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

AUSPest*Check*™ animal health surveillance trial update

The AUSPest*Check*™ project, funded by the *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper* is trialling a data sharing and coordination software system capable of collating information to support National Animal Health Information Program reporting. Please see attachment B for further information.

The OIE-WAHIS project

The World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) is the database administered by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) through which countries meet their international disease reporting and notification obligations. The OIE has been redesigning and upgrading WAHIS to a new platform called OIE-WAHIS. The concept is to develop a 'nimble and user-friendly system' that has the following improved features:

- High-quality and reliable geospatial data, which will enable OIE Member Countries to undertake comprehensive risk analyses. Maps will be interactive, allowing for a dynamic display of information on animal diseases.
- The genomic data linked to epidemiological data in OIE-WAHIS will strengthen disease traceability and contribute to analyses on genetic epidemiology.
- Data from OIE-WAHIS will be usable in a variety of analytic programmes.
- OIE-WAHIS will provide straightforward and standardised ways to interconnect with other international or regional information systems. This will allow greater sharing of data and may permit the more streamlined upload of data from Australia's own databases, such as NAHIS or, in the future, AUSPestCheck.
- The WAHIS Alerts mobile application will be updated to provide a faster dissemination of disease alerts and instant access to disease notifications.
- OIE-WAHIS will be built to evolve as novel information technologies are developed or international standards change, which will help it remain fit-for-purpose in future.

The system for immediate notifications and six-monthly reports has been launched. It is anticipated that the annual report function will become available in the second half of 2022. The OIE is aware of technical bugs in some areas of the platform and is undertaking significant work with developers on a continual improvement program.

International obligations

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) specifies several diseases[1] for which a country (or zone) may be declared and published as 'officially free', after being assessed by the OIE as meeting requirements described in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code. Each year, Australia must provide

[1] African horse sickness, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, classical swine fever, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, foot and mouth disease, peste des petits ruminants, rinderpest

annual reconfirmation to the OIE in order to maintain its official free status for these diseases. There is a trend towards more rigour in the annual reconfirmation process, and in future, more robust data may be required for countries to maintain their free status. In past examples this has included information on disease exclusions, diagnostic testing capabilities, public awareness, and whether standard case definitions are followed.

For other diseases, a country may "self-declare" freedom, involving only administrative and technical screening by the OIE. The OIE may or may not publish the self-declaration. In these cases, the expectation is that a country has sufficient, appropriate data which meet requirements of the OIE code. Scrutiny of this data may occur bilaterally, for example, through trade queries or market access negotiations with a trading partner. There would be significant reputational risk if the information supporting any self-declaration was found to be insufficient. Any loss of reputation would have flow-on effects to Australia's international standing, and to trade.

Data to support export certification

Surveillance data, including exclusion testing data from animal disease investigations, provide important evidence to support claims about Australia's animal health status. These data are combined with qualitative, descriptive information about our animal health system to provide trading partners with the assurances necessary to facilitate or reinstate trade in animal and animal products.

The department provides certification for the export of animals and animal products. Agreed certification, incorporating bilateral protocols that form the basis of trade, often contain endorsements certifying Australia's freedom from a number of diseases. Certification is provided based on historical freedom, the Australian animal health system and supporting surveillance and reporting data. The department requires sufficient confidence to issue this certification, and without adequate data (or sharing of data), this confidence may beeroded. Further, any concerns about our system or data by trading partners could potentially affect international confidence in Australia's animal health systems and status.

Data to support importation policies

Surveillance information is also important in supporting the need for risk management measures for imports into Australia. When formulating import policies based on OIE standards, Australia must be confident in its verifiable disease status to justify application of risk mitigating conditions to imported animals or animal based products. Maintaining the rigour of this component of NAHIS supports trade. Ensuring that all relevant surveillance conducted is reflected in NAHIS is key to delivering this objective.

Unexpected trade queries

Queries about Australia's animal health status and/or system by trading partners or the OIE arise from time to time for a range of reasons. They may occur as a result of suspect disease events or related concerns in Australia, international disease events or concerns (e.g. outside of Australia), media reporting, queries raised through market access negotiations, or following audits/visits by trading partners. Where queries arise, there may be a need to rapidly obtain and compile robust information to address any concerns, and to ensure markets are maintained.

Unforeseen queries can expose gaps in Australia's surveillance system, if the available data or other supporting information are insufficient to address any concerns. This could have a range of possible effects. As examples, trading partners could impose more onerous import requirements on Australian animals and animal products (for example, pre-export testing) or impose trade restrictions in certain commodities. Their confidence in Australia's systems, as a whole, can be diminished.

Specific issues

Anaplasma

In February 2020, a consignment of cattle exported to Japan tested positive to Anaplasma. There is no evidence that these animals had ever been outside of the cattle tick free zone. QLD state government investigated the incident and confirmed that the animals remained in the cattle tick free zone. 13 animals in a cohort of approximately 134 animals from the same cohort tested positive. To date there is no definitive explanation as to how these animals became infected although there is some speculation as to the possibility of vertical transmission. The inability to explain the presence of Anaplasma positive animals in the cattle tick free zone undermines Australia's ability to use this zone to manage Anaplasma and babesia for exports.

Avian influenza

A number of countries require certification for freedom from avian influenza (AI) for the importation of avian commodities. Historically, occurrences of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and notifiable low pathogenic AI (LPAI) in 2012 and 2013 resulted in trade restrictions on live birds and avian products by a number of markets. Many of these restrictions were minimised shortly following each outbreak, through the provision of targeted surveillance data which demonstrated zone freedom. Most remaining restrictions were subsequently removed when Australia self-declared freedom from HPAI, after successful eradication of each outbreak.

More recently, HPAI and notifiable LPAI outbreaks starting in July 2020 on Victorian poultry premises were eradicated with official OIE freedom (self) declared on 26 February 2021. Like the previous outbreak, similar trade restrictions applied to many markets. Although Australia is not a major exporter of poultry meat or eggs, there were also significant impacts on market access for inedible poultry products such as poultry or feather meals used in stock feed and pet foods containing poultry. There was also a notable impact on the export of specific pathogen free (SPF) eggs to the US for the manufacture and supply of veterinary vaccines to Australia.

Import restrictions as a result of AI concerns have been imposed by China since the 2012-2013 AI outbreaks, and continue to have a considerable effect on trade in poultry products (including pet food). Since this time, Australia has also not regained access to other markets for live birds/hatching eggs, due in part to HPAI concerns, despite having provided a substantial amount of information in support of our HPAI status.

Following the Victorian outbreaks in the last half of 2020, in addition to declaring freedom to the OIE in February 2021, Australia has been required to respond to many questionnaires from trading partners such as Japan, Korea, the European Union, South Africa and Taiwan in order to progress the reinstatement of market access for poultry and poultry products. These questionnaires have often included the need to provide detailed epidemiological data relating to AI surveillance during and after the outbreak. At this point (November 2021) almost all markets have reopened, but a few

remain, some seeking further information. In future, additional robust surveillance data may assist in regaining access to these markets.

Hatching egg access to the EU requires that the country/zone or compartment of origin has an avian influenza surveillance program in place that meets the requirements either set out in Regulation (EC) No 798/2008; or in part ii of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

A revised OIE code chapter for AI was adopted in 2021. Changes to the chapter included: to modify the definition of AI to include only HPAI, i.e. exclude low pathogenicity H5 and H7; that surveillance for demonstrating freedom from HPAI should include monitoring of H5 and H7 LPAI viruses in poultry.

Salmonella control program

Australia has received interest from poultry exporters in accessing EU markets. Currently, Australia cannot export breeding chickens, day-old chicks and hatching eggs to the EU because a Salmonella control program in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 2160/2003 has not been submitted to the Commission or approved by it. Australia's existing Salmonella pullorum and Salmonella enteritidis accreditation programs do not meet EU requirements. A broader, more robust surveillance and accreditation program for Salmonella may assist in opening further poultry export markets.

African horse sickness

African horse sickness (AHS) is an OIE listed exotic, nationally notifiable disease. Australia's import conditions for horses require that countries approved for the importation of horses have been free from AHS for the last two years and do not vaccinate. On 27 March 2020, Thailand notified the OIE of the detection of AHS. More recently, Malaysia notified the OIE of the detection of AHS on 2 September 2020. The AHS outbreak in Thailand has been confirmed as serotype 1 and is thought to be associated with the importation of zebras from Africa. This has been reported to the OIE as serotype 9. The source has not been confirmed.

AHS in South East Asia is a biosecurity concern for horse and equine semen imports and other commodities. Thailand and Malaysia are not approved countries for the direct importation of horses or equine semen, so there is no direct biosecurity risk from these incursions. However, the potential spread of this vector-borne disease to neighbouring countries provides an entry pathway for this disease into Australia. Some of these countries are approved for the importation of susceptible equids to Australia and provide significant transportation hubs for the movement of horses to Australia from areas such as Europe.

The department has finalised a review of Singapore and their current surveillance systems. The department was satisfied that Singapore's controls and surveillance, manage the risk at this stage. Should AHS spread in the region, the department would need to reassess the situation. In addition, there is other work involving the department in a review of the AHS AUSVETPLAN.

Equine piroplasmosis

Equine piroplasmosis is an OIE listed exotic and nationally notifiable disease of horses. It is caused by protozoa (Theileria equi or Babesia caballi) which can be transmitted by ticks, iatrogenically or transplacentally. On 22 May 2020, New Zealand notified the OIE of the detection of T. equi in a previously imported horse currently resident in New Zealand. Following this detection, the department revised its import conditions for horses from New Zealand to include testing.

New Zealand's has since conducted an investigation into this incursion and potential contacts of the infected mare. The department has accepted that NZ surveillance data which supports their country

freedom status and Australia's import conditions were revised in May 2021 to recognise NZ's country freedom.

As part of this surveillance, New Zealand has recently informed the department that a number of horses identified in tracing activities had been imported into Australia prior to the detection. To verify that the biosecurity risk is consistent with Australia's appropriate level of protection (ALOP) and to assist New Zealand's investigation, department traced all horses and worked with state colleagues to have them tested at the OIE reference labs. All horses were negative.

African Swine Fever

There is continued spread of African swine fever (ASF) globally. ASF has generally been present in countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and continues to spread through parts of Europe (including the Ukraine and Russia), Asia, and recently entered the Americas. Major jumps in the disease have been attributed to the movement of contaminated pig meat and/or pig meat products.

A new genotype has recently been detected in China which may be vaccine associated

The spread of ASF throughout South-East Asia (SEA) is concerning because of the increased risk to Australia, primarily through the movement of animals and animal products outside of formal trade pathways. As a result, there is increasing scrutiny on Australia's risk management systems, including national surveillance for ASF.

The department continues to review and take necessary action to address that risk at the border. The focus is on legal and illegal import of pigs and pig products through cargo, mail and traveller pathways. However unregulated pathways still pose a risk and early detection of ASF is vital should an incursion of this virus occur.

Surveillance data supporting Australia's free status will be of interest to trading partners and will be important for potential Australian pork market access. Early detection also helps put us in a better position to control and eradicate the disease and support trading partner recognition of zoning arrangements, should ASF reach Australia. This is crucial in areas where feral pig populations are significant.