

Guidelines for Best Management Practice for Exotic Sheep Breed Management in the Rangelands

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These guidelines have been formed as a result of the Envirofund/PIRD funded project 'improving hardy sheep containment in the rangelands'. They are to be used as guidelines for Best Practice Management.

1. Long term stocking rates should be reduced below a Merino stocking rate

Due to different grazing habits, stocking rates for Dorpers should be adjusted from a Merino stocking rate to ensure continued environmental sustainability. The trial found that a reduction of between 20-30% in stocking rate was sufficient - However, this will depend upon land class and vegetation types present and the current condition of the paddock.

2. Develop a planned approach to containment

Fencing alone should not be the sole method of containment - Also consider where watering points are located and the amount of food on offer in the paddock. Increasing breed purity (F4 or higher) also appears to reduce pressure on fences.

Centralised watering points will eliminate pressure put on fences and also allow for more even grazing over the paddock. Ensuring adequate food on offer will reduce the need of the animals to seek feed elsewhere, as their dietary requirements will be met in the paddock.

Electric fencing techniques have been found to successfully contain the sheep when the fence is in full working order. Ring-lock fencing is a permanent alternative to electric fencing which has also been found to be successful in containing Dorpers.

3. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of Food On Offer

As any land manager understands, continuous monitoring and evaluation of land condition and food-on-offer is essential to ensure environmental sustainability. There are numerous tools and techniques available to measure and monitor the land condition, including




- Photo standards
- Setting up exclosure zones
- Using the ABCD Land Condition Guide
- Taking dry matter cuts to determine food-on-offer

A combination of these tools used quarterly will ensure the producer can adequately measure changes in land condition, and instigate changes in stocking rates accordingly.

4. If using electric fencing, continued monitoring and maintenance of the electric fencing is required to ensure it is in constant working order

Electric fencing is only effective if it is electrified! If not installed correctly, maintenance can be high to ensure the fence is fully active continuously. Ensure that appropriate technical advice is sought to determine the most appropriate fencing techniques to use and the correct installation methods. Taking the time to install properly in the first instance can save much time in maintenance in 12 months time.

Here are some examples and observations made of different fencing techniques.

	<p>5 wires; two electrified</p> 	<p>Two electrified wires on poly droppers run at a 45 degree angle to the existing plain wire fence</p> 	<p>12 " offsets placed on existing wire fencing</p> 
Infrastructure requirements	Poly droppers Poly insulators 5 strand plain wire; one live one wire	Existing fence Poly spacers 2 strands plain wire	Existing fence Porcelain offsets (or alternative off sets) 3 strands plain wire
Approximate cost	\$500*	\$422/km	\$605/km
Maintenance requirements	Best for maintenance and is the most robust of the options. Regular clearing of bush spec (acacia) along fence line needed	Kangaroo's can tangle the hot wire/s with fence if they are too slack and continual movement can dig the angled dropper into the ground Regular bush clearing is needed.	Kangaroos and emus can bust or bend outrigger out of shape Regular bush clearing is needed
Strengths	Robust design Not as susceptible to animal tangling Hot wire is most effective	Good presentation or contact to hot wire Can be installed without having to wind up and re-run wire	Quick and easy to install on existing fence Fairly fire proof
Weaknesses	Pin-locks sometimes break under kangaroo and emu pressure Not fire proof	Poly droppers may sag with heat over time, reducing separation distance More prone to kangaroo and emu tangling Not fire proof	Susceptible to kangaroo and emu tangling Costly option

5. Achieving 'pure breed' status is an important factor in achieving containment, operational efficiency and economic profitability

It has been found that the closer the animals are to pure breed Dorper status, the less likely they are to 'wander'. This is important in considering containment, and reducing the likelihood of escapes to neighbouring paddocks.

Operational efficiency is increased with a more 'pure' flock as shearing and crutching requirements are reduced, mulesing is not required, and general care and husbandry tasks are fewer.

Depending upon the business structure, enterprise location and environmental factors, economic profitability could be increased for flocks of F4 or higher and the survivability of the animal under drought conditions is greater. Increased survivability of F4 or higher sheep is also linked with the ability to gain weight and finish condition quicker than a F1 and F2 sheep.