

CHAPTER 4

Drought management

Severe feed shortages caused by fire, flood and drought force some critical decisions regarding managing stock and protecting pasture, soil and water resources.

In a drought, there is usually some feed that can be scavenged by sheep, but they will need a ration to supplement available grazing if they are kept on farm. Protection of the natural resources such as soil, water and pastures are also important considerations in retention and feeding of livestock. In addition, managing financial reserves during drought is essential to ensure long-term viability.

Drought management options

A number of options are open to a sheep producer in a drought. All financial and physical resources available should be itemised so that the effects of the various options can be budgeted and planned for.

Doing nothing is not acceptable farming practice. Sheep cannot be allowed to starve. Appropriate quantity and quality of feed must be provided; otherwise sheep should be sold.

Agistment

Agistment may be an option, especially early in the drought, but the cost (including transport), ease of management from a distance, feed quality and animal health need to be considered.

Selling stock

Decisions to sell stock need to be made before sheep are unsaleable. Shearing and joining dates will have an impact on critical selling times. Taxation may also have an effect on selling policy.

Usually at least some stock are sold to reduce feeding costs, and so classes or mobs of sheep should be prioritised for sale. If the season deteriorates, trigger dates can be set to sell the next mob. Priorities should include cast-for-age and cull sheep, with the aim of retaining as many breeders as