

AHC VET COMMUNIQUÉ

March 2020

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 Animal Health Laboratory; with Animal Health Australia and Wildlife Health Australia as observers. The committee reports to the National Biosecurity Committee. This communique covers the major topics discussed at meeting 37 held 3-5 March 2020.

AHC covered a busy agenda over three days and progressed many important policy issues, particularly around African swine fever (ASF) preparedness. Invited guest speakers, included Dr Margaret Reilly from James Cook University and Dr Darren Peck from the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS). AHC also participated in a field visit to Yarrabah guided by Indigenous Rangers from NAQS.

African Swine Fever preparedness

The AHC ASF taskforce through its ASF task groups developed a range of ASF preparedness recommendations that were presented and discussed at the AHC face-to-face meeting. Many of the agreed recommendations will be incorporated into the ASF AUSVETPLAN manual to improve its operationalisation. Details of those recommendations are as follows:

Resolving export abattoirs

Guidance criteria for resolving infected and dangerous contact abattoirs were endorsed by AHC. The principles of transport vehicle disinfection and effluent discharge treatment were also endorsed. Jurisdictions will assist export abattoirs with development of site-specific Incident Action Plans to be completed by 30 June 2020. Decontamination processes for domestic abattoirs, off-site boning rooms and small goods processors' facilities will continue to be reviewed out of session.

Managing on-site product and recalls

Criteria for domestic product recalls were endorsed by AHC. Product recalls will be applicable to intact carcasses that can be traced to an infected abattoir following a risk assessment. Pork products that cannot be adequately traced will be destroyed on-site at abattoirs as the default action.

Compensation for product recalls

The eligibility for compensation under the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) for abattoir products destroyed in an ASF response was discussed. Product destroyed as a direct part of the emergency response activities is eligible for cost sharing of compensation.

Eligibility for compensation is determined by each jurisdiction's legislation during an emergency response. Some items which may be compensable under jurisdictional legislation may not be eligible for cost – sharing under the EADRA.

AHC members will investigate if there are provisions within jurisdictional legislation that will allow for product recalls that are not food safety related and whether it can be compensated.

Destruction, disposal and decontamination

AHC endorsed the overarching principles for managing the destruction, disposal and decontamination (3D) of pigs during an ASF outbreak. Guidance documents for each 3D component were developed. The animal welfare implications of some destruction methods outlined in the destruction guidance document need further investigation and clarification before the document can be finalised. These will be communicated to industry as soon as they are completed.

Managing ASF in feral pigs

Mapping tools are being used to help jurisdictions identify the changing risk profiles for managing an ASF outbreak in feral pigs. These tools emphasise that no single solution exists for managing feral pigs across or within jurisdictions. Task groups will continue to explore issues such as diagnostic testing, communications and biosecurity advice, movement controls, surveillance and tracing, and pre-emptive

culling. Some work will be completed by the end of March 2020, whilst other work will be handed over to the National Feral Pig Coordinator.

Movement controls

The specific principles and matrices for jurisdictional movement controls during an ASF response, were discussed in detail. There needs to be flexibility so that the jurisdictions can apply controls using a risk-based approach. AHC agreed that communication with industry needs improvements so that movement permit conditions are clearly understood. These are ongoing issues that will be progressed by the task group and will then be shared with industry.

Compartmentalisation

AHC agreed in principle to progress work on animal health status compartmentalisation, noting the need for national compartmentalisation standards. For this to be successful, industry should be able to demonstrate it has best practice biosecurity standards in place. The Commonwealth will take the lead on this issue and will oversee a task group focused on developing the standards.

Coronavirus in dogs

With the escalation of the human coronavirus (COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2) pandemic, AHC agreed it is vital to provide accurate veterinary information to the public. There is currently no evidence that transmission of COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 occurs between humans and companion animals. However, there are many types of coronavirus that can affect humans and other animals. Consistent messaging to industry and the public is

critical to address any confusion. There are recent reports about coronavirus in dogs in Australia, but these cases are due to a canine enteric coronavirus (CECoV), not COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2. There have also been past reports of a canine respiratory coronavirus (CRCoV) that is also not related to COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2.

Although two healthy dogs tested positive for COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 in Hong Kong, they were only transiently positive. It was concluded that the dogs were infected by their owners, not the other way around. AHC agreed that testing and quarantine of companion animals in Australia for COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 is not warranted. If the situation changes or animals show clinical signs consistent with the disease, or tracing suggests virus transmission from animals to humans, then advice will be adjusted accordingly.

Other key items for discussion

- Further development of AHC strategic and operational objectives including focusing on strategic priorities.
- Malcolm Letts from the National Biosecurity Committee led an informative session on how to improve collaboration with AHC
- New Zealand provided updates on their ASF preparedness, the current *Mycoplasma bovis* situation and their zero-carbon approach in the primary industry sector
- Evaluation of, and lessons learned from the ASF taskforce and the bushfire response