Vitamin B1 deficiency.

This problem is characterised by a disturbance of the central nervous system. The brain of infected animals becomes inflamed and swollen, and eventually becomes necrotic. It is a problem that has surfaced again this year with quite a few cases already being treated in our northern areas. It seem to me that we may see quite a few more cases develop as we head closer to Spring. PEM is often hard to diagnose particularly around lambing or calving, I see most cases with sheep, and not as much with cattle. We have all seen some evidence of this problem, it usually occurs suddenly. The affected sheep will stand or sit alone, they appear to be blind, and arch their necks back and stare off into the blue, typically called “star gazers”. They are usually disoriented, don’t seem to want to drink and will lose appetite. Often animals will rest their head against a post or a wall. If not treated, most die within 48 hours. This disease can often be confused with other diseases with similar symptoms and is often a secondary problem with young sheep or goats being grain fed. See your vet for correct diagnosis.

Coming to grips with this insidious disease and developing a strategy for recovery is not that difficult with a little understanding of the problem. PEM can occur in animals being fed grain, or by grazing plants that have a high Thiaminase and Sulfur level. Thiaminases are enzymes found in a few plants, when ingested, these enzymes split Thiamin or Vitamin B1 which is a very important compound in energy metabolism, and render it inactive. So the animal has a Thiamin Deficiency, normally this problem can be attacked using Vitamin B1 therapy. Recognition is the big problem and acting quickly will save stock.

Sheep suffering from PEM generally respond quickly to a vitamin B1 injection, but, this vitamin is eliminated quite quickly and so the animal needs follow up Vitamin B1, you may need to follow up treatment. Dosing the water supply with BSave for Sheep (phone Compass Feeds 08 85568332), is a reasonably easy way to treat the mob, yes the mob will need treating as well as the individual sheep. BSave for Sheep can also be used as a drench. Don’t forget, Sheep will need to be yarded, SO, yarding or mustering must be done quietly and slowly. Some of the affected sheep will want to go the opposite way to the yards, these sheep are much better in the back of the ute, they are pretty easy to spot and handle.. Once yarded make sure the animals are allowed access to ONE treated water supply, you must also provide good fresh feed in the form of hay or a light grain ration, 80-20 Oats to Lupins is fine. You may need to treat water for 3 days so feeding is paramount. Once this operation is complete, sheep can return to the paddock. Your veterinarian will need to confirm the diagnosis, this is usually done by performing a necropsy on the brain of the dead animal, so, you don’t have to sacrifice a live one. Acting quickly will keep the disease down to just a few sheep.