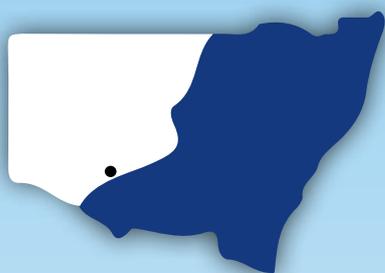


# Using drought lots to manage groundcover

## Humewood Station

### CASE STUDY



#### Location

40 km west of Booligal NSW

#### Property name

Humewood

#### Owners

Simon and Caroline Booth

#### Enterprise mix

Merino sheep

#### Property size

22,000 ha

#### Average annual rainfall

300 mm



#### Why use a drought lot?

For many years, Simon and Caroline have chosen to supplementary feed their livestock during dry times. Having previously fed stock out in the paddocks, they saw an opportunity to protect their country and make better use of supplementary feed supplies. This led to them building a series of drought lots on their property.

#### The problem

In order to maintain livestock numbers during dry seasons at Humewood, sheep often require supplementary feeding. Often in this situation, sheep would be over grazing the land, which is detrimental to the long term productivity of the native perennial pasture system.

Over grazing also results in low ground cover which predisposes the land to degradation caused by wind erosion. In addition to this, Simon and Caroline found that when they were supplementary feeding their sheep in the larger paddocks, sheep were “walking off” valuable energy obtained from the feed they were purchasing.

In order to increase the cost effectiveness of supplementary feeding they needed to reduce inefficient use of energy, which would allow the stock to maintain live weight.



## The solution

Confining sheep in drought lot areas allowed the ground cover in pasture paddocks to be maintained. When it rains, this should lead to faster recovery. Smaller paddocks were constructed at approximately 250 to 300 metres square. Each of these held approximately 2,000 sheep.

Sheep were trail fed grain once every two days and were always able to access hay or straw which was dropped in the confinement areas.

Sheep were put in the confinement areas at the beginning of the dry spell, when Simon and Caroline noticed a decline in both livestock condition and paddock ground cover. By placing the sheep in smaller areas, the amount of walking that the sheep can and need to do is reduced. This decreases the maintenance feed requirements of the sheep which in turn saves on supplementary feed costs.

## Benefits

At Humewood there has been a noticeable difference in the level of ground cover on the destocked paddocks through dry times. As a result of this the recovery time following a dry spell should be reduced. It has also allowed these paddocks to be saved for priority times in the production cycle, for example when the ewes are lambing they can be put in the paddocks which have more feed in them than what they would have if the paddocks had been continuously stocked.

Another benefit is the more efficient use of purchased supplementary feed. The amount of feed consumed by the sheep can be monitored and managed, for example twin-bearing ewes can be fed larger amounts than single and/or dry ewes.

An additional benefit of the drought lot seen by Simon and Caroline is a better conception rate when joining the ewes in confinement. It also allows them to keep a higher number of their core breeding stock, which allows them to “stay in the game” for longer.



## Barriers

Due to the simple nature of the drought lot at Humewood, infrastructure cost was not seen as a major barrier.

For Simon and Caroline, the main barriers to using a drought lot were the cost of supplementary feed and water quality.

When in confinement, feeds such as hay and grain are the sole component of the livestock diet, which results in increased costs. Also, in dry seasons feed costs tend to be higher.

Water quality is fundamental when feeding sheep in confinement. Troughs need cleaning regularly.

Sheep tend not to drink water that has a film of dust on top, which can lead to major health issues and reduce feed consumption. This leads to poor production and in some cases loss of stock.

## Overcoming barriers

To overcome the issue of water quality at Humewood, troughs are regularly cleaned out.

High feed costs were overcome by setting a budget and planning for how long they would feed for.

At particular dates in the feeding period Simon would revisit the budget to plan and assess how long they could continue to feed the sheep.



## Next steps

In the future Simon and Caroline plan to build some more containment areas to allow more stock to be locked up at a time.

In addition to this, they wish to put more grain storage facilities in. This will allow more opportunistic purchasing of grain to avoid being forced to purchase high priced grain when the market is high.

## For more information contact:

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