



MEDIA RELEASE

Public Accounts Committee Reports on Animal and Plant Diseases

The Public Accounts Committee today tabled the report of its comprehensive inquiry into the management of animal and plant diseases, announced Committee Chair, Noreen Hay MP.

"The Agricultural sector is a crucial part of the New South Wales economy, with production worth around \$8 billion each year. Minimising the effects of disease and pest incursions is vital both for preserving the State's disease-free status with trading partners and for containing any threats to human health. Governments and industry both have important roles to play in this process," said Ms Hay.

"The Committee was pleased to find that the New South Wales Government has devoted considerable effort to preparation for emergency disease incursions. It is unique amongst Australia's States and Territories in having a dedicated plant pest and animal disease first response team that can be called into action at very short notice for a wide range of emergencies. The State also performs well in simulated emergency exercises.

"The Committee was keen to learn about the potential impacts on human health of animal diseases such as avian influenza or "bird flu". We were reassured to find that the Government is making huge efforts to be prepared should an outbreak occur. Evidence suggests that the State has the capacity to respond to suspected human cases of avian influenza extremely quickly and effectively," said Ms Hay.

"However, the Committee also found that gaps remain in the planning and maintenance of training levels. The Committee was concerned that, while strategies for surveillance activities were based on risk management principles, the level of resources available was variable and user charging for some tests could lead to a lack of willingness by producers to submit samples," said Ms Hay.

The Committee examined how the Ovine Johne's Disease Program was performing and notes that, while the current program appears to have a higher level of acceptance than the much criticised program it replaced in 2004, it is too soon to assess its performance completely. Damage to the reputation of the Government remains in some quarters and much effort will be required to rebuild trust with producers.

The Committee made a total of 22 recommendations to improve the management of animal and plant diseases including that the Government strengthen links with producers, particularly in the pig and poultry industries and with small, non-professional producers who tend to be less informed about pest and disease risks.

Ms Hay concluded, "I would like to thank all the groups and individuals who participated in this inquiry, including industry members and government agencies."

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View the report at: www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/publicaccounts.