



7th July 2022

Further information:

Summary – Stranded animals were not provided with food or veterinary attention within 3 days of the emergency, in complete contradiction to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2021 (Appendix 1) and to the Veterinary Practitioners Professional Code of Conduct NSW Legislation (Appendix 2). The government processes that were in play for the response were, in reality, too delayed and as primary contacts in the field, the presence of these processes was not evident nor were they communicated to us at any stage (noting I had indeed registered via the correct pathway).

- Dr Gary Wilson had identified some similar issues and gave veterinary recommendations after the 2011 Lockyer Valley Floods (Appendix 3 & 4).
- Document prepared by Dr Oliver Liyou for the Equine Veterinarians Association – Observations and recommendations from the NSW Northern Rivers Floods March 2022 (Appendix 5).
- In the week following the initial flood, Paul Hutchings, General Manager Northern Tablelands LLS, offered to be a liaison officer between CVC private veterinarians and DPI/LLS and this offer was refused by DPI/LLS.
- Further discussion with Bruce Lyle (Norco, Casino) reinforced concerns of poor government communication, 1800 number failure and the importance of local information (Appendix 6). Norco was engaged by LLS to source Emergency Fodder and Bruce Lyle did this efficiently and effectively. Then, out of his own directive and recognising the need for it, Bruce Lyle organised a fodder depot at the Primex site in Casino. Norco was, at no point, contracted to be a lead in the distribution of fodder and overall fodder site running – this was carried out efficiently by Bruce Lyle and other Norco staff, however it is an area that requires specific tasking in future.
- DPI-hosted meeting 30th May 2022 at Coffs Harbour Racing Club

On the 17th May 2022, I became aware of an invitation via AVA liaison officer, Dr Ross Brown, of a meeting to be hosted by DPI regarding 'specific NSW North Coast Floods Veterinarian Response discussion with NSW DPI/AASFA coordinators'. The discussion was then later described as the 'NSW Government and Private Vet meeting to discuss achievements and issues that relate directly to the collaboration between the Agriculture and Animal Services Functional Area and private veterinarians during the NSW East Coast Floods, 2022 response'. It

was held on 30th May 2022 at Coffs Harbour Racing Club and the aim of the meeting was as a 'reflection on *what worked, what improvements would we make, what would we change and why?*'

NSW DPI was represented by:

- Chief Veterinarian Officer
- Director Emergency Management
- Manager Emergency Management, Operations
- Manager Emergency Management, Planning

Also attending were:

- Business Partner Emergency Management at Local Land Services
- LLS Veterinarian
- External Facilitator

Private Veterinarians were represented by:

- Dr Philippa Johnston (veterinarian, CVC)
- Lara Johnston (manager of CVC during floods)
- Josh Wellman (local knowledge and previous LLS employment experience was utilised extensively by CVC during floods)
- AVA liaison officer, Dr Ross Brown (veterinarian)

DPI Director of Emergency Management presented a PowerPoint presentation outlining the DPI timeline of responses pre and during flood. I voiced concerns regarding discrepancies in the timeline and what CVC experienced 'in the field'. These were dismissed and we were instead directed to the question "What worked?" However, to answer this question competently, you often need to discuss "What didn't work?"

Throughout the meeting we were limited in what we could voice regarding the flood response – there was no acknowledgement of the severe failure of the animal welfare response in the initial 5 days post flood and no acceptance of responsibility. I understand organisations were mobilised, however they were not necessarily tasked by DPI. It was continually voiced by CVC that these processes were not working, and it was repetitively ignored.

At the close of the professional meeting, I requested a copy of the timeline and that was agreed to by the DPI Director of Emergency Management. However, I then received the below response and I still have not received a copy of the timeline presented, despite further requests.

"I mentioned to you on the way out that I wanted to check a few of the figures as I put it together last minute on Sunday night. I worked on it late last night and found a few small errors (such as activating RSPCA and AWL on the Monday, not the Wednesday as in the slideshow).

Thanks for understanding - given what you wanted to use it for we don't want even small incidental inaccuracies."

Post appearance before the Select Committee on the Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022 he has not replied to my correspondence at all. The continuing lack of communication and withholding of information appears evident in this situation.

Outcome of the DPI meeting from my perspective:

- DPI would consider appointing a veterinary liaison officer (likely AVA representative) and communication will improve in future.
- There was no acknowledgement that the speed of the fodder and veterinary response was poor and no guarantee this would improve in future emergencies.
- Confirmation from Jocelyn Todd, LLS Veterinarian, that the LLS Veterinarians do not carry adequate equipment or have adequate current knowledge of veterinary treatment and therefore, LLS Veterinarians cannot be expected to be relied upon for veterinary treatment in emergency situations. Private veterinarians are essential to this.

Concerns raised from meeting:

- In response to the above DPI timeline, Dr B Ros (Veterinarian), Bruce Lyle (Norco – Fodder Sourcing), Lara Johnston, Josh Wellman and myself, Dr P Johnston (Veterinarian), then compiled a full timeline of events as they occurred 'in the field' (Appendix 7).
- As a group, members of the 'Central Veterinary Command' were not invited to attend the DPI meeting, despite being the primary large animal group in the flood response; despite Lara Johnston and myself being assured repeatedly that we would be invited to a review, in particular by the Ag Minister and Scott Hansen himself; and despite being the group that DPI reimbursed private helicopter costs to.
- The information regarding the meeting came via the AVA liaison officer, who was not involved directly in the flood response and was appointed for an unrelated reason 12 days post flood.
- Confirmation from DPI Director of Emergency Management that '*LLS can take private veterinarians in helicopters, they just chose not to in that situation*'.

Overall Recommendations:

- Prioritise animal welfare in the emergency phase (maximum 72 hours without food in emergency phase as per PROCTA act). It is a response that can be run concurrently with human rescue, it is not mutually exclusive.
- Planned emergency procedure and prior distribution of plan (including protocols, phone numbers, contacts) to appropriate agencies eg. local veterinarians, produce stores, stock and station agents – these are the people that the community first contact in an emergency.
- Tasking of appropriate aircraft needs to be addressed urgently (Appendix 8 – CEO of Australian Helicopter Industry Association, Paul Tyrrell’s comment in response to questions concerning the Feb / March 2022 Northern Rivers floods). Different aircraft are utilised for human rescues as compared to aircraft utilised for animal welfare concerns, in particular fodder drops.
- Open communication and free flow of information at all times. Listen to feedback from people who are ‘on the ground’ and involved directly in the situation.
- Integral involvement of locals – they have expertise in the district and can offer immeasurable support in an emergency situation.
- Repeated aerial surveillance by experienced animal welfare personnel (eg veterinarian and RSPCA officer) - the emergency situation changes daily and this needs to be monitored.
- 1800 number – it appears that one of the biggest ongoing flaws of this system in a natural disaster is that stock in need of fodder / assistance need to be identified and logged by the owner of the stock. There needs to be a system in place in the emergency phase whereby stock are identified by aerial surveillance and fodder is dropped as required on a ‘need basis,’ as stock are often removed from owner.
- Tasking of appropriate organisations by DPI (not just initial mobilisation) - many of the organisations have commented they had to chase DPI for tasking in appropriate areas.
- I commend RSPCA’s initiative as they have already addressed the concern of their officers not having the qualifications to travel in helicopters over floodwater – officers have completed the training, as well as RSPCA investing in boats and a barge for future emergencies.
- Veterinary response – involvement of AVA and DPI CVO (or equivalent) and protocols in place for veterinary volunteering and treatment.

There must be changes implemented in the process so we can be assured in future we can deliver our professional veterinary obligation to the provision of animal welfare and the POCTA Regulation.

Appendix 1

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (POCTA) Regulation 2021

Part 5 Enforcement

27 Evidence that ruminant stock animal not provided with food or shelter during emergency

(cf clause 5 2006 Reg)

For the purposes of section 8 (3) of the Act, the period prescribed in respect of a ruminant stock animal is **72 hours** during any **period of drought, flood or other emergency**.

Appendix 2

Schedule 2 Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct – NSW legislation

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/sl-2013-0490#sch.2>

Schedule 2 Veterinary practitioners code of professional conduct

(Clause 13)

1 Basic principles of professional conduct

The basic principles of professional conduct for a veterinary practitioner are—

- (a) a **primary concern for the welfare of animals**, and
- (b) **the maintenance of professional standards to the standard expected by—**
 - (i) **other veterinary practitioners**, and
 - (ii) **users of veterinary services**, and
 - (iii) **the public**.

2 Welfare of animals must be considered

A veterinary practitioner must at all times consider the welfare of animals when practicing veterinary science.

3 No refusal of pain relief

- (1) A veterinary practitioner must not refuse to provide relief of pain or suffering to an animal that is in his or her presence.
- (2) In this clause, **relief**, in relation to pain or suffering, means—
 - (a) first aid treatment, or

- (b) timely referral to another veterinary practitioner, or
 - (c) euthanasia,
- as appropriate.

Appendix 3 & 4

Email attachment. Gary Wilson's Report for Qld Division from AVA – VET Report & Veterinary Emergency Taskforce – 19/1/11.

Appendix 5

Email attachment. Dr Oliver Liyou – Observations and recommendations from the NSW Northern Rivers Floods March 2022.

Appendix 6

Email attachment. Bruce Lyle (Norco) Emergency Fodder Distribution summary.

Appendix 7

Updated timeline of events (highlighted when DPI / LLS staff / contractors arrived):

Sunday 27th / Monday 28th Feb – Floods in Northern NSW area.

Wednesday 2nd March – Dr Bruno Ros arrived at Primex, Casino.

Thursday 3rd March - LLS staff arrived at Primex, tasked with accepting a fodder truck that had actually arrived the day prior and had already been unloaded. Despite requests from locals on the ground, they did not stay to offer assistance or guidance.

1st privately chartered helicopter arrived in the afternoon.

Friday 4th March – Dr Philippa Johnston arrived at Primex, Casino.

1st privately chartered helicopter conducted aerial surveillance and 2nd privately chartered helicopter arrived at Primex, Casino in afternoon.

Saturday 5th March – 1st privately chartered helicopter conducted aerial surveillance and transported private volunteer veterinarians to treat and euthanise stock as required. 2nd privately chartered helicopter began slinging hay, delivering fodder to stranded stock, as well as transporting Dr Bruno Ros (veterinarian) to treat and euthanise wounded stock as required.

1st DPI / LLS chartered helicopter arrived in the afternoon.

Private volunteer veterinarians formed CVC (Central Veterinary Command) at Primex.

Sunday 6th March – The 2 privately contracted helicopters agreed to work with CVC and CVC funded their work in entirety. Initial CVC meeting – multiple volunteer private veterinarians and 2 LLS veterinarians attended.

LLS staff arrived with mobile office area to assist Bruce Lyle with fodder distribution and management.

1st privately chartered helicopter conducted aerial surveillance and transported private veterinarians to treat and euthanise stock as required. 2nd privately chartered helicopter slinging hay all day, delivering fodder to stranded stock.

1st DPI / LLS chartered helicopter started slinging hay. Unsure of exact date of arrival of 2nd DPI/LLS chartered helicopter.

Monday 7th March – 1st privately chartered helicopter conducted aerial surveillance and transported private veterinarians to treat and euthanise stock as required. 2nd privately chartered helicopter slinging hay, delivering fodder to stranded stock, as well as transporting private veterinarians to treat and euthanise stock as required. Both privately chartered helicopters also conducted surveillance for CVC to log veterinary treatment for animals through CVC, and fodder drops through the 1800 number.

Tuesday 8th March – 1st privately chartered helicopter conducted aerial surveillance and transported private veterinarians to treat stock as required. 2nd privately chartered helicopter slinging hay, delivering fodder to stranded stock, as well as providing GPS points to DPI/LLS chartered helicopter pilot of stranded animals that had not received hay yet (over 7 days post flood).

Wednesday 9th March – 1st privately chartered helicopter conducted aerial surveillance and transported private veterinarians to treat stock as required. 2nd privately chartered helicopter slinging hay, delivering fodder to stranded stock. Tension developed between privately chartered helicopter pilots and DPI/LLS staff.

Meeting with Minister for Ag, Chief of Staff Ag Minister, Shadow Minister for Ag, DPI Director General, LLS General Manager North Coast, Business Partner Emergency Management at Local Land Services and North Coast DPI representative. I advised Minister for Ag that RSPCA was not involved in response at that time.

Thursday 10th March – the 2 privately chartered helicopters finished and returned home in the morning. By the afternoon, it became apparent to CVC that further aerial surveillance was required as stock were still stranded and fodder drops were required to be relogged by owners to keep occurring. This was impossible as owners were still unaware of their stock's location and/or could not access their stock to assess this. A request was placed to DPI Director General and unfortunately it was unable to be filled. CVC, once again, privately chartered a helicopter for the following day to conduct aerial surveillance.

Communication did improve to a small extent after the Minister for Ag's visit during the flood response; however it improved markedly after contact was made by Lara Johnston (CVC) with DPI State Emergency Coordinator,

Phone conversation with Scott Myers RSPCA – they had been tasked with providing teams to be in field by Friday.

Friday 10th March – RSPCA teams arrived in field, however DPI/LLS would not allow them in helicopters as the officers had not completed training course to travel in helicopters associated with floodwater. RSPCA officers reported to Scott Myers that they were subsequently instructed to 'hand out leaflets at the AWL truck and in the field'. This is a gross underutilisation of their expertise.

CVC privately chartered helicopter conducted aerial surveillance.

DPI State Emergency Coordinator confirmed to Lara Johnston (CVC) that all privately funded CVC helicopters to this point would be reimbursed by DPI.

Sunday 12th March – CVC volunteer veterinarians sent home and CVC dispersed, phone still manned remotely by Lara Johnston and Pip Johnston.

Monday 30th May – DPI hosted meeting at Coffs Harbour Racing Club.

Tuesday 31st May – Dr Bruno Ros and myself appeared before the Select Committee on the Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022. Dr Bruno Ros then received a phonecall from Minister for Ag Chief of Staff to organise an in-person meeting with the Minister for Ag on 2nd June 2022.

Thursday 2nd June – Dr Bruno Ros and I met with Minister for Ag, DPI Director General and another representative. DPI Director General voiced that DPI were not tasked helicopters until Thursday 3rd March; however it is noted that their 1st helicopter still did not arrive at Primex until Saturday 5th March in afternoon, and did not begin fodder drops until the following day.

6th June – phonecall meeting with DPI CVO – suggested the DPI EAD response would be well fitted for emergencies also.

9th June – zoom meeting with , from Minister Steph Cooke's office, discussing animal flood response.

9th June – zoom meeting with AVA NSW Division President, Dr Diane Ryan, and AVA Senior Advocacy Officer, , discussing AVA plans for future emergency responses.

4th July – phone conversation with Scott Myers RSPCA. RSPCA were mobilised initially, however had not been tasked, despite Scott Myers contacting DPI multiple times.

Appendix 8

Email from Paul Tyrrell, CEO of Australian Helicopter Industry Association.

On 3 Jun 2022, at 12:08 pm, Paul Tyrrell <ceo@austhia.com> wrote:

Hi Pip

Fodder drops can be done by most helicopters

Rescue helicopters often have winches and specialised crew. They were available.

There was no lack of helicopters. There was a lack of coordination and tasking between the SES and the RFS.

There were no major airspace issues.

Happy to discuss further

Rgds

Paul

Report of Veterinary Emergency Taskforce – 19/1/11

The Australian Veterinary Association Veterinary Emergency Taskforce (AVA-VET or better known as “ava vet” [= have a vet]).

On Thursday February 13, 2011, I contacted the RSPCA as well as the Manager (Asia-Pacific Region) of WSPA (DR Ian Dacre a NZ veterinarian & good colleague of mine) who was in Australia with his team from Bangkok at the request of the RSPCA due to their special disaster management skills. It was decided that we would visit the worst affected areas of the Lockyer Valley the following day meeting at the Ipswich evacuation area (Ipswich Showgrounds). This was to assess the animal welfare issues associated with the devastation of the region.

On Friday, examination of the horses at the Ipswich Showgrounds demonstrated mostly animals in very poor condition which got the RSPCA inspectors involved instantly. One of the other horses had had veterinary treatment for lacerations caused by running through a barb wire fence to escape the flood waters. Its wounds were heavily infected.

Next call was the UQ Gatton Hospital where we met Louise Cosgrove (Laidley practitioner) who had seen a large number of the affected horses post-flash flood. She informed us that she had run out of euthanasia solution, penicillin, tetanus vaccines and bandages. She had called in to the Equine Hospital, borrowed all of theirs as well as the small animal clinic's euthanasia solution supplies (all of which were also used up). I informed her and UQ of the Provet scheme (Nicola personally delivered these supplies first thing on Saturday morning).

From there we moved through Gatton to Grantham. Here we had to pass through a police road block and report to the Officer-in-Charge. Although we had permission from EMQ, no one had informed the Inspector at the scene who initially informed us we had to leave the crime scene. After some discussion and some phone calls, we were allowed to stay but were required to have a police escort wherever we went. We met with the local Lockyer Council animal control officers who were attempting to capture and relocate all of the abandoned animals. They were working as a team of 2 and were almost overwhelmed by the task (which they had almost completed – relocating the animals to the UQ small animal facility). Most of the dogs and all of the cats were fear aggressive and this had to be overcome first. These men did a remarkable job in the circumstances. Interestingly, not one of the animals was microchipped.

There were a large number of pet birds in cages which had survived and these were also being relocated to UQ. For the remaining animals that were difficult to catch, fresh palatable water was an issue identified and a water container was organized by the RSPCA (but entry permission was not granted). Small water containers were filled by the council officers as needed from this. The council officers seemed to have free access to where they needed to go (without a police escort). All dead animals were

either buried or removed as soon as they were able which was advantageous as decomposition was proceeding rapidly due to the heat and tissue trauma that most had suffered prior to death. With our police escort we also inspected the Murphys Creek locality which was equally, if not more, devastated as Grantham.

Since then we have had 2 AVA teleconferences as well as 2 “Animal Welfare Flood Control Group” teleconferences. Via these, the majority of issues identified by the parties have been resolved or are “in action”.

Issues identified with relevance to the AVA:

1. Access to emergency drugs – this needs to be available to the vets where they are if isolated (i.e. via helicopter drop, if necessary) – this was reported to DEEDI and Janine Barrett is working through this as it was not considered an essential item previously.
2. Identification of veterinary practices in flood affected areas. It is very difficult to get a list of veterinary practices in Qld (the VSB won’t release this information) but a list was obtained from confidential sources. The AVAQ team was then able to cross-reference with postcodes from Centrelink. This is a time consuming process and perhaps AVA could build a database of veterinary practices (as opposed to individual veterinarians) and we can then record if and when they are affected by things such as floods. The identified practices were then phoned to see how they were.
3. Maintaining a “Contact List” of relevant persons for emergencies such as DEEDI, DERM, RSPCA, Provet, EMQ, AWL, Biosecurity Qld (or whatever their name is next week) etc.. This can then be used in the emergency scenario to inform them of our presence and availability.
4. Having up to date media releases ready to go out as soon as needed. Absolutely essential if we want the AVA to be considered as a serious participant. Other peak bodies have these releases organized well in advance and their media people feed the news outlets at appropriate times. The Press then see them as a good source.
5. Identification of stock (especially horses) before euthanasia and a witness to the process (including photos especially video evidence).
6. I feel that a veterinarian should, where possible, accompany the RSPCA and council teams when they move into these disaster zones. The decision to euthanase is not always an easy one and if a vet accompanied a group of inspectors, he/she could help in the decision making process. We need the inspectors to gain access to properties (we were refused permission to examine a mob of horse that had been stranded). This vet could be a volunteer or an RSPCA vet.
7. Pet evacuation Centres. These should be available for the public to leave their pet before their own evacuation if so desired. They need not be at the same place as the human centres (although this is desirable). An arrangement could be made with someone such as Dogtainers to have available a ready supply of collapsible cages which can be stored at the Evac Centre as soon as it is set up. They would then be used as needed and the Centre could be staffed by volunteer veterinarians and nurses. The Brisbane Evacuation Centre requirement for volunteers

to do 12 hour shifts was ludicrous. I have had many complaints from vets/vet nurses who volunteered and when rung said they could do 6 hours (or similar) and were told they weren't wanted unless they could do the full 12 hours. Many of these volunteers had normal jobs to go to which was not possible if they also did a 12 hour shift. Boredom in a 12 hour shift is another issue.

8. Post-emergency, I think we should push for a closer relationship between (selected) parties and set up some communication lines between these groups.

I would like to personally thank the wonderful work put in by the staff and all the volunteers during this crisis especially Amanda, Gill, David, Trish and Nigel.

Signed

Gary Wilson

AVA Veterinary Emergency Taskforce

Duties of Chair

- 1 list important contacts:
 - a. AVA National – Marcia Balzer
 - b. Previous taskforce Chair – Norm Blackburn
 - c. Qld Div AVA – Amanda Gill (office)
 - d. Co-ordinator of vet volunteers – David Paxton
 - e. Co-ordinator of vet nurse volunteers – Trudi Humphrey
 - f. RSPCA – Tracey Jackson (Asst Chief Inspector Qld)
 - g. WSPA – Ian Dacre (Asia-Pacific manager)
 - h. AWL – Denise Bradley (CEO AWL Qld)
 - i. Provet – Glenda (use their networks)
 - j. Lyppards – Jenni (“)

- 2 List of veterinary practices in affected areas:
 - a. Centrelink list of affected postcodes
 - b. Match with AVA lists & other lists of veterinary practices
 - c. Qld Division office staff doing this task
 - d. Contact vets in affected areas to check if the practice is affected & if they need help
 - i. For the practice
 - ii. For themselves & their families
 - e. Not just AVA members

- 3 Donations:
 - a. Money is the preferred donation
 - b. Donations for veterinary goods – Provet Appeal co-ordinator – Nicola
 - c. Donations for AVA Benevolent fund to AVA National
 - d. All donors must be recognized and thanked (for potential future donations) by AVA

- 4 Plan & propose pet evacuation centres
 - a. AVA to be involved with the set up process
 - b. Centres could be kennels/pounds/suitable vet practices
 - c. Easily accessed by the public

- d. Organize volunteer vet/vet nurse visits to evacuation centres
 - e. Vets paid for medications used/dispensed (or reimbursed from Provet Fund)
- 5 Stray cattle/livestock:
- a. If found, get person to contact DEEDI on 132 523 & follow the prompts to Biosecurity Qld
 - b. If injured animals, contact AVA for vet volunteer 3423 1844
 - c. Horses – treat as for livestock
- 6 Wildlife:
- a. Contact RSPCA, AWL or AVA
 - b. If injured, extreme care with attempted handling (only if necessary) and contact above urgently
 - c. Make list of wildlife groups & contacts
 - d. Organize contacts for emergency wildlife carers
- 7 Government negotiation & future planning
- a. Joint taskforce AVA, WSPA, RSPCA, AWL, Biosecurity Qld (DPI)
 - b. See 4 above
 - c. Vets are an underutilized but very valuable resource for any emergency including both urban emergencies as well as rural emergencies and disasters
 - i. Should be on the special needs list for continuity of power & supplies
 - ii. Government should pay vets as they do other essential contractors in emergencies
 - d. Make contacts with other emergency response agencies for future involvements



EVDS EQUINE VETERINARY &
DENTAL SERVICES PTY LTD

www.evds.net.au

www.evds.vet

ABN 86 145 125 837

Dr Oliver Liyou
BVSc (Hons1) MACVSc (EqDent)
and Associates

Ph: 02 6642 4700
Fax: 02 6642 8564
Email: vets@evds.net.au

160 Old Lilypool Rd
SOUTH GRAFTON
NSW 2460

PO Box 95
SOUTH GRAFTON
NSW 2460

DENTISTRY

STUD WORK

CASTRATIONS

GENERAL ELECTIVE WORK

VET TRAINING

DENTAL INSTRUMENTS

Observations and recommendations from the NSW Northern Rivers Floods March 2022.

By Dr Oliver Liyou BVSc (MANZCVS – Equine Dentistry)

29/3/22

Observations:

- 1) Lack of an apparent Record High Major Flood Disaster Plan by everyone from the grassroots people through to government - In an area renowned for its flooding. The severity and speed of this “1 in 500–1000-year flood” obviously caught everyone by surprise.
- 2) The only ones not surprised by the severity of this flood were the climate scientists who have been warning of severe weather events like this for decades.
- 3) The delayed and widely criticised delay in deploying government funded assistance to humans in dire need was mirrored in the small and large animals in need of rescue, fodder and veterinary assistance.
- 4) Early on in the floods – from March 1 until March 4, social media (eg FB page - Flood Displaced Livestock – Northern Rivers – had 835 members on March 1, and this grew to 6,500 by March 28) was the most up to date and accurate indicator of the severity and enormity of the severity of the situation affecting livestock and horses. Other than these, it was near impossible to gauge the extent of losses. Vets in Choppers started on the 4th-5th of March, and their findings confirmed that extent of the damage being described on social media.
- 5) The local private veterinarians e.g., Lismore Equine Vet Dr Bruno Ros and Pip Johnson seemed to be much more in touch with the actual severity and impact of the situation than the Government Local Land Services veterinarian that I spoke to, throughout the response. The LLS vets seemed to be good people but bound by red tape restrictions. There was considerable variation in the assessment of the situation as the days progressed. Dr Bruno Ros had contacted DPI on March 1, requested urgent assistance, and received little response until 9-10 days later.
- 6) There was an apparent dismissal and continued downplaying of the severity of the flood’s impact on livestock and horses by LLS veterinarians. The reason for this gradually became apparent and can be put down largely to the failure of their 1800 814 647 Ag and Animal Services Hotline to be utilised and phoned by livestock and horse owners.
This Hotline Number was not well known about prior to the floods, and mobile phone reception was poor to non-existent through the height of the disaster period – where many large animal owners had lost power, phone, electricity, and internet.
There were many reports of people being able to send Facebook messages, or text but not actually use their phones to call others for help.
- 7) When I continually heard from the LLS Vet that the DPI hotline was not being called much, I realised that it was not able to receive text messages or social media messages, then on March 4, EVDS set up 2 mobile phones and our FB page as a messaging portal for livestock and horse owners to phone and these were disseminated via Social Media groups and became busy as a portal for requests for fodder and veterinary assistance. We were then able to log the fodder requests to the 1800 number along with sending out private volunteer vets.

- 8) After setting up these 2 mobile phones and FB messenger, and a Whatts App video hook up meeting on March 4, EVDS assisted in setting up a Central Command Post at the Primex Site at Casino on March 6, and then co-ordinated most of the “outside” private veterinary response work – knowing that many of the local veterinary practitioners had been severely impacted by the floods. Dr Pip Bacon became the team leader of the CCP from 8.30 am on March 6.
- 9) On Wednesday March 9, DPI Director General Scott Hansen, NSW Minister for Agriculture Doug Saunders and Shadow Minister for Agriculture Mick Veitch, visited the Private Vets CCP to ask what we needed and thanked us for our efforts.
- 10) Lara Johnson – Practice Manager from EVDS continued to liaise directly to the DPI Hierarchy and requested their promises in writing, after an initial withdrawal of some of their offers in the meeting.
- 11) As per Dr Pip Johnson’s summary of the post flood briefing meeting held at Primex on March 22, 2022 between the Central Command Post persons including local vets, local helpers and chopper pilots, there were some observed short comings from the Local Lands Services response:

A). Our observed concerns about the Government Local Lands Services (LLS) response:

- *Inability to evaluate full scope of emergency and initiate appropriate level of response.*
- *Lack of repeated, methodical, experienced air surveillance - need to be efficient in identifying stock in need of fodder and / or veterinary attention and calculating requirements.*
Maximum recommended period without food in emergency situation is 72 hours (as per Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2012 Part 5 Enforcement Section 27) - this needs to be reiterated with all LLS veterinarians – with one LLS vet quoting that “cows can survive for up to 2 weeks without food” and another asking, “why can’t the livestock just drink the flood water?”
- *Reliance on and subsequent failure of 1800 number in initial 10 days - owners were unaware of the Ag Dept’s 1800 814 647 number, had minimal (if any) phone service, issue of stranded stock and inability of owner to log these jobs, minimal ongoing air surveillance conducted within first 7 days post disaster by LLS for this purpose, and / or request for fodder logged and owner received no fodder and / or no further communication.*
- *It took until March 8 for the LLS to organise a mobile phone number and general email that could be advertised for land holders to be able to text or email through requests for fodder or veterinary assistance.*
- *When this new DPI/LLS Veterinary service was dummy tested on 10th of March, the caller was told that there were “No vets available for 24 hours”.*
- *Lack of immediate mobilisation of appropriate relevant assistance / organisations - eg helicopters for air fodder deliveries, local council, RSPCA.*
- *Lack of directive and formalised ID process for deceased animals - difficulty with insurance and for owners to get closure. Finger pointing between council, DPI, and contractors as to what was the responsibility and procedure for identifying carcasses.*
- *Lack of communication with local knowledge - eg veterinarians, landholders, local council and volunteer groups already active in area.*

B). Coordinated veterinary response

– it was left up to us surrounding and local private veterinarians – who had little training in disaster response co-ordination, so we had to work from first principles, setting up the Central Command Post, hotline, deployment of vets, networking with other stake holders and government agencies etc. We had to leave our regular practices to perform this task.

- Vets Beyond Borders (VBB) had literally hundreds of vets offering to help out with the flood response, but VBB could not ask for vets and nurses to come help, unless they had been requested by the Animal Welfare League (AWL) who was being instructed on the need for outside assistance from the LLS – who was monitoring the magnitude of the need for assistance from how busy the 1800 number was. The 1800 number fail's impact was far reaching.
- And even if the VBB vets and nurses did arrive to help, there was little in the way of strategy or organisation in place for them, had we not set up the Central Command Post at Primex , Casino.

Moving Forward recommendations:

- 1) Need to discuss further on how to co-ordinate private vets for the next disaster with AVA and Vets Beyond Borders – possibly role model the reported successful response to the 2021 and 2022 WA fires. Drs Martin Dolinschek and Michael Paton will have details. Need co-ordination and proactive work – not reactive.
- 2) Discuss with AVA – in planning for and in the event of the next emergency:
 - a) contact all local veterinarians immediately via Vet Surgeon Board contact details, via text (NOT email or phone call) to determine if affected and / or capacity to assist.
 - b) work with Vets Beyond Border to have updated and clinically relevant list of volunteers that is suitable for the disaster experienced and the animals affected.
 - c) Support local clinics that have been affected - financially, emotionally, and physically.
 - d) AVA/EVA/CVA/SAVA to communicate with DPI and LLS government departments in all states to plan for response to next natural disaster and how it can be done better – to ensure an IMMEDIATELY ACTIONABLE plan and open communication channels between Private and Government Veterinarians. NEED TO HAVE ALL GOVERNMENT STAFF AWARE OF THESE PLANS, HOW TO ACCESS AND ACTION THEM. Apparently, there WAS one available for use in a disaster like these floods, but no current government staff on the ground seemed to know about it or its whereabouts?
 - e) Insurance of volunteers helping – this was not possible (according to Guild and our Workers Compensation company) for the volunteers helping at EVDS, so indemnity waivers had to be signed. Maybe possible to gain cover for them via RSPCA or local councils?
 - f) Provide recommendations on Managing and planning on how to co-ordinate the offers for help from outside of the region in the way of donated goods, funds, personal help etc.
 - g) Continue to do as AVA/EVA did in these floods by providing vets with educational resources that can help the vets on ground feel less overwhelmed. Also, assisting to disseminate information to local treating vets on how to invoice the LLS for initial treatments etc.

- h) *AVA to employ or work with an effective and well connected media strategist on the impacts of the natural disaster on the local animals, so that as much support from afar can be gathered.*
- i) *Possibly have AVA/EVA set up a GoFundMe page that all potential donators can be directed to by people on the ground. But please not that this task has a lot of "tentacles"! Alternatively contact GIVIT to organise prior arrangements for allocations to animal species in event of disasters, so that they can be confidently recommended.*
- j) *Work with local and state and federal governments to ensure there are private and public evacuation centres and contingency plans for livestock and domestic animals in the event of all types of natural disasters in all parts of Australia (fires, floods, earth quakes, tsunamis)*
- k) *Consider the setting up of a government or privately sponsored/funded Livestock and Horse Disaster Response Convoy (could cost \$1-4 million to set up) that could include, but not limited to:*
 - a. *Semi-trailer/s to transport - around Australia - the smaller vehicles such as:*
 - i. *hover crafts – best option in floods,*
 - ii. *all-terrain vehicles (gators or mules) fitted out with winches, bog apparatuses etc,*
 - iii. *Possibly amphibian type buggies?*
 - iv. *boats with all the safety equipment*
 - v. *firefighting tanks and equipment.*
 - b. *A custom engineered floating river barge fitted out with jet engines and cattle rail panels, hi-ab type crane etc to be able to manoeuvre in flooded rivers and rescue livestock and horses on flooded rivers, along with delivering fodder to stranded stock etc.*
 - c. *TLAER horse models and liaison with SES, Anthony Hatch etc.*
 - d. *Choppers or direct access to local chopper companies, ready to move quickly in a Natural Disaster event.*
 - e. *Small camp kitchen set up, bunks, water, toilet etc to be able to accommodate the Rapid Response team for the first week or two.*
 - f. *VHF radios in case of Mobile Phone Tower failure (the batteries go flat in floods etc), EPIRB transmitters, drones etc.*

If thousands of cattle and horses were lost in this flood event, then the economic cost of animal losses from this one flood could easily exceed \$5 Million. This number of losses could have been significantly reduced through a faster response, choppers in the air to drop down to open gates, cut fences, identify trouble areas emerging etc.

Final Note: Please provide feedback to me on AVA/EVA's thoughts of the above points, so that if AVA/EVA is unable or not wanting to address any of the points, that i can let others who are keen to take them up that they need to proceed.

Many thanks for asking for my thoughts on this terrible event.

All the best,

Oli

5th July 2022.

To whom it may concern.

Hi Pip,

Thanks for asking how the emergency fodder went from my perspective. Happy to put my experiences forward to the current inquiry on the 2022 flood response – North Coast.

It was very poorly administered early on and got a lot worse before better as the week and weeks went on.

Having been a key provider of Emergency fodder in the bushfire events in recent years, I was engaged by LLS to source Emergency Fodder through our Norco rural store network, on top of that I organized the Fodder depot at the Primex site, with whom I have called upon previously as in the bushfires and other field days etc. This was all relayed blow by blow to the LLS staff, as I was acting on their behalf until they arrived to take over.

I sourced quite promptly from our suppliers approx. 12 truck loads of local hay from the non-flooded areas we could safely access, close to Casino, this meant the very next day we had product available for affected stock.

It was clear to myself and the local LLS that this was going to be a catastrophic event and would require large amounts of Emergency Fodder for stock welfare provisions. I commenced sourcing from further afield more loads of hay and had another 6 to 8 trucks on the way for AM delivery to the fodder depot.

At 8.45am on the 2nd day I received a call advising to halt any further hay coming, the hay on the road would be ok, but, no more, enough was sourced. I was gob smacked to say the least. This is day 2 of what went on to be 5 weeks+.

The caller was from the DPI led Emergency LCC and was merely delivering me the message, I did question the directive, and he felt embarrassed but was only the messenger. I immediately called LLS management and asked if that really was the plan to cease supply... It wasn't and no one could fathom that directive, given the enormity of the disaster.

It wasn't until I spoke to an LLS employee in the planning side and spelt out the craziness of the cease to supply strategy that no one could understand. The staff member advised, "I understand, keep the hay coming". He did this using common sense and I can't help but assume over stepped his authority, but in doing so the LCC chief needs to thank him for his initiative.

Whoever was in the LCC had no idea of the supply lead times, nor the enormity of the event and had that staff member not made that decision, it would have been a complete disaster of unimaginable magnitude and liability would be far reaching.

A key point that can't go unsaid, there were so many staff changes in the LCC it was like watching the movie 50 First dates... each person needed a full induction of where things were upto and just as they understood the workings, gone, next new person. So much so it was very unfair on those people who had no flow and strategy that would be meaningful. That is a major flaw, not many of them could fathom what we were doing let alone organize ongoing protocols.

I was also informed by the LCC that this was a Norco run Emergency response as far as fodder and its distribution was concerned, again he was likely just the messenger, well I sincerely hope so.. I denied that, as we are Hay merchants who has myself with the operational ability to kick this off, he needed

to send his operational staff in asap to take over. I advised him if that is the case that has us as the lead distribution group, the depot gates are being shut and that's the end of the depot. I'm sorry to say that the information and strategy I was being told was so amateurish I thought it was a joke...Norco was at no point contracted to be a lead in the distribution and fodder site running, we did that (out of need) for nearly 5 days with NO personnel support from LLS or from DPI, I understand LLS were instructed to keep away and leave it to the DPI..This meant no locals could offer local input to the LCC. It also meant I had no help in the setup of the depot - ZERO. I called in 2 staff of Norco's field service team to assist whilst we awaited LLS / DPI staff to arrive and take over, still, no one came. The excuse was all staff are flooded in. This was a lie as LLS staff were there picking up hay on behalf of themselves and their neighbor's, and, when asked if they could assist advised they have offered to work 3 times and were told they are not required, very disheartening when that feedback comes forward. It wasn't until after the event, I was advised that DPI had told LLS not to send staff.

The first LLS on site was the Board Chairman Bob Smith, who came to give support and was shocked when he learnt of the no LLS or DPI on site. He took that higher in LLS. Bob stayed for quite a few days and loaded hay manually, should not have had to at his age and our need for assistance was real. Second LLS on site was Board member Adam Chapman, as soon as he could access the town he arrived to review proceedings and again, turned straight into a manual handling role. Next LLS staff member was , who against orders had been activated to attend and take over the dispatch of hay and stock management. This was great as for the first 4+ days myself and 2 staff had all in and out hay being done manually, so as to maintain the stock holding integrity as this was public funds buying the fodder. We had it all accounted for, manually and then on personal laptops administering the inwards and outwards of public property, that was incredible to think the LCC thought that was best practice. It was quite clear the DPI had a massive disconnect from reality, no policy or at best policy on the run. It was a shambles to say the least.

Minister Dugald Saunders came to visit. He saw firsthand our shortage of assistance and I aired a portion of my concerns to him re the above, as it wasn't the time and place to discuss. Minister Saunders and the shadow minister both rolled up their sleeves and assisted when they saw a 70-year-old woman trying to load her emergency hay. Thankfully no one on site was injured. The help for a few hours from these gents was excellent.

The 1800 number was grossly under staffed, I don't know what went on there but heard many bad comments around this, - ie no answer, message left no return calls, lack of empathy shown, no knowledge of system workings. Etc etc

Let me say this, there were some excellent staff in this response, unfortunately the LCC was a closed door to most if not all of them. If it wasn't for these staff working from the sidelines, it would have been a Royal commission instead of an Inquiry.

Please follow up this part of the response (Emergency Fodder Depot) with the following people for clarification and further input. (This is just a small snapshot & I am happy to elaborate further).

Bob Smith - LLS Board Chair

Louise Orr - GM Nth Coast LLS

Minister Dugald Saunders

LLS staff in Operations LCC.

LLS Acting GM at the time.

Deniliquin LLS - who was onsite administering hay movements.

In summary I conclude as below:

1. In the area of organization and delivery of initial response Local (Regional) staff must be responsible, and have authorities, for organization and effective delivery. Current system, as evidenced by my documented experiences, removes decision making to persons isolated from the emerging emergency, with consequences that decisions by persons in leadership roles do not reflect the reality, and actions, necessary to effectively, and in timely manner and the needs of clients.
2. Related to my above comment it is imperative to implement a more effective 1800 response system that meets the needs of clients. The current arrangements are clunky and frustrating for clients adding further distress to clients. In particular, the staffing of the 1800 number, must be at a level to respond to client requests in timely and satisfactory manner. The 1800 number is the initial gateway for clients to receive assistance. Experience highlighted that the initial 1800 system did not work, generating frustrations and anxieties for clients.
3. Moving down the logistics system it's important that accurate intelligence is used to guide decision making on the resources (for example fodder requirements and associated support services) required to meet client needs are delivered in a timely and client friendly manner.
4. The inputs from private vets, including their intelligence from surveillance activities, be more effectively incorporated into response systems.

Finally, in this emergency event, if it hadn't been for Local LLS involvement, likely overstepping their roles, this would have been much much worse. This fodder supply event needs an in-depth review, particularly of how the DPI and LLS interact and how support mechanisms are activated to include suppliers, clients, the ADF and staff from both agencies. Please review this information, this poor management must never re occur. Should further input be required please contact me.

Regards Bruce Lyle.