

Pasture dieback in Queensland

What is pasture dieback?

Pasture dieback is a poorly understood condition that causes unthrifty growth and death of otherwise very productive pastures. The condition has been identified in a range of sown and native grasses in north Queensland, Mackay-Whitsunday, central Queensland, Wide Bay-Burnett and south east Queensland regions. The condition causes large losses in beef production and is a major concern for the Queensland grazing industry. The occurrence of dieback in pastures has accelerated in recent years, however it is not a new phenomenon; dieback has been reported since the early 1990s in central Queensland buffel grass pastures.

Pasture dieback, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2017



Image– Unaffected Biloela buffel grass surrounded by affected Gayndah buffel grass.

Symptoms and impact

Pasture dieback only affects grasses. The symptoms of dieback are relatively similar across different grass species and affected plants generally display these characteristics:

- Yellowing and or reddening of leaves, starting with the oldest leaves first
- Stunted, unthrifty plants with reduced leaf, tillers, height and seed-head size
- Reduced root system density
- Individual plants can be affected, but more commonly small patches or larger paddock scale patches can occur across the landscape
- Decreased grass density
- Death of plants in patches that are subsequently colonised by broadleaf weeds, legumes and (rarely) annual grasses.

Pasture dieback has been observed across a range of soil types, landscape locations (ridges, gullies, gentle and steep slopes) and grass species. Stock avoid grazing affected areas. The loss of forage production and consequently carrying capacity has a major impact on enterprise productivity.

Known grass species affected

- Buffel (primarily in cultivars Gayndah and American (or USA))
- Creeping bluegrass (cultivar Bisset)
- Sabi grass (cultivar Nixon)
- Pangola



- Paspalum
- Signal and Para grass
- Setaria (cultivars Kazungula and Purple Pigeon)
- Rhodes (cultivar Callide)
- Panics (Green, Gatton, Guinea, Bambatsi)
- Native pastures such as black spear-grass, forest blue-grass and Golden beard grass.

How is pasture dieback different to pasture rundown?

Pasture rundown is the reduction of pasture growth over time due to the tie-up of soil nutrients (primarily nitrogen). Pasture performance (growth and quality) gradually reduces over time, however plants remain alive, and large areas can be uniformly affected e.g. whole paddocks, properties and districts. Conversely, pasture dieback is expressed as unthrifty or dead patches throughout relatively well grown pasture (in more severe cases whole paddocks can be impacted), and these patches can occur very quickly e.g. during one summer season. Ultimately, plants in these patches die, and these dead areas can be subsequently colonised by broadleaf weeds and legumes.

What can be done about pasture dieback?

Past research has proved inconclusive in identifying the cause(s) of the condition. Without knowing what the cause is, it is difficult to determine effective management strategies that reduce the impact of, or control the condition. Some graziers are implementing a range of techniques to restore pasture productivity, such as burning, fertilising, renovating (only), renovating and re-seeding, spraying on a range of different chemical or biological formulations and changing grazing management. At this point in time none of these techniques have proven to be effective at controlling pasture dieback. A word of caution; many chemical sprays e.g. fungicides and insecticides are not registered for use on pastures in Queensland, so be aware that any off-label use of a product is illegal.

What is DAF doing about the issue?

Since mid-2015 DAF staff have conducted site visits, soil and plant sampling and laboratory analyses to better understand the problem. The DAF team working on the issue include plant pathologists, agronomists and extension officers. Results to date have been inconclusive. In response to producer concerns and to provide an update on recent sampling and testing, DAF pasture scientists and beef extension staff held two forums in Biloela and Moura during March 2017. Feedback from the forums has given the DAF scientific team further insights into the scale and impact of the problem. It has also helped in planning the best way to determine the cause and appropriate management solutions. DAF senior agronomist (sown pastures), Stuart Buck, based in Rockhampton, is working with the beef industry to develop a research project into the cause and management options of pasture dieback.

Who can producers contact about pasture dieback?

If you are concerned about pasture dieback please call DAF on 13 25 23, or visit your local DAF office to talk to a DAF representative. Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) are asking affected graziers to fill out an online survey to report the occurrence of dieback. Contact MLA via their website on www.mla.com.au.



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8 TIPS TO KEEP YOUR PETS COOL THIS SUMMER

We have all been sweltering in this particularly unforgiving summer. We sweat, reach for cool drinks, icy poles, fans, wet towels, have cold showers, swim in a pool, blast the air conditioning (if you are lucky enough to have it!).

We have so many ways to cool down during these hot summer months. Your pets, however, have fewer options to cool themselves down, unless we assist them that is! Here are some tips to keeping your pets cool this summer.

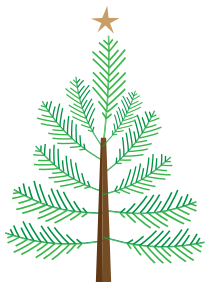
1. No playing or walking during the hot parts of the day!
2. Shade! Make sure your pets have access to shade!
3. Do NOT leave them locked in a car!
4. Get a Paddle pool
5. Give them Frozen Water bottles or Ice blocks





6. WATER! Provide them with fresh cool water
7. Trim your cats fur, don't shave them
8. Fan your fish tank -have the fan blow air lightly across of the tank

Read the blog in full at <http://www.farmcraft.com.au/8-tips-to-keeping-your-household-pets-cool-this-summer/>



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Alistair and the team would like to thank all our readers for their support during 2017. We wish your a Merry Christmas and Prosperous New Year!

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