

Factsheet - This Spring and Bloat

Prepared October 2020

With current conditions on the Southern Tablelands and a positive outlook for spring, the TFS Board thought it prudent to bring the issue of bloat in livestock to the forefront of members minds. This article is designed as a reminder for members to remain vigilant as we understand that some cattle producers have been battling with bloat since before winter and this is not necessarily an issue that is just emerging.

We have discussed this topic with our member vets, Bill Johnson and Catherine Culley, to gain some insights and gather some tips and tricks to help counter bloat especially seeing as capsules are currently not on the market. There is lots of information available on bloat so this factsheet is not designed to be a 'bloat bible' (Bill Johnson quote) but rather to headline the risk faced this season and serve as a reminder to members to continue to minimise the risk of bloat as much as possible.

Bill Johnson notes if producers have not already experienced issues with bloat this season, they are unlikely to unless management practices are changed which increases the risk. Bill understands that many producers have been practicing bloat prevention strategies for a number of months now and that these may need to remain in place for some time yet.

As the seasonal risk declines with the clover maturing, the grasses and weeds becoming more prominent and cattle acclimatising to the conditions, we take this opportunity to remind members of annual management tasks that may increase their bloat risk. Bill notes these as:

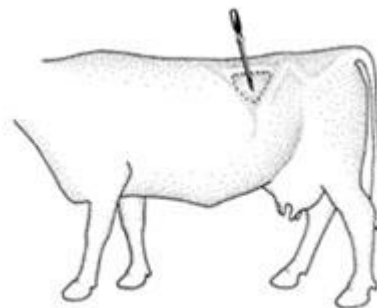
- Moving cattle from a paddock they have become accustomed to into a paddock containing fresh, dense clover or lucerne. This may occur at times like weaning calves or segregating heifers for joining.
- Holding cattle off feed for too long like when cows and calves are yarded or in small holding paddocks in preparation for marking.

- Buying in cattle. If you buy in cattle who come off the truck hungry and put them into a clover or lucerne rich paddock your bloat risk is increased. To counter this, cattle could be held in a holding paddock and fed hay and slowly introduced to pasture.

Catherine Culley notes that it can only be a matter of several hours from putting cattle into a lush green paddock to them showing signs of bloat. Catherine notes that while the preventative treatments available, like bloat oil/blocks and hay work, they are dependent on the stock ingesting them so preventative strategies and minimising your risk as much as possible is best.

Catherine has witnessed some very resourceful and inventive treatments for bloat that you won't necessarily read about in the published articles by MLA or the DPI. One of these such treatments was to have the cow stand in a loading ramp so that their rear was higher than their head. The idea of this is to allow the gas build up to run forwards and leave the rumen exposed. While this may not cure the animal, it may buy you some time to allow a vet to get there and administer treatment.

Another treatment not widely discussed is the 'bloat stab'. Catherine says that if an animal is in obvious distress, its abdomen is extremely bloated on the left-hand side and other treatments aren't working, this may be your only option. By the time the beast is this far advanced with bloat waiting for the vet is most likely not an option. As depicted in the below pictures (supplied by Catherine), the stab needs to occur up high behind the rib cage on the left-hand side. Guidelines are one hand width down from the transverse of the spine and one hand width behind the last rib.



A visit from a vet afterwards to stitch the wound and administer antibiotics to prevent infection would be recommended by Catherine.

As stated earlier there is a lot of information available online explaining the causes and preventative measures for bloat. While researching this article a list was compiled of some of these that may be useful over the coming months:

1. Allworth B, 2020, Managing Bloat in Cattle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QN0002IEjY>

Bruce Allworth presents this webinar as part of MLA's Productivity and Profitability webinar series. It gives an overview of bloat, its causes and treatment options. It also touches on the lack of R&D into bloat.

2. Bailey G, 2014, Bloat in Cattle and Sheep Primefact 416 3rd Edition, Orange NSW, Department of Primary Industries

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/111411/Bloat-in-cattle-and-sheep.pdf

A detailed source of information containing some worthwhile photos. Discussion around prevention and treatment options but is a little out of date as it discusses using capsules which are currently not on the market.

3. Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), 2020,

<https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/animal-health-welfare-and-biosecurity/diseases/nutritional/bloat/>

Brief overview of bloat to be used for a quick refresher.

It is also worth noting that in addition to bloat the high quantity of clover in pastures could mean that pulpy kidney (enterotoxaemia) and selenium deficiency in both sheep and cattle become problems for producers. Bill Johnson explains that some pulpy kidney vaccines require booster shots every 3 months to provide the animal with protection. It is common for these issues to occur at similar times of the year due their shared cause.

Below are some links to additional information on pulpy kidney and selenium deficiency:

- Dunn S, 2007, Enterotoxaemia in Cattle Primefact 418, Orange NSW, Department of Primary Industries

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/110092/enterotoxaemia-in-cattle.pdf

- Robson S, Plant J, Casburn G, 2016, Selenium Deficiency in Sheep Primefact 471 3rd edition, Wagga Wagga, Department of Primary Industries
https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/111355/Selenium-deficiency-in-sheep.pdf