

Pimelea Species

Castlereagh Macquarie County Councils Senior Biosecurity Officer Andrea Fletcher is encouraging landowners to be on the lookout for Pimelea plants, such as the desert rice flower, following the reports of sudden death in cattle.



Pimelea poisoning affects cattle, sheep and horses, however it is potentially fatal for cattle. It is most common in south-west Queensland, north-west New South Wales and northern South Australia. It is also known as St. George disease, Marree disease, 'big-head' and flaxweed poisoning. Pimelea poisoning is caused by ingestion of toxic varieties of the plant pimelea (native rice-flower, flaxweed, poverty weed) and in some cases inhalation of plant dust can also cause poisoning.

Light red, sandy, less fertile soils, particularly in overgrazed pastures and old cultivation paddocks.

- Pastures with obvious bare areas without vigorous perennial grass.
- Between August and January.
- In years when a relatively dry summer is followed by early light winter rain and a dry spring.
- Bulls and breeding cows.

Identifying and diagnosing pimelea poisoning

Pimelea poisoning can be either acute or chronic. Acute poisoning is caused by consumption of green plants, resulting in severe, life-threatening diarrhoea. Cattle, sheep and horses can be affected. Chronic poisoning occurs in cattle. It is caused by on-going consumption or inhalation of dry plant material.

Clinical signs that would lead a producer to suspect pimelea poisoning include the following:

- Chronic diarrhoea.
- Loss of condition, poor appetite.
- Rough coat.
- Depression.
- Prominent jugular veins in the neck, oedema (soft swelling) of the head, brisket and abdomen.
- Increased respiration rate.
- Heart rate can be heard from a distance.
- Reluctance to move.
- Sudden death, commonly during exertion.

Prevention strategies for pimelea poisoning

Despite extensive research, there is no effective vaccine or antidote for pimelea poisoning. Prevention and control of pimelea poisoning requires careful monitoring of cattle during high risk seasons and grazing management strategies to minimise contact between susceptible stock and pimelea plants.

For further information please contact Council's Senior Biosecurity Officer **Andrea Fletcher** on **0428 462 060**.

