

December 2013



Welcome to the December edition of Plains Talk. It's a bit longer than usual, because (unusually) I have been inundated with contributions - I didn't even have to chase anyone this month!! The articles are on a wide variety of topics, which is hopefully an indication of the wide variety of services and knowledge you will be able to access through Local Land Services in 2014.

Next year, it is planned that Plains Talk will merge with the monthly CMA newsletters (the Lachlan Bundle, & What's On) to become one comprehensive newsletter delivered monthly.

If there are things that you like or don't like about Plains Talk, please let me know so that we can keep the good bits and get rid of the bad bits and still keep you informed of what's happening in your local area in the New Year.

Until then, I hope you, your family and your animals all have a Happy, Healthy and Soaking Wet Christmas!!

*Jillian Kelly, District Veterinarian & Plains Talk Editor for 2013*

#### **IN THIS EDITION:**

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# DARLING PEA

## Watch for Poisoning in Horses and Livestock

Following the fires across northern New South Wales and late summer and autumn rain earlier this year, Darling Pea also known as Swainsona, has become abundant in patches of fire burnt country. Presently, it tends to be seen in large drifts in the higher rocky areas of previously burnt country.

District veterinarian with the Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA) in Coonabarabran, Dr Judy Ellem, said livestock owners may experience problems with their sheep, cattle, goats and horses, if they have been grazing Darling Pea over the past few months. "We have recently diagnosed Swainsona toxicity causing deaths and neurological problems in a mob of sheep grazing paddocks where darling pea has been growing abundantly as livestock was more likely to be grazing this plant where it is abundant and other feed is limited or not available," she said. "It may be the only green plant available and more attractive to grazing animals," Dr Ellem noted. "Sheep, cattle, goats and horses can become 'addicted' and will continue to seek out Darling Pea, eating it even if other feed is available."

Dr Ellem said Darling Pea contains an indole alkaloid known as Swainsonine which blocks an enzyme mannosidase causing an abnormal build up of complex sugars in cells. "The central nervous system is most sensitive to these complex sugars. Clinical signs of poisoning will show up after two weeks of grazing for horses, and four weeks of grazing for sheep and cattle." "Of concern, deaths can occur after grazing this plant for about two months," she stressed.

Dr Ellem said there were many signs of Darling Pea poisoning which producers should be monitoring. These include weight loss, staring eyes, head pressing, shaking or tremor, muscle tremors, unco-ordination, paddling gait, high stepping, dragging hind legs (horses), crouching of hind quarters, difficulty eating and chewing, hyper excitability and erratic manic behaviour when handled; particularly horses – take care handling affected horses, cattle may charge when approached and stock may suffer infertility and abortion.

Dr Ellem said a diagnosis of Swainsona poisoning can be made from a history of grazing Darling Pea, and laboratory testing of blood and post mortem samples. "Other conditions and poisonings may present with similar signs, Swainsona toxicity can be either ruled out or confirmed by testing of samples. "If anyone has affected livestock, please let me know," she said. Dr Ellem noted there is no effective treatment available for affected animals.

"Horses and livestock can recover, if they are removed from the Darling Pea before permanent brain damage occurs. However, after six to eight weeks of continuous grazing, some neurological and behavioural changes may persist. "Horses should only graze Darling Pea for up to two weeks, while cattle, sheep and goats can graze Darling Pea for up to four weeks. Livestock can graze the pea again after a spell (being locked away from access to the plant), of at least four weeks." Dr Ellem said producers should not allow pregnant animals to graze Darling Pea, as abortion is a risk.

In terms of managing the issue, there are a number of other options which exist, including:

1. Fence off areas where darling pea is abundant
2. Provide alternative feed for livestock whilst restricting access to darling pea

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3. Agistment, until more desirable pasture plants have become established.
4. Monitor livestock grazing areas where darling pea is growing, and move before toxicity develops.

“It is advisable that producers withhold any livestock from slaughter for at least one month if they have been heavily grazing Darling Pea,” she said. “The toxin may still be present in the body tissue after heavy grazing of the plant, but studies have shown it will clear within a month of no further swainsonine intake. “If they are showing signs of being pea-struck, it is advisable not to sell or send them for slaughter,” Dr Ellem concluded.

If you have any concerns about possible Darling Pea poisoning, contact your local LHPA district veterinarian.



*Above:* Darling Pea growing in abundance

*Right:* An affected sheep

*Below:* Close up view of the plant



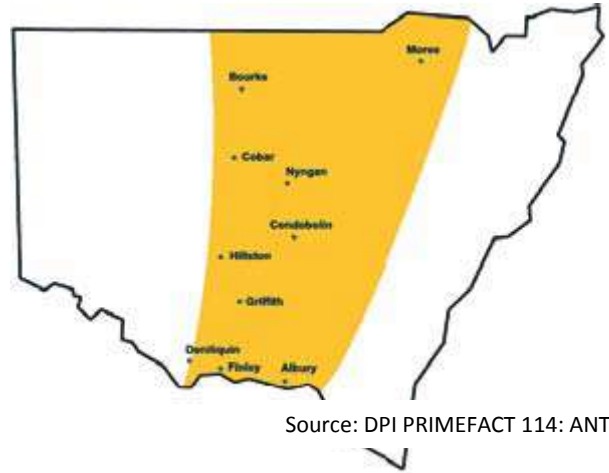
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# Anthrax Season

Jillian Kelly, District Veterinarian

The anthrax season is upon us now that the warm dry weather is here and central west NSW lies squarely in the middle of the anthrax belt (see map at right).

Anthrax is an acute infectious bacterial disease affecting many species of animals, especially grazing livestock. The anthrax bacteria (*Bacillus anthracis*) can survive in the soil for many decades and become dangerous when the seasonal conditions and grazing situation become ideal.



Source: DPI PRIMEFACT 114: ANTHRAX

The current hot, dry weather and lack of feed, causing stock to graze close to the ground, mean the risk of anthrax occurring this year is higher than in previous wet summers.

**Animals that die of anthrax usually show no clinical signs and die suddenly. There is usually blood that fails to clot coming from their bodily orifices - eyes, nose, mouth, rectum and vagina, as seen in the photo below.**



Anthrax can infect humans so it is very important that if you see a dead animal or suspect anthrax you do not open or handle the carcass.

Anthrax is a notifiable disease under the *Stock Diseases Act 1923*. **This means that if you believe anthrax is affecting your stock you have a legal responsibility to immediately notify your local LHPA.**

It is essential to deal promptly with all cases of anthrax because the longer an infected carcass sits decomposing in the paddock the greater the risk of spreading and heavily contaminating the area with anthrax spores.

Fortunately District Veterinarians now have available test kits for rapid diagnosis of anthrax. These can be used in the paddock and take about 20 minutes to confirm or rule out anthrax and has made diagnosis and management of the disease much more efficient.

For properties which have had anthrax diagnosed in the past (even many years ago), a vaccine is available, but must be authorised for use through your District Veterinarian.

All landholders and stock owners in the central west are advised to keep an eye on their stock during the coming summer and autumn and contact their local LHPA District Veterinarian if they notice any dead stock.

# Manage the cows' fat and she will look after you!

Brett Littler & Jason Siddell, Senior Lands Services Officer (Livestock), CMA

With the current seasonal conditions (who turned off the tap?) it seems funny to be saying plan for next year's calves now. However, the decisions we make now will affect our calving percentages next year and the number of cows that get in calf when the bulls go out. It will also affect the number of calves we get each week and therefore will have a compounding affect on your bottom line.

It's been long known that the amount of fat that is on your cows back will have a huge influence on conception rates and this has been more than confirmed by anecdotal evidence over the last 13 years and the research findings coming from the CRC Maternal Efficiency Program. .

Reflecting on some of the results over the last 13 years, the one thing that stands out is that producers who monitor and manage their cows to maintain them in high fat score two or better (minimum of 5mm of fat on the P8 site) have got more calves on the ground and a more condense calving pattern. On the following page is a table that shows the affect of fat score on the amount of cows cycling.

### Fat Score of cows and the percentage cycling after calving

Fat Score at Calving	Days after calving, % on heat		
	50 days	70 days	90 days
1 – 2 (0-6mm P8)	34%	55%	66%
3 – 4 (7-22mm P8)	45%	79%	91%
4 – 5 (23mm + P8)	42%	96%	100%



Fat score 2 cow with 4mm of fat on the P8 site

Also with some new research on cows and body composition coming to light we can really see why. This work has shown that once cows fall below 5mm of fat on the P8 site they start to mobilise their muscle tissue. Another thing to keep in mind is that as the old saying goes "it is always easy to get the first calf from heifers but the second calf is the hard one to get". Below is a table that shows heifers are a lot slower to return to oestrus (cycle) than older cows. This reinforces the need to join heifers 3 weeks before the main cow herd.

### Age of cows and the percentage cycling after calving:

Cow age	Days after Calving						
	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
> 5years (%)	55	70	80	90	90	95	100
2 – 3 years (%)	15	30	40	65	80	80	90



Fat score 3 cow with 11mm on the P8 site

So it is vital if you want to get your cows in calf that you manage their fat. There are a few things that you can do to assist this:-

**1. Feed them.** This is easy enough to say but it is very hard for these cow to put on any weight/fat while they have a calf on them and is really only good at maintaining the cow in the fat score they are in, or minimising weight loss. A protein meal or lupins at joining has shown a benefit in increasing conception rates, but it is no silver bullet.

**2. Early wean calves.** By early weaning calves you drop the cows feed requirement by nearly half. These cows can then get by on feed of poorer quality and are now able to put on weight/fat. Also by weaning you trigger a kick in cattle that are borderline (Fat score 2) and they will start to cycle, just like false weaning does. With false weaning we can expect to increase conception rates by six to eight percent in cows that are borderline in condition. If you are running an AI program this can be as much as 10-12 percent.

So by assessing and managing your cows' fat score, you can increase the number of calves born and tighten your calving period, therefore increasing the weaning weight of your calves and herd profitability.

# Lead Poisoning

*Greg McCann & Jillian Kelly, CWLHPA*

Vets from the Central West LHPA have recently diagnosed several cases of lead poisoning in cattle. The source of the lead has invariable been old batteries, found in farm tips or around sheds.

Cattle are at most risk of lead poisoning due to their inquisitive nature and tendency to "taste test" items such as old batteries, flaking lead paint, sump oil, ashes and just about any other potential lead source they come across.

Our theory for the current run of cases is that some cattle have been early weaned due to the dry weather, and weaners are notorious sticky beaks & will lick or eat anything, plus the dry feed conditions have made animals salt or mineral hungry and they are therefore looking for things to lick.

Often the first sign of lead poisoning is finding dead stock. Where affected animals are observed alive, they show signs of depression and are unresponsive to their surroundings. They are often blind and may walk aimlessly, eventually stumbling into fences or other obstacles, before becoming comatose and dying. Finding dead cattle against a fence line would have lead poisoning as a prime suspect.

Treatment attempts are mostly unrewarding.

Stock exposed to abnormal lead intake must not be slaughtered for human consumption until animal health authorities are confident that their tissues meet food standards. Unacceptable lead levels can persist for many months in the liver and kidney of stock that have recovered from lead poisoning.

If you have an old dump, stack of batteries or old vehicles sitting in paddocks, please remove any potential lead sources. If you notice any sick or dead stock please contact your local District Veterinarian.

While checking for lead poisoning hazards, consider reviewing the security of other farm areas that offer potential stock poisoning risks – including chemical stores, chemical handling areas, spray gear and stores of treated seed grain. Ensuring that stock remain isolated from these hazards will reduce the risk of loss from accidental poisonings as well as keeping them contaminant free.

# Wild dog coordinator appointed for western NSW

## FAST FACTS

- AWI is providing \$538,190 in new funding to help reduce dog predation in the Western Division of NSW.
- A wild dog coordinator has recently been appointed to work with stakeholders to help strengthen rural communities' efforts to achieve sustained on-the-ground control of wild dogs.
- The appointment complements AWI funding for wild dog coordinators currently in Victoria and Queensland.

**A**WI is providing \$538,190 in funding across three years to NSW Farmers to help rural communities across western NSW work together to reduce wild dog attacks.

A new wild dog coordinator, Bruce Duncan, will work with woolgrowers, livestock producers and other key stakeholders to help them achieve long term on-the-ground control of wild dogs.

## COORDINATION IS VITAL

Head of On-farm R&D at AWI Jane Littlejohn said collaboration between local landholders is vital but can be challenging without external help.

"Previous work by AWI in the Western Division shows that woolgrowers recognise the vital need for wild dog control, but they often don't have the relationships with all land managers across such vast distances as in the Western Division that are needed

to be able to work together on the dog problem," she said.

"Nor do they necessarily have all the skills or resources to combat dogs, and those people that are actively involved in dog control can often feel burnout due to the scale of the problem and low participation within the region.

"That is why communities need a coordinator to step in and help out. They need somebody independent, who can break down these barriers and get landholders working locally and across shires.

"Furthermore, coordination is particularly important when dealing with wild dog issues in western NSW where distances to travel are greater and there are a larger number of absentee landowners."

Wild dog coordinators use a "nil-tenure landscape level" approach with local communities that highlights the benefit of focusing on the "common problem" rather than attributing ownership of the dogs to individual land managers.

This approach can negate poor relations between private and public land managers. More importantly, it can have a positive impact on the emotional well-being of farmers in the area who now feel that something positive is being done to address the constant financial and emotional impact of wild dogs.

Through this truly consultative process local farmers can not only share in the "ownership" of the decision making but can identify and pursue the resources required to successfully implement a local and regional solution.

## THE NEW ROLE

Dr Littlejohn acknowledged the role will be challenging but said Mr Duncan will be supported by an expert advisory committee and NSW Farmers' staff. He will also have access to networks of government agencies that are active in wild dog control such as the Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA) and the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Mr Duncan already has good relationships across the Western Division and understands the issues communities have in dealing with wild dog attacks.

"I look forward to working with landholders and stakeholders to develop the networks and structures to help reduce the devastating effects of wild dog attacks on livestock," he said.

"I have lived and worked on a rural property all my life. My family sheep and cattle property borders a traveling stock route and so I am very familiar with introduced and invasive species and their control."

AWI funding for the appointment of a wild dog coordinator in the Western Division of NSW complements AWI past and current funding for wild dog coordinators in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.

## FUNDING AVAILABLE

Funding is also available, as part of AWI's new 'Community Wild Dog Control Initiative', to individual groups to undertake wild dog control activities. Funding can be directed by groups in various ways, from purchasing refrigeration to keep fresh meat for baiting, through to assistance with wild doggers and aerial baiting programs. Mr Duncan can assist groups to form and apply for these funds.

To apply, groups should download and complete the application form at [www.wool.com/pestanimals](http://www.wool.com/pestanimals) and submit it with a project budget and map to [wilddogs@wool.com](mailto:wilddogs@wool.com). Both new and existing control groups are encouraged to apply for the new funding. ◀

More information: Bruce Duncan is based at the LHPA offices in Dubbo and can be contacted on [duncanb@nswfarmers.org.au](mailto:duncanb@nswfarmers.org.au) or (02) 6882 2133. [www.wool.com/pestanimals](http://www.wool.com/pestanimals)



Bruce Duncan has been appointed as the new wild dog coordinator in the Western Division of NSW.

Photo: Copyright Dubbo Photo News.



Catchment Management  
Authority  
Central West



Department of  
Primary Industries

## Summer Fallow Management- Preparation for our next winter crop starts NOW!

*Neroli Brennan, Cropping Advisory Officer, Central CMA*

As we wind down from the 2013 winter harvest it is time to wind-up for the summer fallow management. To provide a strong foundation for next year's winter crops it is vital that you control the weeds germinating on your farm and within your summer fallows.

Effective summer weed control will benefit the upcoming winter crop by:

- Optimising soil moisture storage and retention for winter crop use
- Reducing the 'green bridge' and minimising the diseases and pests that survive on summer weeds
- Saving residual soil nutrients, especially nitrogen for the winter crop

Research carried out by CSIRO, GRDC and NSW DPI over a number of years has agreed that effectively stored summer rainfall can account for up to **50%** of winter grain yields. This same research suggests that for every **\$1** spent on summer weed control you should receive a **\$3.50** return in winter crop production. So it is very important to manage the summer fallow to prepare for the winter crop cycle.

### INTEGRATED WEED MANAGEMENT-

The integrated weed management approach uses multiple control methods to provide the greatest chance of controlling weeds and combating herbicide resistance amongst our hard –to –control weeds, including summer weeds such as flax-leaf fleabane, windmill grass, Barnyard grass, sowthistle and spiny emex.

1. Control weeds early
2. Prevent weed seed set
3. Practice good farm hygiene- keep roadways, fencelines and around sheds weed-free
4. Use different modes of action within your herbicide regime
5. Use full rates of herbicides
6. Increase competition with weeds - reduced row spacing and increased crop population
7. Crop rotation or pasture phase

### HERBICIDE RESISTANT WEEDS-

If you suspect that you have herbicide resistant weeds or you are not getting an effective kill from your spray application it may be time to sample some of these plants and submit them for herbicide resistance testing.

Greg Brooke, Research Agronomist with NSW DPI is currently undertaking a project assessing the potential resistance of weeds to Group I, Phenoxy herbicides such as MCPA and 2-4-D. If you feel this may be an issue on your property please contact Greg on 0437140577 for more details.

### USEFUL RESOURCES:

**Summer Fallow Management** <http://www.grdc.com.au/Search?q=Summer+fallow+management>

**Weed Control for Cropping and Pastures in Central West NSW** <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/pests-weeds/weeds/publications/central-west>

**WeedSmart website** <http://www.weedsmart.org.au/>

For all other enquiries or if you would like more information regarding summer fallow management contact Neroli Brennan, Cropping Advisory Officer with Central CMA (soon to be Local Land Services) on 02 6880 8028 or 0428 692713



## **Is it time to early wean your calves?** By Brett Littler & Jason Siddell Senior Lands Services Officers (Livestock), CMA

Early weaning has got a lot of press in the last few years for various reasons and judging by the number of phone calls I have received in the last few weeks, this year is no exception. With seasonal conditions deteriorating, it is time to look at the management options for your cow herd, to ensure good production from your cows next year and into the future. A lot of the calls have been about what to feed cows and how much. This conversation usually then turns to "you need to wean your calves off your cows"...

### ***Why should you early wean your calves?***

One of the most inefficient ways to feed a calf is through a cow. A lactating cow (about 500kg) will require about 13kg of hay/head/day. Once you wean the calf off the cow and feed them separately the amount required to feed drops substantially (7kg hay for the 500kg cow and 3.5kg of hay for a 200kg weaner). You will also find that the stock will improve and do better than feeding them together.

- It requires less feed to feed a cow and calf separately than it does to feed the cow and calf together. Usually 30-40% less feed.
- By weaning early you are able to maintain your cow's fat score which will help in future years to maintain their performance i.e. calving and weaning percentages.
- By early weaning while the bulls are still in this will help to increase your conception rates. The stress of the weaning of the calves and the stopping of the suckling effect will trigger cattle in lower condition to start to cycle. (Plan for the future)

### ***IF you are going to early wean the following are a guide to help you plan what to do. Younger than 6 weeks***

I would suggest you sell these straight from their mum - there are a number of markets for these young calves. If you are going to wean these and feed them you can expect a lot of hard work. It is going to be expensive and time consuming to get good results and there is a limit of how many of these you can feed. They will require high quality pellets plus high quality hay and milk powder. Coccidiosis causes souring and is a major risk for these young calves so speak to a vet as to how to minimise your risk. You will need to delay marking / branding / dehorning for a few months with these calves.

#### ***Older than 6 weeks***

Once again I would sell these but they are a little bit easier to handle than calves under 6 weeks of age. If you are going to wean and feed these calves, it will require high quality pellets and roughage or a grain and protein meal mix with high quality roughage. Once again I would suggest that you need to delay marking / branding / dehorning for a few months with these calves.

#### ***Older than 12 weeks***

These calves are far easier to manage and you have more options of what to feed and the cost is far less - you could sell these or feed grain plus roughage. I have seen some very good results with fortified molasses diets and roughage. Mark brand and/or dehorn animals a few weeks before weaning *or* wait a month after weaning to do these jobs. The health of these calves is always a concern and you need to plan how to control parasites and problems like pink eye. Talk to some people who have early weaned and see what they have done and also speak to a vet or give me a call to talk about your options.

#### ***Some other tips for early weaning are as follows:***

- Never have mobs of greater than 100.
- Do take off shy feeders (suggest you sell these as they will always be a problem) and sick animals.
- Feed animals of similar age and weight (don't have 100kg calves in with 200kg calves).
- Make sure the site you choose has all weather access and avoid feeding areas that get boggy and wet as you could get a storm.
- Have some shade.
- Allow enough trough space for the calves (30cm/head if you are feeding daily).

#### ***Now some positives to end on***

- There are usually good opportunities to trade during a drought.
- Replacement cattle at the end of a drought are never as expensive as originally assumed (History).



### **LLS Board members have been announced.**

In our southern areas, Pip Job, Ian Rogan and Reg Kidd will be joining Ian Armstrong to lead the Central Tablelands LLS

Greg Matthews, Tim Ferraro and Bob Freebairn will be joining Tom Gavel on the Central West LLS Board.

Out west, Marie Russell, Benedict Barlow, Justin McClure and Jim Maynard will be joining Thomas Hynes to lead the Western LLS Board.

To find out more about their backgrounds and other regions, search '[Local Land Service](#)' online. Appointed board members and Chairs will be joined by elected members in early 2014.

### **Incentives available**

There is still support available to manage your natural resources and land.

In the Fish River area near Bathurst, incentives and support is available to rehabilitate riparian areas and remnant woodlands.

Landholders in the lower Macquarie region can access materials and support to manage problem pests such as feral pigs and foxes.

We are also providing all landholders the opportunity to develop a farm management plan for any property in the Central West Catchment. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your land and its resources is vital for business and property sustainability in an ever changing environment.

Our incentives program and existing agreements will continue into LLS next year.

<http://cw.cma.nsw.gov.au/WorkingWithUs/centralwestcmaintincentives.html>

### **Social media toolkit**

Community groups and farm businesses may be interested in a number of free resources Landcare have developed to beef up your social media skills.

The social media kit gives a great overview of what social media is and how you can dip your toe in. Search '[Landcare social media kit](#)' to find out more.

### **Thanks**

Staff and Board of the Central West CMA would like to thank you for your support over the last nine years.

We wish you and your family a safe, merry and wet Christmas.

We look forward to working with you again in 2014 under the new LLS structure.



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