Animal Health Committee 15 meeting 02, February 2009

Welcome to the Animal Health Committee (AHC) newsletter for animal industry bodies. The aim of Vetcommuniqué is to provide a communication link between AHC and client industry bodies.

AHC membership comprises the Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) of the Commonwealth, States, Territories and New Zealand, and representatives from Biosecurity Australia and CSIRO. Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and Animal Health Australia (AHA) attend AHC as observers. AHC also meets with industry representatives on specific items from time to time.

Dr Rob Rahaley is the South Australian Chief Veterinary Officer and AHC Chair for 2009.

AHC next meets on 23 February 2009 in Canberra. AHC last met by teleconference on 27 November 2008.

Further information on the structure of AHC can be found on the DAFF website at: http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/animal/committees/ahc

Issues for discussion at AHC15 meeting 02

BJD

A National Bovine Johne’s Disease (BJD) Workshop will take place on 4 March 2009 in Adelaide to discuss the future management of BJD in Australia.

The AHC BJD Working Group has prepared a document for consideration by AHC with the objective for AHC to agree to a view on the future management of BJD in Australia. The AHC view will be presented to the BJD Workshop by the Chair of the BJD Technical Advisory Group, Brian Radunz (Northern Territory Chief Veterinary Officer).

Recommendations from the BJD Working Group to AHC include: that the July 2006 objectives of the national BJD program be maintained; that BJD should be managed using industry-driven, assurance based approaches with minimal regulatory overlay; that BJD zoning be phased out within 12 months, replaced with an industry education program to use a property and individual animal basis for risk based trading; and that a beef cattle and dairy cattle sectoral approach should be adopted.

TB

Bovine tuberculosis (BTB) is listed in Schedule 3 of the EADRA as ‘bovine tuberculosis due to Mycobacterium bovis, after Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance
Program (TFAP) is completed (provided that no other program in respect of bovine tuberculosis is introduced in its place).’

The Australia BTB Surveillance Program (including TFAP) ceases on 31 December 2010. At that time, without any further detection of BTB, 10 years will have elapsed since the last case of BTB in cattle and eight years since the last case in buffalo.

AHC are being asked to endorse a Terms of Reference and nominate persons to a BTB/EADRA Working Group. The Working Group is envisaged to provide AHC with advice on which to form a view on a request for unqualified inclusion of BTB in the EADRA post December 2010. This will include assessing what surveillance will take place post December 2010, and the financial and operational responsibilities of industry and government if a case of BTB was detected post December 2010 with BTB included unqualified in the EADRA.

**Equine Influenza (EI) Expert Panel - development of the Equine Influenza Learnings Discussion Paper**

The Primary Industries Ministerial Council (November 2008) requested the Primary Industry Standing Committee (PISC) to establish an EI Expert Panel to advise on the costs and benefits of possible strategies for managing the risks associated with a future equine influenza outbreak. The EI Expert Panel, Chaired by Roger Beale AO, will review the work of Animal Health Committee, consult with stakeholders and report to PISC by June 2009.

AHC14 agreed to the establishment of an Ad Hoc Group to report on learnings of the 2007 EI experience, and to highlight mechanisms by which impacts on business continuity could be reduced without compromising containment and eradication were a future EI incursion to take place.

AHC is to provide comment on the draft report of the Ad Hoc Group at the upcoming meeting. The finalized version of the report will be circulated to horse industry groups, and will be key AHC input to EI Expert Panel.

**Integration of Aquatic Animal Health Responsibilities into AHC**

The National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) (July 2008) requested that Aquatic Animal Health Committee (AAHC) and AHC to work together to prepare a transitional plan for the integration of aquatic animal health responsibilities into AHC, for consideration by NBC in February 2009. This followed on from a review of AAHC by the Primary Industries Health Committee (now subsumed by NBC) in 2006.

A draft options paper on how to integrate the AAHC into AHC has been developed by the Aquatics Section of the Office of the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer (AAHC member) and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (AHC member). This will be examined at the upcoming AHC meeting in moving towards having an endorsed paper that can go to NBC.
Response Preparedness Capability Enhancement Program (RPCEP)

AHC15 M02 will be asked to endorse the Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) RPCEP Training Program for the period January to June 2009 and its associated financial arrangements. The capacity of some jurisdictions to resource a First Response Team for the first week of an EAD incursion has been identified as being limited and requiring urgent enhancement.

AHC15 M02 will also be asked to endorse the development of an EAD Planning Doctrine that sets out practices and procedures to be followed when undertaking planning during an EAD response. This is a result from the recent Equine Influenza incident demonstrating the lack of an agreed approach to planning at strategic and operational levels. The development of the EAD Planning Doctrine is fundamental to the development of higher level EAD approved training courses for strategic and operational planners and for Incident Management Team (IMT) training.

LEADDR

AHC15 M02 will continue discussion on the evolution of the Laboratories for Emergency Animal Disease Diagnosis and Response (LEADDR) committee and framework developed by the AHC Subcommittee on Animal Health Laboratory Standards (SCAHLS). It draws on similar national networks being developed in the USA and Canada, with whom Australia has been collaborating.

The vision for LEADDR is to have an effective diagnostic laboratory network that detects and responds quickly and efficiently to foreign/exotic/emerging diseases and communicate diagnostic outcomes to decision makers. The network will be organized and supported so that it has the capacity to respond to animal disease outbreaks nationwide including those which have the potential to threaten human health.

Enzootic Bovine Leucosis

Version 2 (January 2009) of the Enzootic Bovine Leukosis (EBL) Standard Definitions and Rules (SD&Rs) will be presented to AHC for endorsement at their upcoming meeting. The SD&Rs have been under review by the EBL National Dairy Program Advisory Group (Chaired by Wes Judd of Queensland Dairy Organization) and the EBL Technical Working Group (Chaired by Dr Hugh Millar, Victorian Chief Veterinary Officer) since mid 2008.

Changes to the SD&Rs incorporate the agreed target outcomes for the National EBL Eradication Program to progress all dairy herds in all jurisdictions to ‘Monitored Free’ status by 1 July 2009, and for Australia’s dairy herd to be EBL Free by 31 December 2012.

Under new delegation arrangements, AHC endorsed SD&Rs are no longer required to go to the National Biosecurity Committee or the Primary Industry Standing Committee for endorsement. Version 2 of the EBL SD&Rs will be effective on endorsement by AHC.
A draft National EBL Eradication Program Business Plan incorporating the business plans from all jurisdictions (except the Northern Territory) will be presented to AHC for noting.

**Poultry Depopulation**

In AUSVETPLAN (Australia’s technical response plans that describe the proposed approach to an exotic disease incursion), gassing with carbon dioxide is the only method described as suitable for destruction of large numbers of commercial poultry as part of an emergency animal disease (EAD) response. In some circumstances whole-shed gassing is feasible. In other circumstances birds must be caught and transferred to skips or bins where they are gassed, having significant labour demands and exposing workers to potential zoonotic diseases such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

The use of wet foams or ventilation shut down for emergency depopulation of poultry during an EAD response both have clear advantages for managing occupational health and safety risks and disease control risks. Wet foams cause death in poultry in less than 3 minutes by occluding the avian airway and causing rapid hypoxia. Ventilation shutdown involves sealing a poultry shed and turning off the ventilation. It will kill birds effectively, over a period of 30-60 minutes.

The AHC Sub-Committee on EADs (SCEAD) has recommended AHC seek advice from the Animal Welfare Working Group/Animal Welfare Product Integrity Taskforce/Animal Welfare Committee on the animal welfare and legal aspects of these technologies, prior to deciding whether to consider them for inclusion in AUSVETPLAN.