

## 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; with Animal Health Australia, Wildlife Health Australia and New Zealand as observers. The committee reports to the National Biosecurity Committee (NBC). This communiqué covers the major topics discussed at meeting AHC44 held on 5-7 September 2023.

AHC met for its second face-to-face (F2F) meeting of 2023 in Canberra. The meeting was chaired by Dr Michelle Rodan (WA CVO), with all members represented except the ACT.

The discussion focussed on collective considerations across jurisdictions in relation to animal disease preparedness and responses. The key topics discussed included:

### Laboratory official testing policy

AHC noted the importance of Australia having a consistent standard and framework to ensure assurance in the competence, reliability and repeatability of results of laboratories performing official testing, including for nationally notifiable animal diseases. AHC considered a draft official testing policy, which would be circulated for endorsement out-of-session. Official testing principles tailored for both government and non-government laboratories were considered and will be further developed by a working group in consultation with the Sub-Committee on Animal Health Laboratory Standards.

### Animal health surveillance and modelling

AHC considered and discussed opportunities to improve significant animal disease surveillance, particularly in southern Australia, and agreed for a proposal reflecting the discussion to be prepared for out-of-session consideration. AHC also discussed the H5 HPAI virus lineages that have caused significant disease outbreaks in poultry and wild birds internationally and opportunities to improve avian influenza surveillance in Australia. The progress and outcomes of animal health modelling activities and the national animal health surveillance plan were also discussed.

### Japanese encephalitis (JE) reporting case definition

AHC discussed the national case definition for JE. AHC agreed a case definition would be reviewed based on the discussion, to be circulated for endorsement out-of-session (OOS).

### AUSPestCheck® Animal Project

AHC noted the progress of the AUSPestCheck® Animal Project. A demonstration of the proposed new system that will store national animal health surveillance program data was provided to AHC by PHA and AHA highlighting key system features to ensure secure data sharing, access and management.

### National Notifiable Disease List (NNDL)

AHC discussed the draft Terrestrial Animal NNDL recommended by the NNDL task group and agreed for an updated list reflecting feedback from the meeting to be circulated OOS for endorsement.

### Stakeholder communication and engagement

AHC discussed opportunities for improvement in stakeholder engagement and decision-making during emergency animal disease (EAD) outbreaks. AHC agreed to review current committee and working group processes for EADs in light of this discussion.

### Animalplan 2022 to 2027

AHC and industry stakeholders discussed approaches to support the ongoing delivery of Animalplan over the next 12 months.

### AHC workplan 2023-24

AHC discussed the importance of a clearly defined and achievable workplan for the upcoming year. AHC considered and refined a draft workplan, which will be presented to the NBC at its upcoming F2F meeting in September 2023.

### AHC membership changes

AHC welcomed new members Dr Jo Coombe, NSW CVO, and Debbie Eagles, ACDP a/g Director, to their first F2F AHC meeting. AHC also acknowledged the significant contributions of Dr Mary Carr, SA CVO and Dr Mark Schipp, Australian CVO, both of whom will be leaving their roles later in the year.