

FOR INFORMATION

NAHIP Advisory Committee Annual Meeting 2021

Agenda Item 2.1

Last updated: **24 November 2021**

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Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Update on relevant activities and issues influencing Australia's animal health surveillance needs

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the NAHIP Advisory Committee NOTE
 - a. the relevant activities the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment is currently involved in (Attachment A)
 - b. Note the overview of the AUSPestCheck™ trial (Attachment B)

BACKGROUND

2. The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the department) provides an annual paper for the information of the NAHIP Advisory Committee to:
 - provide an update for the NAHIP Advisory Committee on relevant activities of the department;
 - inform the NAHIP Advisory Committee of identified issues that may affect Australia's animal health surveillance needs; and
 - highlight areas of the NAHIP that trading partners may scrutinise and use to assess Australia's animal health status.
3. Animal surveillance underpins Australia's trade and market access, supports early detection of emergency and emerging animal diseases, and enables monitoring of significant endemic diseases.
4. The department is frequently required to provide current surveillance information to overseas authorities. Existing surveillance data, combined with descriptive information about our system, is usually sufficient to address most of these queries. However, this process is resource intensive for the department and partners. There are also instances where the department has experienced challenges in obtaining the data and information required.
5. In recent years, biosecurity threats have increased, and trading partners demanding more robust evidence in support of Australia's claims about its animal health status. Trading partners and the OIE are now moving towards requiring sound 'evidence of absence', rather than simply 'absence of evidence'.
6. In June 2018, the department commenced a proof-of-concept trial of AUSPestCheck™ for national sharing of animal health surveillance data in June 2018. Additional extensions to the grant have been made in March 2019 and May 2021. The May 2021 grant extension includes targeted workshops and training to support improved provision and utilisation of national data in addition to software upgrades and ongoing support for the trial. An overview of the trial is provided in Attachment B.
7. Significant funding for additional further IT upgrades and support activities has also been provided for financial years 2021/22-2024/25, as part of the Australian Government June 2021 budget. The department is planning to schedule workshops in February 2022 to codesign this project with partners. This project is tentatively titled 'Surveillance in Action' (SIA).

DISCUSSION

8. Surveillance to demonstrate emergency animal disease and nationally notifiable animal disease exclusions in Australia is important to substantiate Australia's claimed animal health status and support trade negotiations. Trading partners regularly question Australia's self-declared disease status. Surveillance of some form is necessary to support Australia's claims to ensure import policy is science-based, trade is not disrupted, and unnecessary import conditions are not applied to Australian animal-based exports.
9. In many cases, NAHIP is meeting the current requirements of the Australian Government in substantiating Australia's claimed animal health status and supporting trade negotiations. The report 'National sharing of terrestrial animal health surveillance data' prepared in 2018 by Ausvet included several issues with the current systems of data sharing, management and analysis at the national level. Enhancement to national sharing of animal health surveillance data should provide a more complete picture of animal health, provide direct benefit to 'local' users and providers of data, and achieve greater capability to detect and manage biosecurity threats and endemic diseases. These changes are required for Australia to maintain its world-class reputation in animal health surveillance.
10. Pathogen genetic sequence data are also being generated more quickly, at lower cost, and in more laboratories than ever before. The use of this data in conjunction with routine laboratory and field epidemiology data in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including surveillance activities, highlights this opportunity for the animal health sector (also note the incorporation of genomic data to OIE-WAHIS outlined in Attachment A). Australia should consider how this data could be captured, managed, analysed and reported for animal diseases.
11. Thus, the department continues to invest in the AUSPestCheck™ platform as a mechanism to address the identified issues with the existing system. AUSPestCheck™ the information technology tool component of SIA. However, additional activities involving governance, data standards, surveillance system strengthening, and workforce development are expected to be included in the project pending further consultation with partners.
12. The department has also been successful in an application to host an Australian National University Master of Philosophy in Applied Epidemiology (MAE) scholar from February 2022 – December 2023. During their time with the department, they will be required to design and/or evaluation a national surveillance system and analyse an animal health data set.
13. The responsibilities and reporting requirements outlined in the NAHIP Business Plan remain applicable.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14. Funding for SIA has been provided for financial years 2021/22-2024/25.

CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATION

15. The animal health reference group for the AUSPestCheck™ trial continues to be consulted around platform developments. A data standards working group currently reports to the reference group. A second working group will be formed in the coming month to develop reporting templates and dashboards.
16. The data standards group is currently adapting existing standards to those required by AUSPestCheck™. To date, data standards for nationally notifiable diseases and Ehrlichia canis targeted surveillance have been drafted, with transmissible spongiform encephalopathy and aquatic reportable disease standards in development

17. Relevant areas of the department were consulted internally during the preparation of this paper.

NEXT STEPS/ACTIONS

18. The department would appreciate the support and cooperation of jurisdictions and AHA identification of and participation in a suitable project(s).

Attachment A: Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment Update on relevant activities and issues

Attachment B: AUSPestCheck™ Trial: Update and Overview 2021, AUSPestCheck™ Reference Group, November 2021

FEEDBACK

19. [Please respond to the questions below in assessing the performance of the NAHIP over the 2020–21 year, and use this as an opportunity to offer feedback and suggested changes for continual improvement.]

Q1 My organisation's needs and expectations of the NAHIP are being met.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: The Department of Agriculture's current needs are being reasonably met, but refer to discussion points above. Further work is also required to assess the performance of the current system.				

Q2 My organisation is satisfied that the outputs of NAHIP, such as the Animal Health in Australia report are Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly, are credible and robust.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: The department and AHA have revised the structure and content of AHIA. However, further work is required ensure surveillance analytics and reporting meet stakeholder needs.				

Q3 The format and protocols in place for uploading and transferring national surveillance data are fit for purpose.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: The AUSPestCheck™ project is aiming to improve issues with the format and protocols in place for uploading and transferring national surveillance data. If successful, this will create efficiencies in data transfer.				

Q4 NAHIP satisfies national surveillance data and reporting requirements. (Please outline any requirements not being met).				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: The Department's current needs are being reasonably met.				