Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper
Submission IP214
Australian Wildlife Health Network
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Australian
Wildlife Health
Network

4 April 2014

Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Taskforce members,

AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE HEALTH NETWORK (AWHN) SUBMISSION: AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS WHITE PAPER – WILDLIFE DISEASE AND DISEASE AGENT RISKS

Please find attached a submission to the Taskforce regarding feral animals, native wildlife and disease and Australia's future agricultural competitiveness.

Diseases and disease agents of feral animals and native wildlife pose a risk to Australia's future agricultural competitiveness.

Detection of disease and disease agents in wildlife, and the lack of evidence of absence to satisfy trading partners can impact upon trade and market access. Having surveillance for disease agents that are outside Australia and the collection of data on agents within Australia is important.

The better our knowledge of the distribution of such agents the better Australia can be placed for exports.

We are happy to discuss this submission with you face to face should you feel it would assist the working group. We hope that our submission helps you with this important work.

Best Wishes,

Rupert Woods

Rupert Woods PhD
Manager, AWHN

AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE HEALTH NETWORK (AWHN) SUBMISSION: DISCUSSION PAPER - AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS WHITE PAPER

THE IMPORTANCE OF WILDLIFE HEALTH TO AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS

Diseases and disease agents of feral animals and wildlife pose a threat to Australia's future agricultural competitiveness:

- Wildlife are hosts and/or reservoirs for important diseases and disease agents that can affect trade and market access (e.g. tuberculosis in possums).
- **Detection of disease and disease agents in wildlife, and the lack of evidence of absence to satisfy trading partners, can impact upon trade and market access**.
- Furthermore, wildlife are susceptible to many of the important emergency diseases of production animals and spillover to humans and food animals can occur (e.g. foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever, avian influenza, Nipah virus, Surra etc).
- Wildlife are also the most common source of emerging diseases and these diseases can impact upon people and food animals (Jones et al 2008, McFarlane et al 2012).

These risks will become greater with changing land use, climate change and as societal attitudes bring wildlife, livestock and people into closer contact.

THE SOLUTION: SURVEILLANCE AND THE INTEGRATION OF WILDLIFE HEALTH INTO NATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

- There is a need to improve education and knowledge of diseases with wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact upon Australia's future agricultural competitiveness and to prepare for and respond to these risks.
- Having surveillance for disease agents that are outside Australia (e.g. demonstrating that Australian possums are free of tuberculosis) and the collection of data on agents within Australia (e.g. avian influenza viruses) is important. **The better our knowledge of the distribution of such agents the better Australia can be placed for exports**.

PRIORITY ACTIONS: SUPPORT FOR INFORMATION GATHERING FROM WILDLIFE TO SUPPORT ANIMAL HEALTH, TRADE AND MARKET ACCESS

- It is vital in future that Australia be able to show that it is free of diseases and disease agents that can affect or be carried by wildlife and feral animals that can jeopardise our trade and market access.
- There is a need to further develop Australia's national wildlife health system to support Australia's animal health.
- Wildlife surveillance sources differ from production sources and need separate support.
- **There are opportunities to quickly and easily build upon existing structures such as the newly formed Wildlife Health Australia.**

RELEVANT TECHNICAL INFORMATION SUPPORTING OUR COMMENTS OR PRIORITY ACTIONS

Jones KE, NG Patel, MA Levy, A Storeygard, D Balk, JL Gittleman, P Daszak (2008) Global trends in emerging infectious diseases. Nature 451:990-995.

McFarlane R, A Sleigh and T McMichael (2012) Synanthropy of wild mammals as a determinant of emerging infectious diseases in the Asian–Australasian region. EcoHealth 9(1):24-35.

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE HEALTH NETWORK

AWHN was established in 2002 under PISC/AHC to facilitate investigation and management of wildlife health in support of human and animal health, biodiversity and trade. The core activity is national coordination of wildlife health surveillance and management of the national wildlife health database to provide information to improve decision making, management and policy development to protect Australia's trade, human health, livestock health and biodiversity.

AWHN activities are driven by the increasing risk of emergency and emerging diseases impacting on Australia's trade, human health and biodiversity. Spillover occurs and is an important issue for productions animals and human health. AWHN provides a framework that allows Australia to better identify, assess, articulate and manage these risks. Activities assist in limiting the deleterious impact of wildlife disease on primary industries, natural ecosystems and human health, to provide ecological, economic and social benefits to Australia.

AWHN is complimentary to existing organisations and does not duplicate their operations. It supports animal biosecurity in Australia.

AWHN directly supports the Animal Health Committee (AHC), Animal Health Australia (AHA), the Animal Health Policy Branch and the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (OCVO) within DA and Australian governments in their efforts to better prepare and protect Australia against the adverse effects of wildlife diseases. It provides priorities in wildlife disease work, administers Australia's general wildlife disease surveillance system as well as facilitating and coordinating targeted projects. Wildlife health intelligence collected through the National Wildlife Health Information System (eWHIS: http://www.wildlifehealth.org.au/) administered by AWHN is provided to members of AHC and the Australian Government DA, and Departments of Health (DA) and Environment (DE), on issues of potential national interest, potential emerging issues and significant disease outbreaks in wildlife. The information is provided in line with the agreed policy for data security.

The Network is administered under corporate governance principles. A management group, chaired by an appointment from DA provides strategic direction and advice to an operations committee, which oversees the running of the Network. It is important to note that the network involves almost every agency or organisation (both government and NGO) that has a stake or interest in animal and wildlife health issues in Australia. In addition the Network also comprises more than 500 wildlife health professionals and others from around Australia and the rest of the world who have an interest in diseases with feral animals or wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact on Australia's trade, human health and biodiversity.

Following two years of planning and consultation, the AWHN has now commenced a process of decommissioning and over the next year will be replaced by the separate legal entity Wildlife Health Australia Inc (Wildlife Health Australia: WHA). More information on this exciting development for Australia is available at: http://www.wildlifehealth.org.au/.