

AHC COMMUNIQUÉ

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 key outcomes of its face-to-face meeting held in Darwin on 17-19 March 2026.

AHC strategic planning

AHC held a strategic planning workshop focused on building a shared vision for a future animal health system and identifying AHC's strategic risks and priorities. The workshop highlighted the importance of national collaboration, system interoperability, stakeholder partnerships and adaptability in AHC's future activities. AHC agreed to incorporate input from this workshop into the 2026 workplan and future engagement with the National Biosecurity Committee. AHC also agreed to build on the outcomes of this workshop through further strategic foresight discussions in the coming months.

High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) preparedness

HPAI Infected Premises (IP) resolution policy

AHC agreed to update IP resolution policy settings for HPAI drawing on insights from recent Australian and international experiences with HPAI outbreak responses. The revised policy settings will help poultry farms return to business more rapidly after an outbreak, while maintaining strong biosecurity standards. AHC agreed to notify relevant industry parties to inform them of the outcome of this work.

H5 HPAI response strategy for non-avian livestock

AHC received an update from the Subcommittee for Emergency Animal Diseases on the development of a national response strategy for the management of H5 HPAI in non-avian livestock. A consultation draft national response strategy will be provided to relevant industry stakeholders in the coming months.

National guidelines for private veterinarians on the management of H5 HPAI in domestic (non-livestock) animals and wildlife

AHC discussed progress on the development of national guidelines for private veterinarians on the management of H5 HPAI in pets and wildlife presenting to veterinary clinics. AHC noted the guidelines have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders including the Australian Veterinary Association and is close to finalisation.

Avian Influenza (AI) vaccination policy in poultry

AHC were provided with an update on the national AI vaccination policy review for poultry. AHC members agreed to finalise work on a policy on the emergency use

of vaccination ahead of the development of a policy on systematic (preventative) vaccination. This will enable outcomes of the review to be realised iteratively while work continues on developing a policy for systematic vaccination informed by a better understanding of delivery requirements.

Lumpy skin disease (LSD) preparedness

AHC agreed to establish a government-industry steering committee and a technical writing group to progress the development of a national LSD vaccination policy. AHC also discussed continued progress on actions under the National LSD Action Plan, including updates to the national LSD surveillance strategy.

Zoning operationalisation

AHC agreed to establish a task group to progress further scoping work to strengthen national preparedness for zoning, recognising its importance in maintaining livestock movements and market access during EAD responses. Victoria agreed to lead the task group.

Stakeholder session

AHC was joined by 20 local and national stakeholders for its open stakeholder session. Key topics discussed included LSD threats and preparedness, activities of the AHC antimicrobial resistance task group, the roles of industry and private veterinarians during EAD responses and HPAI preparedness. AHC thanks stakeholders for attending and sharing their knowledge and experience.

Acknowledgements

AHC would like to thank the NT Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for hosting the AHC49 meeting. AHC also extends its thanks to PRI Farming for the opportunity to visit Marpu Crocodile Farm and see first-hand how animal health and biosecurity are maintained in this unique industry.