



Transitioning out of stock containment

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Containment topic areas

Considerations

- Is there enough feed?
- Will the feed last?
- Can I keep stock in containment if it becomes wet?
- Is there enough water in the paddock?
- What will be the effect on wool quality

Managing the process

- Before the release
- After the release
- Toxicities to watch for

What to do with containment areas after stock are released?

When to transition out of containment

Perennial pastures have recovered: 2 ½ to 3 leaf stage

Groundcover levels have increased: >70% flats, 90% slopes

Enough high quality feed on offer to meet livestock requirements

Dry sheep – minimum 500 kg DM/ha (1 cm of dense green pasture)

Late pregnancy ewes – minimum of 1000 kg DM/ha (twinning ewes must be higher)

Single ewes point of lambing 1200 and twins 1500 kg DM/ha

Dry cow – minimum 700 kg DM/ha

Late pregnancy cow (8-9 months) - 900 kg DM/ha

Lactating cow (calf 2 months) - 1100 kg DM/ha

Reference (AWI 2019)

Reference Prograze

With pregnant ewes consider distance and stress

- Aim to reduce stress with moving (distance from pens and mustering quietly)
- Move twinning ewes 2-4 weeks before lambing
- With singles release can be closer to lambing (1 week)

Does the paddock meet ongoing feed requirements?

Will the pasture provide sufficient grazing length to warrant the move from containment to pasture?

Information needed to determine how long feed will last:

- Starting FOO
- Pasture growth rate (PGR)
- Stocking rate
- Paddock size
- How much do animals eat?

Feed planning calculators available

- How long will the feed last?
- How many stock do I put onto this paddock?



Management before the move

Pulpy kidney

- Increased risk of pulpy kidney with moves from a low fibre or grain diet to a lush, rapidly growing pasture.
- Ideally use clostridium vaccination with 3 in 1 or 6 in 1 at least 10 days prior to release or now to build immunity.

Rumen adjustment

- Rumen microbes need to adjust back to fibre over a 2 week period.
 - Increase hay as a % of their diet and start to reduce
 - Avoid hungry stock going onto new feed or sudden changes in feed.
- Avoid gorging pasture by feeding their grain ration or offer high quality ad lib hay 24 to 48 hours before release.

Familiarise stock with licks

- If stock are moving onto lush pasture or a cereal (potential for calcium deficiency) then introduce stock to calcium supplements.

Management on release

Gradual transition approach:

- Letting out late in the day so the stock have had their grain ration.
- Offer high quality ad lib hay prior to and after release.
- Let stock in and out of pens onto pasture for short periods initially and buildup over time or
- Continue to feed some of the containment ration in the paddock as pasture unlikely to be enough.

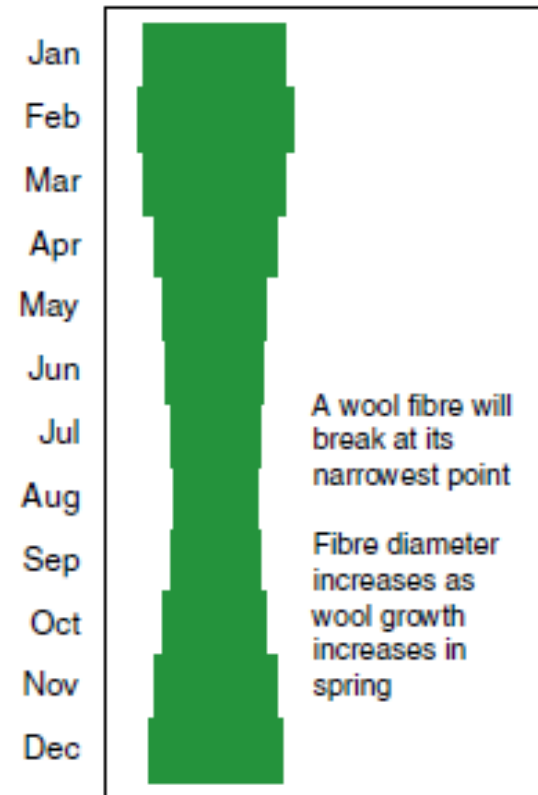


Source: MLA

Consideration of managing wool quality

Change in nutrition can affect fibre diameter, which can create a 'break' in the wool and affect staple strength.

- Use a gradual transition approach.
- Consider the timing of shearing.



Wether wool fibre variation throughout the season (GrassGro simulation at Hamilton, Ref. Prograze)

What if the paddock has limited water?

- Green pasture is 80 to 90% water.
- Sheep require 0 to 0.5 L/day during winter when there is green feed available.
- Pregnant ewes drink more than non-pregnant ones. Water intake doubles by the fifth month and is greater for twin-bearing ewes than for ewes carrying a single foetus.
- Lactating ewe water requirement increases close to 100%, so require supply of good quality water at all times.
- Consider quality as well as quantity - if water is salty, sheep increase their consumption.
- Supervise stock coming out of containment – lots of sheep get stuck in mud around dam edges.

Problems with releasing too early

Ewes chase short green pick, which is 85-90% water, so they have to eat about 15 kg DM/day to meet requirements (unlikely) & they ignore supplementary feed.



Have a wet weather management plan for when containment areas become wet and slippery

Issues

- Trafficability can be reduced for feeding out in.
- Feeding out becomes difficult in wet, slippery conditions, OHS issues and increased labour units.
- Feed wastage if feeding on the ground.
- Lighter textured soils may not compact down.

Consider:

- Reposition pens to ensure run-off drains out the back of the pen and does not flow into adjacent pens.
- Building a levee bank can divert run-off around a potential site.
- Digging drains to reduce surface water and water ponding.
- Elevate feeding and watering stations or mineral supplements: Place on elevated platforms (pallets) to keep them dry and reduce mud around these areas.
- Use appropriate footing materials such as gravel, sand, or wood chips to reduce mud around feeding or watering stations.

- Minimise feed wastage by avoiding ground feeding.

Increasing feed rations in cold, wet conditions by 30%. (Replace spoiled feed)

Potential for hypocalcaemia post drought

Occurrence: Change to lush pastures post drought after high cereal grain diet

Actions:

- Continue to provide calcium supplements to ewes grazing lush pastures post drought (or after high rates of grain feeding).
- Licks can be unreliable due to significant variation in individual animal consumption within and between mobs.
- In a Charles Sturt University study, ewes in paddocks were given access to a dietary supplement (supplied in troughs). Only 2 out of 5 mobs consumed amounts considered to be effective.



Source: Agriculture Victoria

Drought creates excess nitrates causing toxicity issues

- High soil nitrates may occur because of a lack of leaching rainfall and reduced use by plants because of lower growth.
- After the drought breaks, nitrate uptake by plants may be high, which can be poisonous with ingestion.
- Potentially dangerous plants are lush capeweed, thistles, and forages that have been fertilised with nitrogen.

Actions:

- Assess potentially at-risk paddocks.
- Manage by introducing stock slowly to the new feed.
- Make sure stock have full bellies when going onto at risk feed.



Pasture toxicity issues



Source - MLA

Consideration of phalaris poisoning

- Phalaris contains different alkaloids, under certain conditions they can become toxic.
- Plant breeding has focussed on reducing 6 suspected alkaloids but they don't know which ones cause the issues, so all phalaris pastures are at risk.
- Two main types: phalaris staggers and sudden death.

Phalaris staggers

- can occur any time when green phalaris is predominant in the diet, classically a few weeks after the break of season.
- Prolonged exposure to dominant phalaris pastures that are grown on soils linked to low soil cobalt availability (although no reliable soil test correlation).
- Treatment - cobalt bullets administered to livestock or cobalt pasture sprays.
- Thought is that cobalt binds to the alkaloids rendering them ineffective.

Sudden death

- Sudden death neurological (SDN) is more common, sudden death cardiac (SDC) is rare.
- SDN suspected cause is by excessive drying out of dormant plants, hence following drought, which may cause toxic alkaloid levels.
- Onset is sudden, 12 to 48 hours after introduction, after rapid ingestion of toxic material.

SDN risk factors:

- Post autumn break, when phalaris is short (1 to 1.5 leaves) and stressed.
- Hungry stock – deprived of food for a few days, happens under high stocking rates and rotational grazing, probably because stock are entering paddocks hungry.

Sudden death neurological (SDN)

Prevention:

- Test suspect paddocks with a sentinel mob for up to one week on large paddocks.
- Stock 'at risk' paddocks with cattle.
- Set stock 'at risk' paddocks before the autumn break & don't move for at least 2 months (this might limit initial consumption).
- Use strategies to reduce dry matter intake initially in 'at risk paddocks' – provide hay or straw, feed well before moving in, introduce late in the day.

What to do with bare containment areas?

- Phalaris with underground growing points may recover and may not need reseeding. So, wait to see the recovery.
- Area will have high N levels & high weed levels from imported hay and bare ground.
- Could resow either quick feed, e.g. cereals or annual ryegrass or a mix, then sow down a long-term mix.



Source: Agriculture Victoria

Recap: Making Decisions

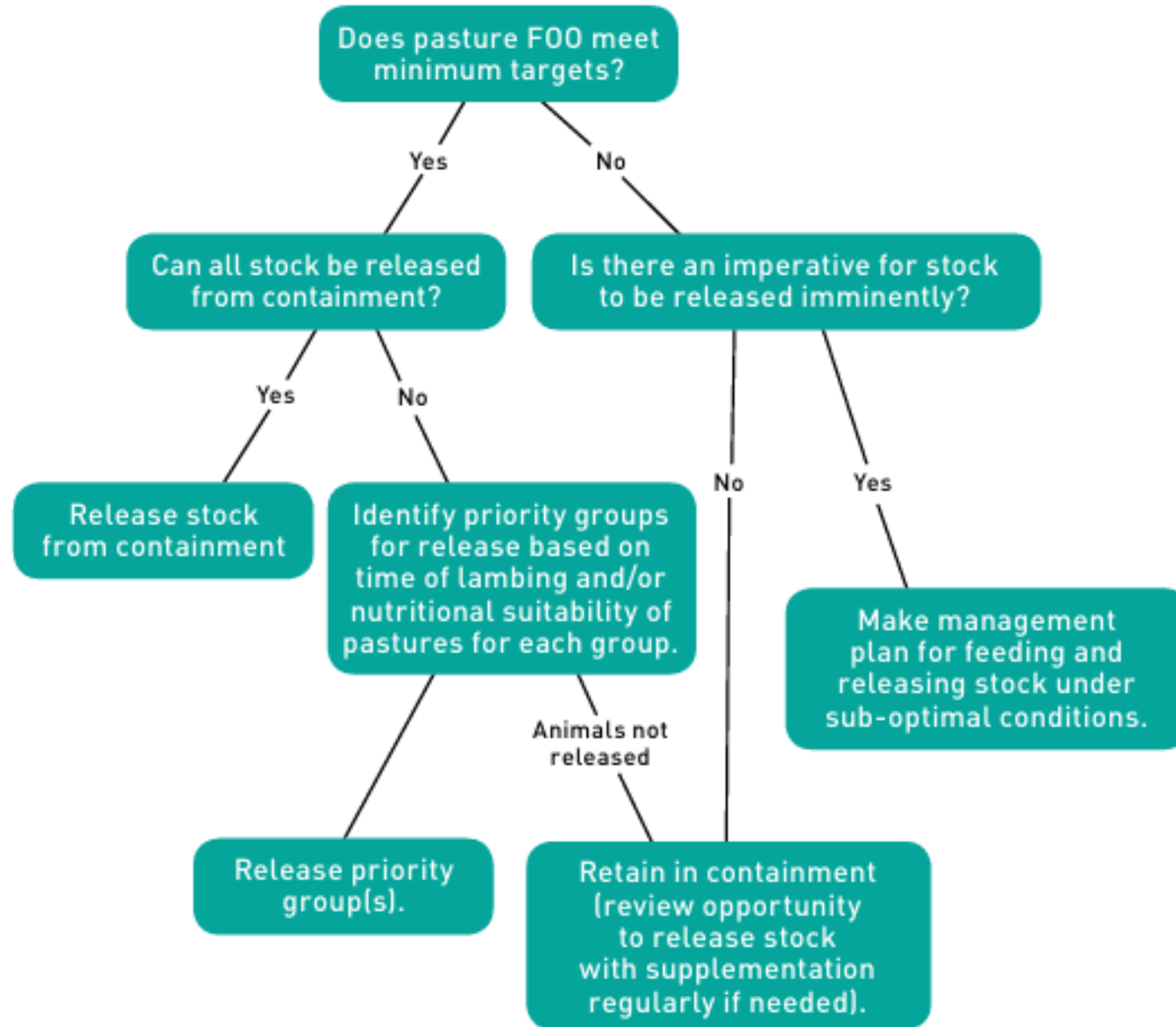


Figure 4 - Decision tree for key considerations of when to release stock from containment (source: Australian Wool Innovation).

Seek advice

Drought-affected farmers in eligible LGAs can register for the one-on-one advisory program support

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/dry-seasons-and-drought-support/south-west-drought-support-package>

- Ararat
- City of Greater Geelong
- Colac Otway
- Corangamite
- Glenelg
- Golden Plains
- Moyne
- Pyrenees
- Southern Grampians
- Surf Coast
- Warrnambool
- West Wimmera (southern half – postcodes 3312, 3317, 3318 and 3319)

Key messages

- Release sheep late in the day, after feeding, when they are not hungry.
- Minimise stress for pregnant ewes
 - Move 2-4 weeks before lambing for multiples, 1 week for singles
- Transition over a 2 week period and continue feeding the containment ration out in the paddock for at least a week
- Monitor closely for health issues & supervise on release.

Resources

- AWI (2019) Releasing sheep from containment feeding. [Online]. Available by ([releasing-sheep-from-containment-feeding-v3.pdf](#) ([wool.com](#))) (verified 1 November 2022)