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Export Meat Operational Guideline

3.20 Emergency animal disease



Purpose

This document outlines how the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) meat program staff will work with export-registered meat establishments in the management of potential and real emergency animal disease (EAD) incursions in collaboration with Australian Government Authorised Officers (AAOs) and state and territory authorities to ensure continued compliance with state and territory legislation, export legislation, Australian standards, and importing country requirements.

Scope

This document sets out what is expected of departmental and establishment staff in relation to preparing for and responding to an incursion of an EAD on a tier 2 export-registered meat establishment.

Legislative basis

Jurisdiction for management of emergency animal disease at export-registered establishments is held by the relevant state or territory authority responsible for animal health. Importantly:

- state and territory governments are responsible for animal disease laws and their enforcement and prosecution.
- a requirement to report notifiable disease is contained in individual state and territory legislation.
- once a state or territory authority are notified of a disease incursion or suspected disease situation, all individuals on-plant must comply with directives from the relevant state or territory authority.

Under the Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Rules 2021 (the Rules) and Export Control (Wild Game Meat and Wild Game Meat Products) Rules 2021, red meat abattoirs and game meat processors are bound to comply with:

- their approved arrangement (including animal disease response procedures and animal disease preparedness components)
- the relevant Australian standard.

The Australian meat standard (AS4696) and wild game standard (AS4464) require:

- AS4696 Section 3.14 - If an animal at a meat premises is affected by, or is suspected of being affected by, a notifiable disease or a carcass or carcass part at the premise displays evidence of

an animal having been so affected, the operator must without delay advise the authority in the state or territory in which the premises is located that is charged by the government of that state or territory with the responsibility of animal health.

- AS4696 Section 10.22 (1) and AS 4464 Section 9.22[1] - If the carcass or carcass parts of an animal is affected by or is suspected of being affected by a contagious or notifiable disease of animals:

(a) the animal's carcass and all its carcass parts (including the head if still available) are separately identified and segregated from other carcasses and carcass parts not affected or suspected of being affected by the disease; and

(b) associated animals, carcasses and carcass parts are separately identified and segregated from animals, carcasses and carcass parts not so affected or suspected of being affected until a disposition is applied to them by a meat safety inspector.

In other words, relevant state or territory authorities responsible for animal health are to be advised where an animal or carcass/carcass part displays evidence of being affected by a notifiable disease.

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Emergency animal disease plan

All export-registered meat establishments must have an up-to-date emergency animal disease plan (EADP) to manage possible EAD incursion. Plans should be written using guidance contained within the [AUSVETPLAN Enterprise manual on meat processing](#). The EADP is to be reviewed and updated (if required) by the establishment every 6 months. The EADP will be evaluated and reviewed with departmental oversight at the on-plant weekly management meetings.

Content of the plan

The EADP must contain:

- background details about the establishment
- significant details about the establishment, such as
 - the main business operation (i.e., abattoir, wild game processing)
 - business address
 - species and number of animals processed (i.e., daily/weekly basis)
 - number of staff
 - capacity of the lairage
 - chiller load capacity
 - sources of stock
 - site security system (i.e., access to the premises via the gates and/or other significant information)
- up-to-date site diagrams and map of the establishment. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - entry and exit points for staff and stock
 - perimeter fence with gate points, including parking areas
 - paddocks, yards, isolation pens
 - waterways and drainage plans
 - production areas, including numbered chillers, freezers, and cold stores
 - proximity to all neighboring properties and types of animals present (if any)
 - location of bores and any underground structures
 - wastewater disposal ponds and site away from ground water that complies with the local state authority requirements
 - source and location of electricity supply
 - suitable areas for burial sites
 - storage facilities
 - locations for cleaning, washing down, disinfection and decontamination
 - change and showering facilities

Note: if any modifications or structural changes are made to the establishment, the EADP should be updated accordingly.
- details of the wildlife and feral animal situation around the establishment and their risk of spreading EADs
- a current list of notifiable diseases for the state or territory where the establishment is located
- emergency contact details of the:
 - state veterinary officer (SVO)
 - establishment management
 - department on-plant officers
 - area technical manager (ATM)
 - EAD hotline
 - local police
- evidence of staff training which provides on-plant staff with awareness and understanding of disease signs and animal behaviours with EAD potential
- details of disinfectants that may be used for decontamination and their storage locations.

- roles and responsibilities of personnel in the EAD notification process in the scenario that the plant is a suspect establishment, an infected establishment, or a dangerous contact establishment.

Note: It is recommended that establishments use a job card template to cover these roles and responsibilities.

Training of staff

All establishment-employed stockyard and slaughter personnel must be trained in detecting any unusual signs of EADs in animals (see [Clinical disease manifestations and abnormal behaviours of suspect emergency animal disease cases](#)) in accordance with required training in sections 3.5 of AS 4696 and AS4464.

Establishment staff must undergo an appropriate EAD or EADP training course ([for example MINTRAC EAD online training course](#)). Records of staff EAD training must be kept.

Reporting a suspected case of emergency animal disease

Any staff member at an establishment can report a suspect EAD case. Suspect animals must be isolated in lockable pens, or under departmental or establishment supervision. Animals that have been in contact with suspect animals must also be isolated. Photos and video footage of the suspect animal should be taken as evidence as soon as possible with subsequent contact with animal(s) minimised. It is the obligation of stockyard and slaughter personnel (including Porcine Ante Mortem Inspectors 'PAMIs' in pig export establishments) to report any signs of EAD to the site manager and/or the On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV) immediately.

It must be ensured that the segregated animal(s) welfare is maintained, and animals have access to food and water.

Key contacts to notify

Important: Leaving a message is not an adequate way of notifying contacts.

Depending on the person identifying the suspect(s), the following is a series of persons who must be informed of a suspected EAD case at the establishment:

- **the OPV** – establishment staff/management to notify immediately
- **establishment management** – OPV/establishment staff to notify immediately
- **the Food Safety Meat Assessor(s)** – OPV to notify as soon as possible
- **the AAO(s)** – OPV to notify as soon as possible
- **the ATM** – OPV to notify as soon as possible via phone call (Field Operations Manager 'FOM' or another ATM if the Establishment ATM is not available)
- **the Assistant Director (AD)** – OPV to notify as soon as possible via phone call (Director or another AD if establishment AD is not available)
- **central office** – OPV to notify as soon as possible via email at MID.OpsCoord@agriculture.gov.au
- **office of the chief veterinary officer** – OPV to notify as soon as possible via email at OCVO@agriculture.gov.au
- **the EAD hotline (1800 675 888)** – OPV to notify as soon as possible and liaise as necessary¹
- **animal health state or territory authority staff (District Veterinary Officer (DVO) or Animal Health Officer (AHO))** – OPV to notify and liaise if necessary.

¹ To support Tier 2 establishments in their biosecurity obligations, the OPV will, unless unavailable, take responsibility for liaison with the state and territory authorities.

Key information to be communicated

The following information about suspect animals should be communicated to the above people when notifying a suspect case:

- number of animals consigned for slaughter.
- name and address of the consignor/owner
- name and address of the livestock transport company
- details of any lesions and/or abnormalities observed during ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection
- number of animals with lesions or abnormalities
- details of all livestock transport which have entered and exited the establishment since the suspected incident occurred

A report containing the above key information should be prepared by the OPV and submitted to local state authorities, the ATM, and the office of the chief veterinary officer, and Food Safety Unit via email at Foodsafetyunit@agriculture.gov.au.

Additional responsibilities of establishment staff and personnel

Should EAD signs and manifestations be observed during animal handling and ante-mortem inspection, the responsibilities of establishment staff and personnel include:

- obtaining information on the stock's property of origin (i.e., NVD or waybill)
- segregating the affected/suspected animal and collecting identification (i.e., NLIS) if safe to do so
- avoiding unnecessary contact with the suspect animal(s)
- identifying the stock transporter
- isolating personal belongings and equipment that contacted the suspect animals
- to stop washing the yards.

Responsibilities of the site manager

The site manager will notify the OPV immediately, or if after hours, call the EAD Hotline and act as per advice of the EAD officer in-charge, or alternately on advice of the state veterinary officer in-charge. If an after-hours suspect identification, the OPV must be notified as soon as possible the following working day.

Possible measures to be implemented by the On-Plant Veterinarian as per instruction of EAD hotline duty officer or relevant state regulatory body

All or any of the following measures, are to be enacted by the OPV in conjunction with the establishment management as appropriate:

- Immediate cessation of slaughter operations.
- Permit continued dressing of all slaughtered animals (note that chain speed may need to be reduced – or additional inspectors put on the chain).
- Move all meat/meat products into cold storage and ensure storage is locked.
- Ensure separation of any possibly affected product.
- Isolate, in lockable pens or under departmental/establishment supervision, suspect animals at the establishment and those that have been in contact with suspect animals.
- Restrict access to suspect animals.

- If directed by the Emergency Animal Disease hotline or relevant state authority, support management to:
 - control access to the premises and prevent entry of unauthorised personnel, vehicles, and equipment until state officials arrive.
 - prohibit movement of animals, product, people, vehicles, and equipment onto and from the premises.
 - request assistance from police to control people movement where necessary.
- Restrict movement of animals and people within the establishment especially near pens where suspect animals are held.
 - Identify and record details of all:
 - suspect and in-contact animals
 - prescribed goods and other animal goods (for example, skins, waste)
 - vehicles and people that have left the establishment since the suspect animal(s) was/were detected
 - persons who have been in contact with suspect animals.
- Minimise water use and contain water drainage from all parts of the establishment.
- Ensure that all dogs and working animals present on the establishment are restrained and prevented access to suspect animals.
- Maintain appropriate animal welfare standards of suspect animals.

Clinical disease manifestations and abnormal behaviours of suspect emergency animal disease cases

Ante-mortem inspection

During ante-mortem inspection and handling of stock in the yard/lairage, clinical signs and abnormal behaviour includes:

- sudden deaths
- abnormally high morbidity or mortality rates in a herd (all species), including poultry
- lameness, excessive salivation in cloven-hoofed animal species
- ulcerations, erosions or blisters on feet, muzzle, mouth, and udder/teats in cloven-hoofed animals (cattle, buffalo, sheep, pigs)
- display of peculiar neurological signs
- sensory changes (for example, muscle tremors and spasms, teeth grinding, tossing of head, licking of feet and tongue licking)
- hypersensitivity to light, sound, or touch
- aggressiveness and nervousness
- multi-focal erythema, raised or necrotic areas and/or joint swellings in pigs
- unusually high rate of respiratory disease signs, especially in pigs
- multiple, deep, fly-struck wounds (particularly relevant in Northern Australia)
- other clinical signs and manifestations relevant to specific EAD of interest.

Post-mortem inspection

During post-mortem inspection, pathology can include:

- enlargement or swelling of lymph nodes
- blisters
- inflammation of organs
- haemorrhages and congestion
- any organ abnormalities on size, colour and smell
- any identified abnormal fluid or mucus filled structures.

Related material

The following related material is available on the department's website:

- Webpage: [ELMER – emergency animal disease \(EAD\) resources](#)

The following related material is available on the internet:

- PDF: [AUSVETPLAN Enterprise manual: Meat processing](#)
- Webpage: [MINTRAC EAD training course – MyTOM](#)
- Webpage: [Emergency animal diseases – a field guide for Australian veterinarians](#)
- Webpage: [Export Control Act 2020](#)
- Webpage: [Export Control \(Meat and Meat Products\) Rules 2021](#)
- Webpage: [Export Control \(Wild Game Meat and Wild Game Meat Products\) Rules 2021](#)
- Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption (available for purchase from [SAI global](#))

Attachment 1: Roles and responsibilities

Food Safety Meat Assessor (FSMA)

- Know and recognise clinical signs of potential EAD of species in their establishment.
- Report suspicion of EAD identified during post-mortem and/or ante-mortem inspection to the OPV.
- Assist as requested in the implementation of the EADP.

Australian Government Authorised Officer (AAO)

- Know and recognise pathology of potential EAD of species in their establishment.
- Report suspicion of EAD identified during post-mortem inspection to the OPV.
- Assist as requested in the implementation of the EADP.

Establishment Management/Staff

- Ensure the establishment has an up-to-date EADP.
- Management to train staff to know and recognise clinical signs of potential EAD in species of livestock in their establishment.
- Maintain current records of establishment staff training.
- Implement the EADP when a suspected or confirmed case of EAD is identified at an export-registered meat establishment.
- Notify OPV immediately of any suspected EAD case at the establishment, and should suspicious lesions /signs or EAD signs and manifestations be observed during animal receipt and handling, the site manager will notify the OPV immediately, or if after hours, call the EAD Hotline.
- Review and evaluate the EADP at the on-plant weekly management meetings.
- Ensure the establishment complies with state and territory legislation export legislation Australian Standards and importing country requirements.
- Ensure establishment employed stockyard and slaughter personnel are trained in detecting any unusual signs of EADs.

Porcine Ante-mortem Authorised Inspector (PAMI)

- Know and recognise clinical signs of potential EAD of pigs at their establishment.
- Report suspicion of EAD identified during ante-mortem inspection to the OPV.
- Assist as requested in the implementation of the EADP.

On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV)

- Maintain knowledge of EADs for species slaughtered at the establishment by familiarising with the latest versions of the AUSVETPLAN and its supplementary manuals and documents.
- Know, recognise, and assess the clinical signs of potential EAD in species of livestock in their establishment.
- Remind the department meat inspection team of their obligation to report any suspicious lesions/signs observed during inspection.
- Verify that the establishment has an up-to-date EADP.
- Examine the establishment's EADP every 6 months and assess it against the latest AUSVETPLAN Enterprise Manual on Meat Processing. The criteria used for assessment of the plan is in the approved arrangement guidelines.
- Include EADs as an agenda item for discussion at least every 3 months during a scheduled weekly meeting with management; and remind establishment staff of their obligation to report any unusual lesions/conditions observed during operations.
- Request establishment management to address any identified deficiencies in their EADP.

- Notify the establishment and the emergency disease (EAD) hotline and/or the relevant state government staff (usually the District Veterinary Officer (DVO) or an Animal Health Officer (AHO)) of suspicion of an EAD incursion.
- Work closely with establishment management to effectively implement the EADP when a suspected or confirmed case of EAD is identified at an export-registered meat establishment.
- Display a copy of the national and state-specific notifiable animal diseases list at the staff amenity area (i.e., lunchroom) and discuss it with the meat inspection staff.
- Ensure that EAD Hotline number is displayed at the inspection staff amenity area and department office.

Attachment 2: Definitions

Area Technical Manager (Establishment ATM)

A Commonwealth authorised officer (senior veterinarian) who has responsibility for on-plant technical support, technical assessment and verification of technical standards and operations in a defined group of export meat establishments.

Assistant Director, Veterinary and Export Meat Services Group (VEMS)

A Commonwealth officer who maintains AEMIS arrangements within defined group of export meat establishments and has responsibility for the operational supervision and performance management of on-plant departmental staff in those establishments.

Australian Export Meat Inspection System (AEMIS)

The Australian Export Meat Inspection System is an integrated set of controls specified and verified by Government that ensure the safety, suitability and integrity of Australian meat and meat products. Underpinning AEMIS are objective hygiene and performance standards which are continually monitored.

Australian Government Authorised Officer (AAO)

An individual employed by an export-registered abattoir or independent AAO employer, authorised by the department to undertake prescribed functions as an authorised officer under the Export Control Act and subordinate legislation.

Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN)

A comprehensive government-supported contingency plan for all aspects of the livestock industries to combat a suspected outbreak of prescribed animal diseases exotic to Australia.

Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO)

Primary representative of, and advisor to, the relevant government on all matters relating to the maintenance and improvement of animal health status and the systems that support it. In this document, refers to either State Chief Veterinary Officer or Australian Government Chief Veterinary Officer.

Condemned

Any animal, carcase, carcase part, meat or meat product that is not suitable for human consumption and prevented from entering the human food chain.

Decontamination

All stages of cleaning and disinfection.

Director, Veterinary and Export Meat Services Group (VEMS)

A Commonwealth officer who has responsibility for the overall regional management of VEMS Assistant Directors and on-plant departmental staff.

District Veterinary Officer (DVO)

A veterinary officer employed by the State Government responsible for managing a region within the state.

Emergency animal disease (EAD)

An animal disease with potential to cause severe socio-economic impacts, affecting animal, human and environmental health. The majority of EADs are exotic. Some are emerging, re-emerging and/or endemic to Australia. All EADs are notifiable diseases in all states and territories.

Emerging animal disease

The emergence of a previously unrecognized disease or a new disease that has developed due to evolutionary changes of the pathogen or other disease factors.

Endemic disease

Disease that is constantly maintained at a baseline level in a geographical location.

Exotic animal disease

A notifiable disease that normally does not occur in Australia. The term is usually applied to serious epidemic diseases that cause significant economic loss to livestock production.

On-Plant Veterinarian (OPV)

A Commonwealth authorised officer (veterinarian) employed by the Department to conduct ante-mortem inspection and to provide daily supervision of post-mortem inspection and verification of the establishment's approved arrangement.

Porcine Anti Mortem Inspector (PAMI)

A meat safety inspector who is authorised, through a deed of obligation under the Export Control Act, to undertake ante-mortem inspection on a pig abattoir under the supervision of the OPV. They are employed either by an establishment or by a third-party service provider.

Re-emerging disease

Disease that is constantly maintained at a baseline level in a geographical location.