



Animal Health Committee

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VET COMMUNIQUÉ – March 2021

Animal Health Committee (AHC) provides veterinary leadership and technical expertise for Australia's animal health systems. AHC includes the Australian, state and territory chief veterinary officers (CVOs), and the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness; with Animal Health Australia and Wildlife Health Australia as observers. The committee reports to the National Biosecurity Committee. This communiqué covers the major topics discussed at meeting 39 held 16-18 March 2021.

With the ongoing travel disruptions due to COVID-19, AHC met again in a virtual (online) setting. Stakeholder forums continue to be held independently of the usual face-to-face meetings.

Resourcing during an emergency animal disease outbreak

AHC discussed what was learned from the recent avian influenza outbreak in Victoria. The outbreak highlighted the need for Australia to have flexible approaches to managing human resources. For example, it is not always practical to have highly trained staff and using an 'on-the-job' training model proved to be quite effective.

The experience of the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in the United Kingdom (UK) led to new processes and procedures that are now used during all responses in the UK. Examples include reasonable worst-case scenario modelling, a multi-agency, whole of government approach (i.e., using police, military, environment and transport agencies), and a scaled Human Resources strategy that includes details on how, when and where staff may be obtained.

AHC will continue to explore some of these concepts to improve Australia's emergency animal disease response capabilities.

National Notifiable Disease List of Terrestrial Animals

The number of nationally notifiable diseases has increased in recent years. The criteria for including diseases on the National Notifiable Disease List of Terrestrial Animals (NNDLTA) were last reviewed in 2010. AHC agreed it would be timely to review both the disease inclusion criteria and if the NNDLTA is still fit for purpose. A working group will undertake these tasks in consultation with stakeholders.

Ehrlichia canis

A working group has been tasked with investigating if it is feasible to have nationally agreed controls for *E. canis*. The working group will report back to AHC in

two months' time and their findings will help determine if Australia's import requirements for *E. canis* in dogs are still appropriate.

Educational materials and tick control programs continue to be developed and circulated through both affected and unaffected areas.

Emerging vector-borne viruses

Lumpy skin disease and African horse sickness have expanded their geographical range in recent years jumping from Africa into Southeast Asia. Australia's preparedness for these viruses is being actively addressed by Commonwealth, state and territory agriculture agencies and industry bodies. Preparedness activities continue, including raising awareness amongst veterinarians and investigating if there are any suitable vaccines in development.

AnimalPLAN 2021-2025

AHC noted the good progress being made on the development of AnimalPLAN and that a Steering Committee is being established to guide the implementation of activities.

Approval for the final plan will be sought from the National Biosecurity Committee, the Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee and the Agriculture Ministers' Forum in the next few months. The plan will then be made available on the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's website.

Good luck Tiggy!

Wildlife Health Australia's (WHA) National Coordinator, Tiggy Grillo, will be sharing her time between WHA and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) over the next six months, to assist with the development of a global framework for wildlife health. We wish Tiggy the very best and look forward to having her back full-time at WHA later this year.