can impact quality and increase chances of bacteria or algal growth.

Where possible, stock should be placed on pasture or fodder with the lowest ash burden.

Stock may be reluctant to eat in the first few days after a bushfire, so it is important to closely monitor them. Initially providing a high protein feed will help restore energy reserves.

Pasture and fodder on hand may no longer be available or suitable so consider what options are available to fill the feed shortage, such as buying in feed, agisting or selling stock.

STOCK CONTAINMENT AREAS

Stock containment areas help make feeding, handling and monitoring stock more manageable after a fire. They also reduce further damage, allow pasture to recover, and limit the spread of weeds from imported feed.

Carefully select containment areas on the property with dedicated feed and water sources and appropriate drainage.

Current standards recommend an area of 2-5 meters per sheep and 10-15 meters for cattle.

IMPORTING FEED

If supplementary feed is required, dietary changes should be introduced gradually. This will help reduce the onset of feed related conditions and ensure stock health is maintained.

Guides are available to help manage and plan this change in diet for both sheep and cattle, based on drought feeding and management.

Use a Commodity Vendor Declaration when importing feed so you have a record of where it came from and any chemical treatments or withholding periods.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- ▶ Take care of yourself and your family and ask for assistance, the VICEmergency Hotline is a good starting point: 1800 226 226
- ▶ Make a list prioritising what you need to do in the short-term to help know where to start in what can be an overwhelming situation.
- ▶ Focus on short-term needs such as containing remaining stock and providing access to quality water.
- ▶ Assess options for meeting feed shortages such as importing fodder, setting up containment areas, agistment or selling stock.

This will help manage the introduction of weeds and salability of stock, which may not seem important now, but help in the long term.

AGISTMENT

In many cases agisting livestock may be the only option.

If transporting stock it is important to consider if they are fit to load and won't be negatively impacted by travel.

Make sure a written agistment agreement outlines responsibilities for care of agisted stock and is signed by both parties.

Stock must be appropriately identified and movements recorded according to National Livestock Identification System regulations so that the animals can be easily traced to the property of origin if required.

For more information, contact Livestock Health & Biosecurity VICTORIA on 1300 020 163 or lhbv@vff.org.au

FURTHER LINKS

Managing livestock after a fire, LHBV
www.vff.org.au/LHBV/FireRecovery.aspx

Livestock after an emergency, Agriculture Victoria
<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/recovery/livestock-after-an-emergency>

Sheep drought feeding and management guide, Agriculture Victoria
http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/312733/Drought-feeding-and-management-of-sheep-2015.pdf

Cattle drought feeding and management guide, Agriculture Victoria
http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/312735/Drought-feeding-and-management-of-beef-cattle-2015.pdf

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