

VET 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 (ACDP); with Animal Health Australia, Wildlife Health Australia and New Zealand as observers. The committee reports to the National Biosecurity Committee. This communiqué covers the key items discussed at meeting 43 held 18-20 April 2023 in Launceston, Tasmania.

AHC met for its first face-to-face (F2F) meeting of 2023 in Launceston, Tasmania. Progression of preparedness for emergency animal diseases (EADs) continued to be a key topic of discussion.

AHC participated in a field visit to a salmon breeding facility and an abattoir.

AHC membership changes

AHC Chair, Michelle Rodan, WA CVO, welcomed new AHC member Dr Rob Williams, acting NT CVO and welcomed back Dr Wendy Townsend, ACT CVO, who has returned following a period of leave. AHC Chair acknowledged the significant contribution of previous NT representative Dr Sue Fitzpatrick who departed AHC effective April 23. The Chair also acknowledged the significant contributions of Dr Sarah Britton, NSW CVO, who will be leaving NSW DPI on 30 June and Professor Trevor Drew, Director ACDP, who will be retiring later in the year. Dr Debbie Eagles will join AHC as the ACDP representative from July 2023.

Strategic plans for animal health and biosecurity

AHC received an update on the progress of key strategic plans including [Animalplan](#), the [National Animal Health Diagnostic Business Plan \(NAHDBP\)](#), the [National Animal Health Surveillance Business Plan \(NAHSBP\)](#) and the [Australian Government Biosecurity and Agricultural Response Plan \(AUSBIOAGPLAN\)](#).

Preparedness for lumpy skin disease and other emergency animal diseases

AHC continued discussions on activities to support preparedness for EADs such as lumpy skin disease (LSD), foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

AUSBIOAGPLAN is a critical resource to enhance capacity and to activate emergency disaster relief arrangements through the Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committee to address issues outside of the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA), for example in cases where there may be significant economic impact from significant trade disruption.

The Commonwealth provided updates on the progress of actions resulting from the recommendations of the [Joint Interagency Taskforce on Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness](#), and within the [National LSD Action Plan](#), particularly those that encompass activities being undertaken by AHC.

Queensland briefed AHC on the outcomes of Exercise PREPARE, a simulated EAD response exercise to a HPAI scenario. The poultry industry (layer and broiler) and government exercised the scenario in November 2022 in Queensland. The exercise objectives focussed on information gaps in destruction, disposal and decontamination operations for very large enterprises across multiple housing systems.

Five-year review of the EADRA

To help inform the current review of the [EADRA](#), AHC discussed key issues being considered by the EADRA review working group. Key areas included input into the national response framework for diseases with significant public health implications, valuation and compensation, categorisation process and criteria. AHC views the efficient operation of the EADRA as a critical component of Australia's biosecurity system and supports the opportunity for all EADRA signatories to review how it could be enhanced to ensure Australia is best prepared to respond in the event of an EAD outbreak.

Laboratory testing for nationally notifiable animal diseases and official testing.

AHC discussed progress on the national animal health policy for official testing. This policy will ensure Australia has consistent standards and framework to ensure assurance in the competence, reliability and repeatability of results of laboratories performing testing for official testing including testing for nationally notifiable animal diseases.

AHC also reviewed the process for reporting results of EAD exclusion testing performed by Laboratories Emergency Animal Disease Diagnosis and Response Network laboratories.

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Joint AHC and Animal Health Australia Industry Forum (AHA IF) and local Industry session

AHC, AHA IF and the Tasmanian Industry members held a joint session to discuss industry and government key priorities and activities.

Representatives working in the Tasmanian aquatic sector presented on emerging issues and opportunities for innovation in Australian aquaculture and on the translocation requirements for farmed abalone.

IF raised opportunities for enhanced engagement with AHC members at Animal Health Australia engagement weeks.

New AHC task and advisory groups

AHC has established several new task (time-limited) and advisory (ongoing) groups, including several that will report to the recently established Sub-Committee on Emergency Animal Disease (SCEAD).

The National Epidemiology and Surveillance Advisory Group will provide advice to AHC on key epidemiological and surveillance activities/documents.

National Framework for Engagement of Private Veterinary Practitioners Task group has been established to review the process and award rates for engaging veterinarians in an emergency animal disease.

SCEAD groups:

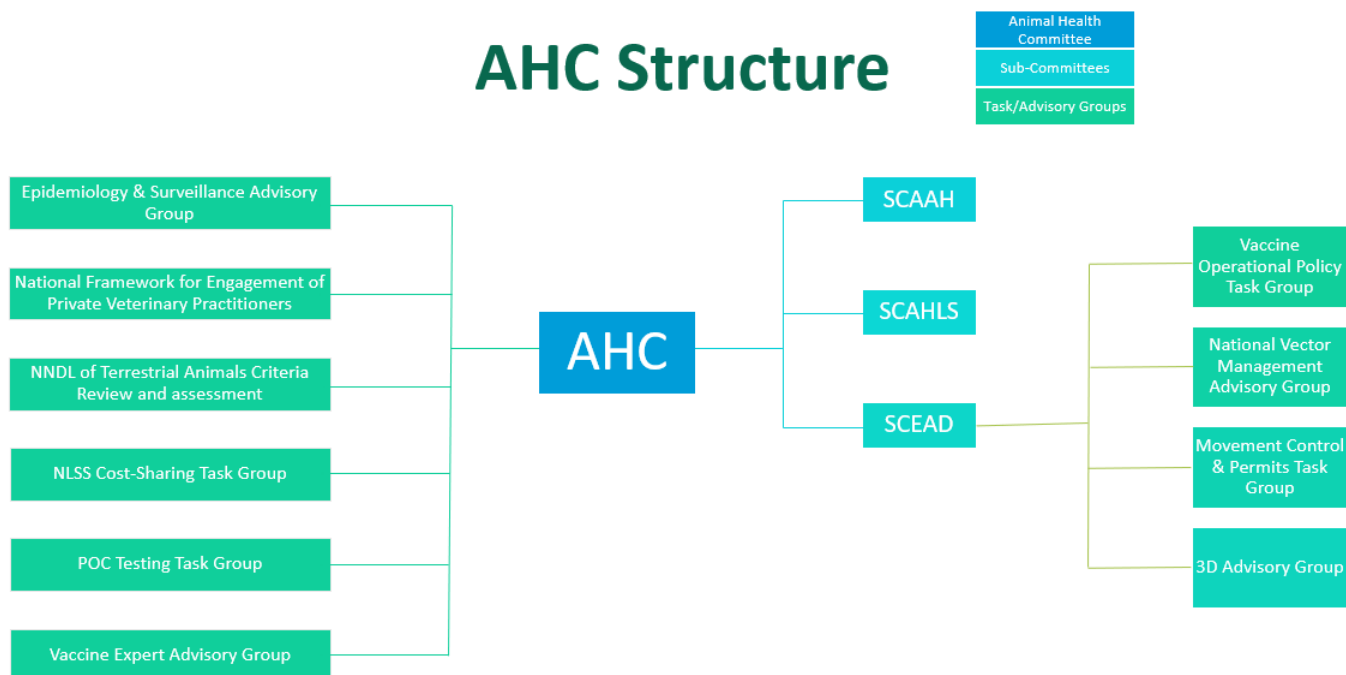
A number of new and already established groups have been established under SCEAD to progress some of the recommendations from the LSD action plan and the Joint interagency EAD task force.

- National Vector Management Advisory Group
- Vaccine Operational Policy Task Group
- Movement Control and Permits Task Group
- Destruction, Disposal and Decontamination Advisory Group

Next AHC F2F meeting

The next AHC face-to-face meeting will be held in Canberra on 5-7 September 2023.

AHC Structure



NNDL = National Notifiable Disease List; NLSS = National livestock standstill; POC = Point of Care; SCAAH = Sub-Committee on Aquatic Animal Health; SCAHLs = Sub-Committee on Animal Health Laboratory Standards; SCEAD = Sub-Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases; 3D = Destruction, Disposal & Decontamination