

DROUGHT | Fears of rapid gro



NO RESPITE:
Tossie Nitschke at Mt Eba yesterday.
Picture: JAMES ELSBY

More stock sold as station struggles in the dead heart

BRYAN LITTLELY

IN what is truly the dry heart of South Australia, Mt Eba Station owner Tossie Nitschke faces the harsh reality of selling off another 1000 of her sheep, further reducing her livestock.

Drought conditions over a string of years have already cut numbers on the 3300sq km station, north of Glendambo, from 20,000 to about 16,000 and dry conditions this year mean Ms Nitschke, 61, has been forced to change her lamb marking and crutching routine to give her stock a break.

"Once your stock numbers get down, it's hard to get them back up," said Ms Nitschke, who has lived on and managed the station since 1998.

"We'd usually be crutching in October and lamb marking in August, but I've brought the two together now because it



has been so dry and the sheep are tired. I'll do the two jobs together so they only have to be handled once.

"We will have to sell about 1000 because of the drought. I don't expect the lambing percentage to be that good this year either."

Although parts of Mt Eba Station - on which the precise geographical centre of South Australia lies - have had 52mm of rainfall this year, it is far from likely to meet its average rainfall of 150mm. That last occurred in 2004.

The property also had 30mm of rainfall in December.

"But then we had an horrific dust storm, the worst we'd ever seen and it left us worse off than before it rained... it was shocking," Ms Nitschke said.

The harsh conditions in central SA - with gibber plains and desert-like conditions - are a far cry from the Morphettville farm where Ms Nitschke grew up.

The divorced mother of four girls was born into a bush lifestyle but lived in Adelaide until she took over running her father's Mt Eba Station in 1994 and then moved there in 1998.

"I worked for my father in the office throughout my life. He owned eight to 10 sheep stations and I managed his books... but I always wanted to get out on a station," Ms Nitschke said. "I don't think I'd want to go back to Adelaide now, but it is pretty hard out here because you have to do it all yourself."