



TACTICAL RESPONSE

The False Break 2015

The early rains that most of the state received in mid April, or earlier, required follow up rain to secure good pastures. Some areas have had more rain and their grazing season is secure. Other areas have not had follow up rains and are now facing the worst of all seasonal circumstances, a false break. The clover is dead and the feed has "hayed off" even with rain forecast in the next 10 days there is a need for those in this circumstance to PLAN and ACT.

There is a weight of anecdotal evidence from previous years as to how this situation will affect pastures and sheep. The following can be expected;

- Less pasture growth and feed until the growth spurt of late winter
- The inability to maintain the projected stocking rate (Figure 1).

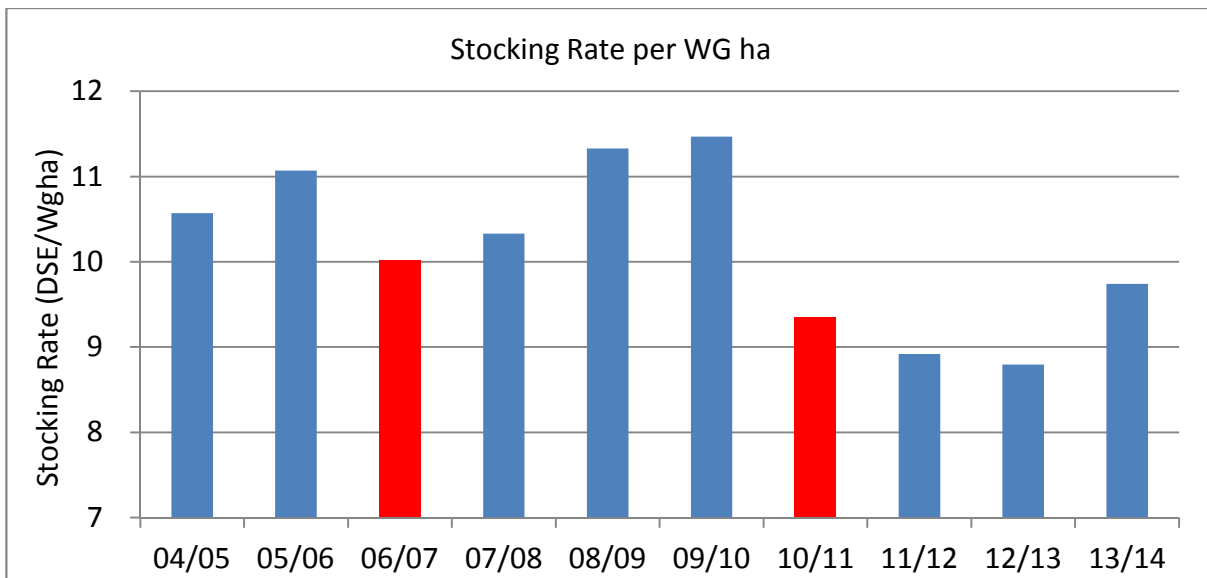


Figure 1: The poor season's effect on stocking rate per winter grazed hectare.

- A poorer lambing percentage, not only in the current season (lamb survival) but also in the following season (due to ewe nutrition).

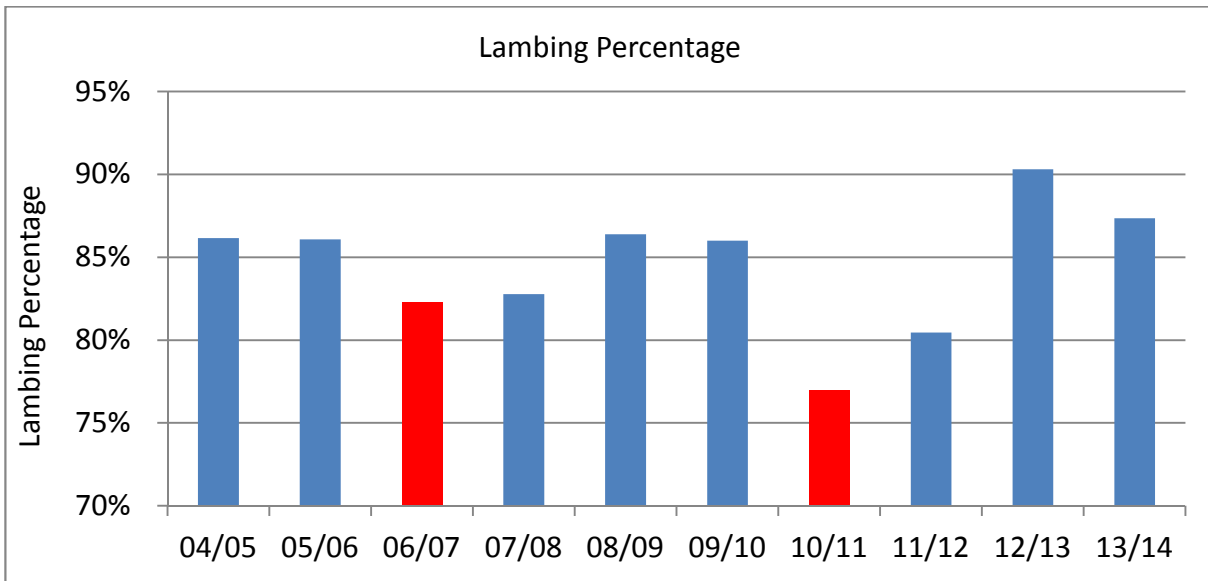


Figure 2: The effect on lambing percentage from poor seasons and the flow on effect.

- A lower wool cut in the current season but also a flow on affect into the next season

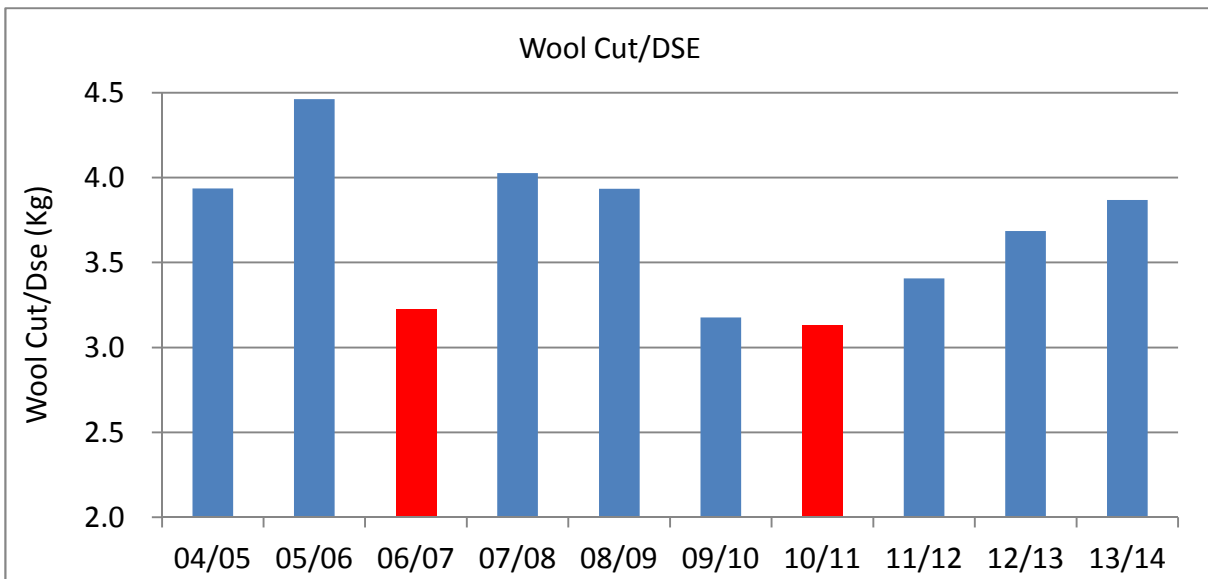


Figure 3: The effect on wool cut per DSE during a poor season.

These effects can be minimised through a proper tactical response to the season but one way or the other there will be a cost to the sheep enterprise. Be prepared for this effect on your budget and PLAN your response within the constraints of your budget.

Of course it may never happen. We could get good rains and some warmer temperatures which will allow pasture to grow in abundance. However it is better to have your tactical response ready to deal with the worst scenario. Ensure you have a written plan. This is most likely to be sequential as the season deteriorates. By way of illustration here is an example.

1. **Now.** Organise feed for the future if required.
2. **17th May.** Sell half the wethers and pregnancy tested dry ewes.
3. **24th May.** Sell the rest of the wethers.
4. **31st May.** Start a drought lot for maiden ewes.

Major ways of dealing with the problem.

1. Reduce the stocking rate.
 - i. Sell sheep. We are lucky that current prices are high.
 - o Dry ewes – (Pregnancy tested dries)
 - o Wethers
 - o Wether lambs
 - o Prime lambs as stores
 - o Cull ewe lambs earlier than usual
2. Feed sheep
 - ii. Especially lambing ewes and those with or expecting multiple births.

Table 1: Energy required by Ewes @ Condition Score 3 to maintain weight (Source Lifetime Wool See Further Resources)

Energy Required by Ewes @ Condition Score 3 to maintain weight								
Maintenance energy (MJ/d) for ewes under paddock conditions							Confinement Fed	
day of pregnancy	small frame (45kg) maintain CS 3		medium frame (50kg) maintain CS 3		large frame (60kg) maintain CS 3		medium frame (50kg) maintain CS 3	
	single	twin	single	twin	single	twin	single	twin
dry	7.8	7.8	8.3	8.3	9.9	9.9	6.7	6.7
50	8.1	8.2	8.6	8.7	10.1	10.3	6.9	7.2
70	8.3	8.7	9.1	9.4	10.5	10.9	7.4	7.7
100	9.3	10.3	10.3	11.5	11.8	13.2	8.3	9.6
130	11.6	14.4	12.8	15.9	14.8	17.9	10.9	11.7
days lactating	maintain CS 3		maintain CS 3		maintain CS 3		maintain CS 3	
	single	twin	single	twin	single	twin	single	twin
10	17.7	22.0	19.2	24.0	21.9	28.7	ask for advice on confinement feeding ewes and lambs	
30	19.2	24.1	20.8	26.5	23.4	29.8		
50	15.8	19.5	17.2	21	19.4	24.2		

- iii. Consider a “drought lot”, that is feed sheep on a confined area or small sacrifice paddock rather than have them grazing all the pastures. This can give an element of deferred grazing increasing the pasture production post germination.

Table 2: Intake for medium frame ewes (MJ/day) (Source Lifetime Wool See Further Resources)

Intake for medium frame ewes (MJ/day)			
FOO	medium frame ewe (50kg)		
	d 0-150	mid lactation	
300	8.0	11.5	12.5
500	9.5	14.5	15.5
800	12.0	17.5	19.0
1000	13.0	19.5	21.0
1200	15.5	21.0	22.5

- iv. Feed the minimum to dry sheep. Keep them alive but not increasing in weight. Make sure you have the tail of the mob set aside for preferential feeding.
- v. Ensure that your sheep are worm free.
- vi. Hay or good straw is important for lambing ewes (to do with long fibre for milk production), it also provides gut fill, provides some heat and they search less for feed.
- vii. Feed before rain events.

Table 3: Feed analysis for common sheep feeds with the average shown in brackets.

Feed	Dry Matter (%)	Metabolisable	
		Energy MJ/kg of DM	Crude Protein % of DM
Wheat	91	12 - 13.5	7.5 - 15
Barley	91	11.5 - 12.5	7 - 13.0
Oats	92	10.5 - 11.5	5.5 - 13.5
Lupins	92	13 - 14.5	30 - 42
Peas	91	12.5 - 13.5	21 - 30
Wheat - Seconds	92	11.5 - 12.5	12.5 - 15
Oaten Hay	85	6 - 9.5	4.5 - 6.5
Barley - Straw	90	6.5 - 7.5	1 - 2.5
Wheat - Straw	90	6 - 7.5	1 - 2.0
Pellets - Maintenance	91	8 - 9.0	8.5 - 9.5
Pellets - Production	91	10.5-11.5	13.5 - 15.5
Early Season Growth			
Grassy Pasture	10 - 20	10 - 12	20 - 25
Clover Pasture	10 - 20	10 - 12	25 - 32
Grazing Cereals	15 - 25	9.5 - 11	15 - 25

- viii. Agistment. A good way to feed sheep, but not readily found. It normally costs 30-50 cents/hd/week but there is also freight costs, usually both ways and supervision. Balance agistment with 1kg feed at 40 c/day for hand feeding which will cost \$12 for 30 days and \$24 for 60 days.

- ix. Crop grazing. With such early rains there maybe some opportunity to graze some very early crop growth (<http://www.grainandgraze2.com.au/index.php>). Grain and Graze 2 shows evidence that properly undertaken there is little effect on yield from grazing up until the end of June.
- x. Crop less.
 - o Is it really worth putting late sown canola in the programme?
 - o Rather than attempting to crop the paddock with ryegrass why not apply 50kg of urea and use it as sheep feed. Ryegrass is an excellent feed source but when fed it grows quicker than legume based pastures offering quality feed earlier.
 - o If you had planned to crop a previously excellent pasture perhaps it should be left in pasture. It will again be one of your better pastures and you can always re-crop another paddock or reduce your cropped area.

Other possible and useful tactics.

- a) Mate later for 2016 lambing to allow the ewes from 2015 time to recover better.
- b) Run ewe hoggets hard for 2015 and do not mate them next year. They will recover eventually.
- c) Wean 2015 lambs early if the ewes are being fed. Cut out the middle man and feed the lambs direct. You must feed these early weaned lambs properly but it will be cheaper than doing it via the ewe.
- d) False break pastures are low density low quality. Improve this by seeding cereals and canola to increase the early feed available. Again these plants respond very well to applied nitrogen.
- e) Monitor for Redmite and Lucerne flea. Redmite in particular are already present and will cause great damage in conditions of slow pasture growth. Two sprays a fortnight apart will be required to eradicate them.

Summary

- ✓ Act now don't keep hoping it will rain
- ✓ Plan your tactical response
- ✓ Ensure you consider your budget in the planning and ensure finance is in place.
- ✓ Take advice, especially on sheep nutrition.
- ✓ Reduce stocking rates. Up 50% reduction for heavy stockers and 25% for lighter stockers.
- ✓ Ewes need the most attention. Pregnancy toxaemia is due to inadequate feeding and can be avoided with proper management.
- ✓ Increase feeding rates.
- ✓ Lambs born in a bad year can perform badly for life. They need special attention to prevent this.
- ✓ Talk to your family and friends. Having actions in place will also reduce personal stress.

Further resources:

- Lifetime Wool
<http://www.lifetimewool.com.au/index.aspx>
- DAFWA Feeding & Nutrition
<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/livestock-animals/livestock-management>
- Feeding and Managing Sheep in Dry Times Bulletin
<http://www.ruralrdc.com.au/WMS/Upload/Resources/FeedManSheep06.pdf>
- Making More from Sheep
<http://www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au>
- Managing Drought
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/90329/Managing-drought-2014.pdf
- Sheep CRC Feedlot Calculator
<http://www.sheepcrc.org.au/resources/psm-software-feedlot-calculator.php>

The Sheep's Back team.