

## Animal welfare in drought

### Ed Clayton

Former Livestock Officer

### Be prepared in a drought

The management of livestock, stocking rates and nutrition are inextricably linked to animal health and welfare. In Australia, drought is part of the expected management cycle, and all producers should plan in advance for seasonal fluctuations and times when feed and water will run short. Producers must ensure that plans are already in place for adjusting stocking rates and/or supplementing livestock.

The welfare of animals is always of the utmost importance and in drought particular attention must be paid to protecting their welfare. Tough decisions will have to be made, and producers who have drought-affected stock will need to consider the effects of any intended actions on their animals. Any decision made must be humane and reasonable.

### Act early

Delaying action may seem logical but delays usually reduce the number of choices available. Therefore, you must act early while stock are still fit and strong.

### Relieve animal suffering

If the situation has deteriorated to the point where stock are suffering, you must immediately relieve the situation by feeding or agisting stock, or sending stock to slaughter. In desperate cases, stock may need to be humanely destroyed. It is not an option to just let nature take its course.

### SCARM Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals

The Primary Industries Standing Committee (PISC) supports the Primary Industries Ministerial Council of Australia and New Zealand (PIMC). PISC was

previously known as SCARM (the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management) and supported the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ). There are several SCARM Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals, which are key reference books containing advice on animal welfare. These Codes of Practice are essential for all people involved in livestock industries. They describe basic standards of animal care that the community accepts as reasonable. For example, the *Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: The Sheep* states that:

'Sheep being fed for survival should be observed carefully at feeding times. Weak animals may require segregation for special treatment.

'Sheep should not be allowed to starve to death. Where minimal water and food requirements cannot be met, they should be agisted, sent for slaughter or humanely destroyed on the property. Drought-affected sheep are highly susceptible to stress and require careful handling:

- i. if they are unable to rise and walk, they should be humanely destroyed on site;
- ii. if they go down after limited exercise, they are not fit to travel and should be humanely destroyed on the property.
- iii. if they are still able to walk, they should be agisted or sent directly to the nearest slaughtering plant. They should not be consigned through saleyards.'

### Useful codes

- Report 29. Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: The Sheep
- Report 32. Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: The Goat
- Report 39. Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Cattle



- Report 63. Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Land Transport of Pigs
- Report 66. Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: The Pig (2nd edition)
- Report 77. Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Land Transport of Cattle
- Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Road Transport of Livestock

Some of these codes are available online at:  
[www.publish.csiro.au/nid/22/sid/11](http://www.publish.csiro.au/nid/22/sid/11)

Some can be purchased from:  
 CSIRO Publishing, PO Box 1139,  
 Collingwood Vic 3066.  
 Freecall 1800 645 051

## NSW Legislation

In NSW the general law relating to animal welfare is The *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*.

This Act states that:

*'A person in charge of an animal shall not fail to provide the animal with food, drink or shelter, or any of them, which, in each case, is proper and sufficient and which it is reasonably practicable in the circumstances for the person to provide.'*

This means that the carer of an animal must provide at least maintenance feed to prevent the animal from distress and starvation, even in drought.

## Further information

Further information on animal welfare can be obtained from the RSPCA. They are listed in the phone book under 'RSPCA' and their internet address is [www.rspcansw.org.au](http://www.rspcansw.org.au)

---

© State of New South Wales  
 through NSW Department of Primary Industries 2007

ISSN 1832-6668

Replaces Agnote DAI-164

Check for updates of this Primefact at:  
[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts)

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (January 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Recognising that some of the information in this document is provided by third parties, the State of New South Wales, the author and the publisher take no responsibility for the accuracy, currency, reliability and correctness of any information included in the document provided by third parties.

Job number 7112