

FOR INFORMATION

NSDIP Advisory Committee Teleconference Meeting 2023

Agenda Item 1.1

Last updated: **23 August 2023**

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WHA REPORT – NSDI PROGRAM FOR WILDLIFE**RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the NSDIP Advisory Committee NOTES WHA's report on the NSDI Program for wildlife

BACKGROUND

2. Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) administers the NSDIP wildlife disease investigation funds on behalf of AHA. NSDIP funds also support a sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network coordinated by WHA.

DISCUSSION**3. Wildlife disease investigations**

The process for NSDIP wildlife disease investigations is as follows:

- WHA and the state/territory WHA coordinator make a joint decision on whether to provide NSDIP funds for an investigation. WHA determines the veterinary subsidy and considers the laboratory subsidy within the context of the national budget.
- On completion of the investigation, payments are made directly from WHA to the veterinarian and the laboratory.
- Funded investigations are entered into the national wildlife health database (eWHIS) and into the NSDIP project of the NAHIS database by WHA.

Summary of funded investigations

In 2022-23, 13 wildlife disease investigations were approved for funding through the NSDIP. There were more than 10 additional enquiries or applications that did not progress, either because they did not meet the NSDIP criteria, they were approved but could not be completed (e.g. no further cases presented or samples could not be obtained), or the veterinarian did not submit a case report or invoice. Samples were submitted to a combination of government, university and private laboratories. Funded investigations were from Queensland (5 events), WA (4), Victoria (2), Tasmania (1) and NSW (1).

Taxonomic group	Number of events	Species
Birds	6	Corellas, bowerbirds, shearwaters, mixed waterfowl, Carnaby's cockatoos, silver-eyes
Mammals	4	Koala, brushtail possum, eastern grey kangaroos, little red flying-foxes
Reptiles	3	Shingleback, bluetongue, eastern water dragon

Presenting syndrome	Number of events
Neurological signs	4
Skin lesions	3
Ill-thrift/weight loss	2
Weakness/depression	1
Circulatory	1
Sudden death	1
Lameness	1

Examples of funded investigations include:

- Seasonal mortality of corellas
- Eastern water dragon with skin lesions
- Koala with neurological signs
- Flying-fox mortality and neurological signs
- Kangaroos with haemorrhage

Veterinarians have indicated that NSDI Program funds allow investigation of wildlife cases and diagnostic testing that would not otherwise be possible. The program has also improved communication between veterinarians and the state/territory WHA coordinators, particularly for those private veterinarians that are not involved in a WHA surveillance program. An example of feedback from a veterinarian:

"I have made some really good connections from this process... and increasing contact with the [state government] labs. This will make further investigations much smoother. I really appreciate the support."

4. Sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network

WHA continued to manage a wildlife sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network in 2022-23. Veterinary clinics in the surveillance network are those that have a large or dedicated wildlife caseload, or expand the geographic or species range of the national surveillance system. Ten clinics participated in 2022-23, and an additional suitable clinic was identified by WHA to join the program.

The participating sentinel veterinary clinics see a total caseload of over 37,500 free-ranging wildlife cases per year. The clinics contribute wildlife disease information directly to WHA's national wildlife health database (eWHIS) based on national priorities for data capture. Since the sentinel clinic surveillance program was established in 2014, the clinics have contributed over 900 disease events involving over 140 different wildlife species into eWHIS, the majority of which would not have been captured into the national information system without the sentinel clinic surveillance network. The coordinators from the sentinel clinics meet quarterly by teleconference along with the zoo and university wildlife disease surveillance program participants to discuss interesting cases, share information and establish contacts.

Veterinarians at the sentinel clinics have indicated that their participation leads to improved disease investigations because: a) participant funding allows additional diagnostic investigation; b) participation in a national surveillance program provides impetus and justification for spending time on wildlife cases that do not bring in income; and c) significant events can be investigated due to access to NSDIP funds through their ongoing relationship with WHA. The program increases engagement and collaboration between sentinel clinic participants and the state/territory government agency in relation to wildlife disease investigations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5. Disease investigations

In 2022-23, the NSDIP budget for wildlife disease investigations was \$11,355. The full budget was allocated, however the final figures may change as there are 3 investigations not yet finalised at the time of this report.

The veterinary subsidies for wildlife disease investigations ranged from \$400 to \$500 depending on the level of investigation, and laboratory subsidies ranged from \$0 to \$1600 (average for events with lab subsidies of \$970).

6. *Sentinel clinics*

The 2022-23 NSDIP funds of \$11,355 were utilised for payments to clinics for their participation in the sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network (\$5,000 per clinic).

FEEDBACK

7. The NSDIP funds are very valuable for enabling wildlife disease investigations and supporting the sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network. Through the program, private veterinarians interact with the state/territory WHA Coordinator to discuss appropriate diagnostics and submission of samples, which helps increase their knowledge and strengthens relationships between private vets and the WHA Coordinator, which can lead to better investigations and reporting in future. The delegation to WHA of the administration of the NSDIP wildlife funds allows the program to function efficiently and effectively on a national basis.