Stock containment areas for emergencies

Managing livestock after an emergency can be challenging, particularly when large areas of the farm have been affected.

The loss of feed requires more intensive farming practices until pastures have re-established and the soil is able to withstand livestock without causing erosion or pugging. There is also a higher risk of weed infestation with imported feed.

One of the best ways to minimise weed infestations and erosion and help pastures to recover is to remove stock from normal paddocks and feed them in a stock containment area.

# Stock containment areas

A stock containment area is a carefully selected part of the property that is set up to hold, feed and water core farm-livestock during adverse weather periods or after a fire.

Consider it as part of the property management plan. Once established, the area should be maintained and available for use during emergencies.

If there is any intention to convert a stock containment area into a feedlot for cattle then it will have to meet the requirements of the Victorian Code for Cattle Feedlots. See <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/beef/planning-requirements-for-feedlots>.

# Benefits of containing stock

There are a number of benefits of containing stock. These include:

* ease of stock feeding, watering, monitoring and handling
* weeds brought onto the property with imported feed will be contained to the stock containment areas
* stock control when large areas may need fencing rebuilt
* faster pasture recovery
* less chance of soil erosion or damage to paddocks
* control of shelter and shade

# Stock containment area requirements

Stock containment areas should have:

* an area of two to five square metres per sheep and 10 to 15 square metres per beast for cattle (lower figure to be used on light soils to reduce dust)
* reliable fencing
* appropriate subdivision to separate different classes of livestock
* watering troughs with a reliable reticulated supply of water, see <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/water/managing-dams/water-supply-in-stock-containment-areas>
* stabilisation of soil around troughs through the use of stone or gravel where necessary
* feed areas located away from water troughs (such as the opposite end of the pen) to reduce the chance of livestock transporting feed residues on their mouths to pollute the water supply
* guarded trees
* existing trees for shelter and shade, or ensure provision is made for establishing shelterbelts or shaded areas using shade cloth or alternative
* vehicle access for feeding and stock movement
* a maximum desirable working number of animals for animal welfare and husbandry reasons (500 sheep or 100 cattle). The establishment of additional areas may be necessary in some circumstances.

# Location

The location of the stock containment area is important. The site should have:

* no important remnant vegetation
* a moderate slope and well drained, stable soils such as a clay or clay loam
* minimal problems of noise and smell that will cause concern to you or your neighbours
* shade, shelter and good drainage
* access to good quality water and clean facilities
* proximity to a shearing shed (for sheep).

# Other issues

Water quality needs to be protected through the following methods:

* The stock containment area should be setback from watercourses and water storages. A distance of 500 metres is desirable if no other management methods are to be used in combination with the setback.
* Establish a nutrient filter on the down slope side of the stock containment area. The filter may be provided by a vegetation buffer strip, or by constructing traps from wire netting or straw bales.

It is important to closely monitor livestock during the period of containment.

# Stock containment area checklist

## Area

Allow two to five square metres per sheep and 10 to 15 square metres per beast for cattle. Use the lower figure on lighter loams to reduce dust and the higher figures for ewes and lambs, and cows and calves.

## Water supply

The stock containment area needs a supply of clean cool water supplied by trough. Plan for an average of six litres per day per sheep and 50 litres per day per beast for cattle. This can increase to nine litres and 90 litres respectively for very hot days or lactating animals.

## Trough length

Ensure 15 metres of trough edge is available to 500 sheep, while 100 cattle could require five metres of trough edge. Anecdotal evidence from landholders is that less has been used satisfactorily. Flow rates are often more important.

## Slope and soil type

Land should be moderately sloping with well-drained and stable soils such as a clay or clay loam.

## Odour and noise

Some isolation from dwellings is necessary to avoid issues with odour and noise.

## Feeding

Feeding apparatus should be used where possible rather than feeding directly on to soil. When feeding grain use 15 to 20 metres of double-sided trough for 100 sheep, 400 to 600 millimetres each for beef cattle.

Old conveyor belts or corrugated iron between two logs and tractor tyres and 200 litre (44 gallon) drums cut in half have been used.

## Access

Good access is needed for:

* feeding
* watering
* monitoring
* getting stock in and out.

## Shade

Cool livestock will drink less and be less stressed, so it is important that adequate shade is provided.

## Runoff

Consider where runoff will go from the site and the options for avoiding contamination of off-site water quality.

## Subdivision

Subdivision may be needed for separating different classes of stock including shy feeders.

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