



Our ref: MEMB/091/001/A

25 May 2006

The Honourable Ms Noreen Hay MP
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Hay

MANAGING ANIMAL AND PLANT DISEASES

In response to your letter of 13 April 2006, Animal Health Australia makes a submission in relation the Terms of Reference, point two, for animal disease emergencies.

In general terms, Animal Health Australia makes the point that disease response preparedness activities must be balanced against disease incursion risk minimisation investment. Any emergency disease response of significant magnitude will require a whole of government response. Industry has a significant role to play in all three areas; preparedness, risk minimisation and response and their contribution needs to be counted as a part of the overall picture. Overall, NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) whilst not being able to currently solve all related issues, is in many respects a leader in these fields in which continuous assessment and improvement is required. Progress on unresolved issues is proceeding in line with developments in other jurisdictions in Australia.

By way of context, Animal Health Australia is a not-for-profit public company established by the Australian Government, State and Territory governments and major national livestock industries with a mission focussed on ensuring that Australia's national animal health system delivers a competitive advantage and enhanced market access for Australia's livestock industries, and in doing so minimises the risks to human health.

The company currently has 24 members spread across four membership categories with a structure that facilitates flexible and responsive management of animal health issues and accountability via an independently selected board of directors responsible to members in general meeting.

Animal Health Australia is dedicated to advancing issues of collective interest to stakeholders associated with the health of livestock. The company also has the capability to manage national animal health related programs for all, or a subset of members.

With an exclusive focus on national animal health issues, the company develops appropriate and sustainable partnerships between members and provides leadership in securing outcomes that position Australia as a world leader in terms of its health status and systems.

Animal Health Australia's role in the national animal health system is to:

- Identify national animal health system priorities
- Engage animal health system stakeholders in pursuing agreed priorities
- Integrate activities of animal health service participants
- Facilitate and manage national animal health programs
- Evaluate national animal health system outputs
- Communicate national animal health performance

Animal Health Australia's objective is to demonstrate national leadership in achieving:

- A shared vision of the national animal health system
- Auditable national animal health performance standards
- Risk based national animal health priorities
- Improved awareness of biosecurity planning and management
- National animal health education and training programs.

The emphasis of the Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) Preparedness Program is to ensure that Australia's capability to respond to disease incursions is current and adequate. To achieve this Animal Health Australia focuses its efforts on maintaining the EAD Response Agreement (EADRA) to ensure relevance, reviewing the suite of AUSVETPLAN manuals on a risk priority basis and EAD training to develop a national pool of trained and accredited EAD response personnel.

To reduce Australia's exposure to disease incursion risk, resources are directed to EAD awareness and biosecurity planning.

The EADRA

To maintain the relevancy of the EADRA ongoing work is focussed on a range of issues identified by Parties to the Deed via annual workshops that seek to not only identify areas for consideration but also to remedy these by consensus decision making. This work continues with a comprehensive input by NSW DPI.

AUSVETPLAN

AUSVETPLAN is the nationally agreed plan for response to emergency animal diseases. The individual manuals are under constant development and revision with a significant amount of input from all jurisdictions including NSW DPI which is more advanced than most other jurisdictions in respect of local translation of these plans to jurisdiction action plans and standard operating procedures.

Emergency Training

Training is recognised as an essential element of the preparedness program with Animal Health Australia undertaking a number of activities relating to the ongoing delivery of the National EAD Training Program. NSW DPI is a significant part of the training program and has contributed generously to training design, development and delivery. Animal Health Australia recognises the operational expertise in NSW and seeks to capture and use that expertise as part of its national training programs.

Emergency Response Teams

NSW is actively involved in the three national emergency response groups being trained and managed by Animal Health Australia.

Animal Health Australia is responsible for the 'peace time' management and training of the Rapid Response Team (RRT) which includes one major exercise each year. Currently there are 35 members of the RRT, seven of whom come from NSW.

The establishment of the Australian Veterinary Reserve (AVR) was one of the major recommendations of the Review of Rural Veterinary Services and is a significant milestone in realising the potential of Australia's national veterinary resource. NSW DPI has facilitated AVR uptake in NSW and strives to maintain contact with its AVR members, encouraging them to participate in NSW DPI professional development activities, workshops and exercises.

Work on an Industry Liaison Officer (ILO) training project commenced in December 2004 and the rollout commenced in May 2005. This training allows industry to train to be able to contribute real value to the Local Disease Control Centre (LDCC) team in an EAD response.

The 'First Response Teams' represent a unique NSW approach that is admired by other jurisdictions.

Awareness Building

The Protect Australian Livestock Campaign (PALC) been successfully implemented with the assistance of all jurisdictions including NSW. The promotion of the Emergency Disease Watch Hotline and on-farm biosecurity practices has continued with the creative concepts of "Look. Check. Ask a Vet" and "Spot the Risk". A comprehensive research project was undertaken by the Institute of Rural Futures at the University of New England to review the 2004/05 campaign and provide some direction for the 2005/06 campaign. The PALC continues to evolve with significant local efforts to raise awareness.

Biosecurity

The Biosecurity Planning Reference Group has been established to assist Animal Health Australia progress the development and implementation of Biosecurity Plans and Statements by industry and government members as required of Parties to the EADRA and to ensure the quality and relevance of these plans. Biosecurity awareness and uptake represents a significant challenge to industry which NSW DPI is facilitating.

National Animal Health Performance Standards

The detailed National Animal Health Performance Standards Version 3 developed in November 2005 provide a framework for identifying animal health priorities and measuring expected outputs and outcomes at industry and jurisdictional level across the nation. States and Territories are currently entering their initial data into the online system and Animal Health Australia anticipates that the first comparative analysis report will be produced early in 2007. NSW DPI was intimately involved in the pilot testing of the online system.

In summary, NSW DPI has a proven capability to manage smaller EAD inclusions effectively, viz Newcastle Disease at Mangrove Mountain and more recently the oyster disease outbreak. The jurisdiction has recognised the need to actively participate in capacity building at all levels within NSW DPI. Animal Health Australia recognises the expertise held in the Department and appreciates the contributions made by NSW DPI to share their knowledge and resources nationally.

Yours sincerely



RALPH HOOD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER