



Vetcommuniq 

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Animal Health Committee Meeting 07, 9-11 May, 2006

Welcome to the third edition for 2006 of the Animal Health Committee's (AHC) newsletter for food animal production industry bodies. The aim of Vetcommuniq  is to improve communication links between AHC and client industry bodies.

The face-to-face meeting was held on 9-11 May in Perth, WA. Face-to-face meetings are held twice each year, with the venue rotating around the States, Territories and New Zealand. The meetings are attended by the Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) of the Commonwealth, States, Territories and New Zealand with representatives from Biosecurity Australia, CSIRO and Animal Health Australia (AHA) to discuss animal health issues of national importance. We also look forward to some innovative discussions with invited industry groups.

Key Outcomes from AHC07

AI policy – Vaccination issues

A key item discussed by AHC at this meeting was policy options for combating HPAI, in particular the current panzootic H5N1 strain that is spreading internationally. The current H5N1 outbreak is behaving differently from past HPAI outbreaks.

AHC agreed that any approach to vaccination in Australia cannot assume that future outbreaks in Australia will behave in the same manner as previous outbreaks and must be in accordance with AUSVETPLAN.

AHC discussed scenarios where use of vaccination may be considered, types of vaccine and supply as well as policy for use in different sectors of the avian population. AHC will continue to develop policy for use of vaccination for AI.

Illegal activity

Agriculture Ministers have requested AHC to develop a nationally agreed and consistent framework for dealing with illegal activity aimed at disrupting animal production, including trespass, economic sabotage and disruption to bio-security. Recent incidents have highlighted the need to ensure food supply is not threatened by these types of activities.

AHC will develop policy parameters, including consideration of legislation issues.



Veterinary boards registration

The AHC National Registration of Veterinarians Working Group outlined a model for national recognition of veterinary registration. The model has support from the majority of AHC members, the majority of veterinary surgeons boards, the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC), and the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA).

Several options are considered in a draft Regulation Impact Statement, and this will be used as a basis for consultation with the, the AVA and their members. A final proposal is expected to be presented to Agriculture Ministers in the second half of 2006.

Avian Influenza (AI)



AI and Biosecurity Standards

AHC considered heads of power in each jurisdiction, to mandate biosecurity standards in animal production industries.

Members provided advice on whether there is a current head of power within their jurisdiction to regulate biosecurity on farms, both as an everyday routine and in response to any threat .

All jurisdictions advised AHC that they have power for the purpose of prevention of EAD outbreak. AHC will consult with industry, to further consider critical minimum standards for biosecurity applicable to a range of enterprises.

At present the biggest threat is an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in Australia and on-farm biosecurity for poultry and related industries is an important focus for this issue.

AI - other species

At the meeting AHC discussed the possibility of a meeting with the Committee and ARAZPA representatives, to progress issues relating to the management of zoo species and facilities. The meeting would aim to ensure the threat of AI is minimised for valuable zoo collections. Particular concerns raised by zoos is the development of agreed policy for surveillance and vaccination in zoo species. Biosecurity threats posed to zoos by their role in caring for sick wild life is also an issue for discussion.

The Australian Chief Veterinary Officer (AVCO) wrote to all Australian veterinary practitioners providing information and advice including advice on the role of cats and pigs. In consultation with AHC, the ACVO will forward a similar letter to zoos providing them with specific advice.

AHC also considered a recent paper by the Singaporean veterinary authorities on response to AI vaccination in zoo species. The information will inform AHC consideration of policy for Australian zoos.

AI Communications

AHC considered recent avian influenza communication activities being carried out in all jurisdictions. AHC agreed that it is particularly important to ensure national cooperation in producing and distributing relevant communication materials. Updated material for backyard poultry owners and feed suppliers is the next priority.

AHC also plans to revisit previously targeted groups with updated information such as bird fanciers; farmers from non-English speaking backgrounds; small producers; and recreational shooters. AHC agreed that in the current climate it is essential that clear and factual information is available to all Australians.

AHC considered future communication activities which could include radio and rural and suburban newspaper advertising components

AHC discussed the use of ongoing media liaison efforts to highlight key points on avian influenza risks. AHC agreed that it is vital to better differentiate between bird flu and a human pandemic of influenza. AHC agreed to continued use of the emergency animal disease telephone hotline as a basis for reporting suspected disease. AHC also agreed to seek assurance from health agencies that the human health hotline will remain operational. It is useful to be able to refer those phoning on the hotlines to the animal or human health line depending on the whether the issues raised by callers are about animal or human health.



Roles during an AI emergency

AHC clarified that employment of Industry Liaison Officers during an emergency is the responsibility of the CVO in each jurisdiction. AHC also discussed the conditions of employment of veterinarians during an EAD response .

Outcomes



National Animal Health Surveillance Strategy

AHC discussed the proposed future arrangements for development and implementation of the NAHSS and noted the establishment of the Advisory Group. AHC agreed that mechanisms for consultation between the NAHSS AG must be in place to participate in any Technical Support Group that might be established. AHC considered project proposals for livestock production, wildlife and zoonoses.

Australian Veterinary Reserve

Most jurisdictions have provided in kind contributions to the EAD training of practitioners and support that this continues.

AHC agreed that review of AVR program and ongoing consideration of its effectiveness should be included in future discussion of the program. AHC endorsed the proposed AVR Maintenance and Development Program (2006/09) (AVR MDP). AHC also agreed to participate in the AVR MDP as detailed in the program and requested Animal Health Australia (AHA) to approach industry members of AHA to join with governments in future resourcing of the AVR MDP (2006/09).

National Animal Health Laboratory Strategy

AHC discussed mechanisms for ongoing consultation between the NAHLS Advisory Group and the Committee. AHC has a significant interest in a highly effective animal health diagnostic service for Australia. The proposed AG will develop a work plan for agreement from stakeholders. The AG will have expertise from universities, government laboratories, the private laboratory system, wildlife, aquatic and human health representation and members from intensive and extensive animal production industries.

Johne's Disease

There are a number of technological developments that permit consideration of a sectorial approach to the control of BJD in cattle and goats. At the meeting AHC agreed that NSW would develop a discussion paper with industry to take to TAG and then bring to AHC.

CVO NSW outlined the recent audits of the Beef Only scheme and noted that review of the implementation is due. Queensland representatives have recently visited Victoria and NSW to consider the implementation of the *Beef Only* approach in those jurisdictions. Qld will review the report and consider the implementations in other states and possibly implement the approach later in the year.

AHC discussed a national risk based trading scheme for goats. Most members supported using a risk assessment scale (The scale is based on herd factors, risk and without zoning). However, AHC believe that the scale requires further explanation and clarification and a number of issues require further consultation with industry before the scheme is progressed. SA proposed that TAG and goat industry, including the goat Industry Council (GICA) should work together to progress nationally risk based trade.



Intensive industry triggers

AHC noted the final report "Trigger Point Reporting in the Intensive Animal Industries". AHC noted that the report has been referred to the NAHSS AG. Lack of appropriate reporting of mortality events in intensive animal industries continues to concern AHC.

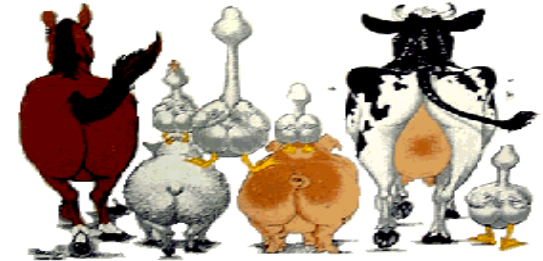
AHC considers that baseline mortality figures must be developed in consultation with industry, to ensure mortalities are reported appropriately.

Animal Welfare

International animal welfare activities.

AHC discussed the proposed UN Declaration for the Welfare of Animals and also endorsed Australian support for the draft OIE resolutions on Animal Welfare to be presented at the OIE general session in May 2006.

AHC agreed that the international trade aspects of animal welfare remain a significant issue. AHC supports the OIE as the appropriate body to set international standards for animal welfare



Strategic animal welfare issues

AHC agreed that animal welfare is becoming a key issue in animal production. AHC discussed possible roles for the Committee in developing policy and providing technical advice to Ministers. AHC agreed that animal health and animal welfare are a continuum and that it is important to maintain the connection between the two. Departments of agriculture are interested in promoting high standards of animal welfare, with consequential improvement in animal production.

AHC agreed that, as livestock management standards are introduced, there is an opportunity for livestock management issues to come under animal health legislation, including legislation relating to animal welfare and biosecurity standards. Animal cruelty legislation could remain unchanged. AHC noted that in some jurisdictions, members had direct responsibility for animal welfare while in other jurisdictions the responsibility lies with agencies outside agriculture.

AHC will continue to discuss the role of the Committee in animal welfare at future meetings.

Illegal activity.

Agriculture Ministers have asked AHC to develop a nationally consistent approach for dealing with illegal activity aimed at disrupting animal production.

AHC agreed that a key drive for this is the possible effect that such activity can have on biosecurity and food safety.

Welfare Standards.

AHC endorsed the business plan for review and development of Australian welfare standards. The plan was developed at a government industry workshop in March this year.

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