

Tasmanian Farmers and  
Graziers Association –  
Sheep Producers  
Dry Season Guide

# A Guide to Navigate Southern Tasmania's 2023–24 Dry Season

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# Navigating Tasmania's 2023-24 Dry Season

A best practice guide

## Introduction:

The dry season is already posing significant challenges to livestock farmers in Southern Tasmania. This Guide is designed to provide you with contemporary guidance and strategies to effectively manage your livestock during times of severe dry weather while also ensuring the sustainability of your pastures. By following these recommendations, you can minimise the impact of a severe dry season on your farm, maintain the welfare of your sheep, and safeguard your financial future.

## Early Preparation

### Have a plan:

Creating a written dry season plan is an essential first step. This plan should outline specific actions to take if rainfall thresholds are not met by certain dates. If you have a farm consultant or agronomist they may be available to assist you in preparing your plan:

- Consider conducting a risk assessment for your farm, identifying vulnerable areas, and categorising paddocks based on erosion risk.
- Designate some paddocks as "sacrifice paddocks." These paddocks are typically less valuable and can be used to preserve more critical pastures.
- Stockpile essential resources, including water, fodder, and cash, ideally before the dry begins. This ensures you have a financial buffer and adequate supplies to sustain your operation.

## Water Conservation

### Efficient Water Use:

Water conservation is critical during droughts, as every drop counts. To maximise water efficiency:

- Implement strategies to minimise evaporation losses from water sources. Utilise windbreaks to reduce wind-induced evaporation.
- Instead of allowing direct access to dams, consider using troughs and storage tanks to reticulate water to your livestock. This approach can keep stock from getting stuck in muddy waterholes and minimise the risk of excessive evaporation.

## Determining Livestock Numbers

### Destocking Strategies:

The early destocking of livestock is crucial for preserving your resources:

- Develop a contingency plan for prioritising the sale of less valuable livestock first. This allows you to maintain the genetic diversity and quality of your flock.
- Keep a close eye on weather conditions, especially the "autumn break," as this is often a good time to reassess your winter stocking rates.
- When faced with a late autumn break or poor seasonal conditions, consider reducing stock numbers to match available feed. Planning is key to avoiding overgrazing and resource depletion.

## Feeding Livestock

### Cost-Benefit Analysis:

Feeding livestock during a dry season can be a substantial financial and labour-intensive endeavour. To make informed decisions:

- Draw up a feed budget of all feed required, on-hand and predicted.
- Conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis that considers feed prices, labour, and equipment costs. Understanding the financial implications of different feeding strategies is crucial.

### Assessing Pasture Quality:

Dry pastures and failed crops may not be as barren as they initially appear. It's essential to assess their quality accurately:

- Regularly evaluate the nutritional value of dry pastures and failed crops. You may find that they contain more nutrients than expected, which can reduce the need for supplementary feeding.
- Crop stubbles can be another useful source but may need supplements such as Urea blocks.

### Monitoring Stock Condition:

To ensure the well-being of your livestock and efficient resource use:

- Establish a system for assessing, weighing, and recording the condition of your stock. This practice prevents overfeeding or underfeeding and ensures optimal health.
- Consider investing in sheep scales to facilitate accurate weight measurements, a valuable tool for effective stock management.

## Drought Lots

### Confinement Strategy:

Creating drought lots, where livestock are confined to small, high-density areas, can be an effective way to minimise pasture degradation and nutrient loss:

- Monitor the condition of livestock within drought lots, especially those that are shy feeders. Provide assistance as needed and, if necessary, relocate them to ensure their well-being.
- Be aware of the potential for introduced weeds when feeding out hay and grain bought off farm. Try and feed out in or near the same place and where possible use improvised troughs for grain.

### Managing Health Risks:

Maintaining the health of your livestock in drought lots is essential:

- Be vigilant about potential health risks, such as acidosis when feeding grain and polio encephalomalacia (PEM). Prevent these conditions by incorporating fibre in sheep rations and introducing ag lime or even sodium bicarbonate to reduce the risk of acidosis.
- Conduct research on common diseases associated with feedlots to safeguard the health of your livestock.

## Agistment and Droving

### Agistment Options:

Agisting some of your sheep to graze on another farmer's land, can be an economically viable alternative to feeding:

- When considering agistment, assess the proximity and quality of available agistment options. Be mindful of transportation costs, potential disease risks, and the need for supervision.

### Droving Considerations:

Droving involves moving your livestock along roadsides, but its legality and environmental impact vary between councils. Check local regulations and environmental considerations:

- Be cautious of disease spread when practicing droving, and ensure you have the necessary permissions from all relevant councils.

## Timing Adjustments

### Strategic Timing:

Modifying the timing of critical activities can help reduce feed demands during drought conditions:

- Adjust the timing of mating, weaning, and shearing to align with periods of reduced feed availability. These adjustments can help manage your stock's nutritional requirements more effectively.

## Managing Native Pastures

### Use of Native Pastures:

While native pastures can serve as feed during drought, it is crucial to minimise their degradation:

- Remove livestock from these pastures when planned minimum pasture mass or maximum bare ground levels are reached (e.g., 500 kg DM/ha or 30%).
- Avoid overgrazing, especially during drought, to prevent the depletion of native grasses and soil erosion.
- Overgrazing can lead to weed invasion, which may permanently harm pasture condition and future productivity.

## Humane Disposal

### Consider Humane Disposal:

In situations where livestock become unsaleable, humane disposal may be the last resort:

- Contact the relevant authorities, such as NRE Tas, to understand and comply with disposal regulations. Ensuring that disposal is carried out humanely and in accordance with legal requirements is paramount.
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## Post-Drought Planning

### Transition to Green Feed:

Planning for the transition from dry feed to green feed is crucial when dry season conditions finally break:

- Gradually introduce your sheep to emerging pastures to prevent health issues and ensure a smooth transition. This approach helps livestock adapt to the changing conditions and minimises stress.
- Supplement lick blocks can be very beneficial

### Conclusion

By following a structured approach you can effectively manage your farm during a dry season, ensuring the welfare of your livestock and the sustainability of your improved and native pastures. Remember that thoughtful planning and early action are key to successful management.

## Sources & More Information

### General Drought Information

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[Resource Library - NRM South](#)

A fully comprehensive drought management guide from NRM South

[Sheep Drought Feeding Book | Feeding Livestock | Agriculture Victoria](#)

Guidance on feeding livestock during drought.

[Drought Resources | Australian Wool Innovation](#)

Tips for managing sheep in drought lots in Tasmania.

Real-life drought management case study.

[Drought advice for agribusiness | Business Queensland](#)

Strategies for managing sheep during drought.

[Key points - managing sheep in the poor season | Agriculture and Food](#)

Key guidelines for sheep management during poor season

### Family and Health Matters

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[Welcome to RAW \(rawtas.com.au\)](#)

Rural Alive & Well's mission is to support people affected by suicide, their families, and communities through innovative awareness and practical interventions, with a focus on rural and remote areas, offering confidential, non-clinical, and culturally sensitive support.

[Beyond Blue | 24/7 Support for Anxiety, Depression and Suicide Prevention](#)

Beyond Blue has been a trusted mental health resource in Australia for over 20 years, providing information, support, and hope to millions, with a strong commitment to prioritizing people's needs and serving as a reliable source for those seeking guidance in various stages of their mental health journey.

## Tools

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### [Drought and Supplementary Feed Calculator \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://nsw.gov.au)

The Drought & Supp Feed Calculator is an essential tool for sheep and cattle producers to develop drought feed rations as well as rations for dry periods when supplementary feeding is required.

### [DR.SAT | Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool \(drsatsat.com.au\)](https://drsatsat.com.au)

A free, online tool to get an understanding of your drought resilience and better prepare you for dry spells.

The Farm Business Resilience program soon to launch:

- i. [Farm Business Resilience Flyer](#)
- ii. Call the NRE Tasmania FarmPoint team on 1300 292 292 or Email: [farmpoint@nre.tas.gov.au](mailto:farmpoint@nre.tas.gov.au)
- iii. The FBR program is supported by the Tasmanian Government and the Australian Government's [Future Drought Fund](#).