

FOR INFORMATION

NSDIP Advisory Committee Annual Meeting 2021

Agenda Item 2.1

Last updated: **3 November 2021**

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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 national 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 payment 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) as well as the NSDIP project of the NAHIS database by WHA.

In 2020-21, 11 wildlife disease investigations were approved for funding through the NSDIP. There were at least 18 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. Samples were submitted to a combination of government, university and private laboratories.

Taxonomic group	Number of events	Species
Birds	4	Rainbow lorikeets, currawongs/magpies, powerful owls, ducks/ibis
Bats	3	Flying-foxes (several species), eastern bent-wing bat
Marsupials	2	Allied rock wallabies, brushtail possum
Marine mammals	1	Beaked whales
Reptiles	1	Shingleback

Presenting syndrome	Number of events
Found dead	4
Nervous signs	3
Diarrhoea	1
Weakness/depression	1
Skin lesions	1
Stranding	1

State/Territory	Number of events
QLD	4
NSW	3
VIC	3
WA	1

Examples of funded investigations include:

- Beaked whale strandings
- Mass mortality in an island population of allied rock wallabies
- Mass paralysis event in flying-foxes across a large geographic area
- Possum with neurological signs
- Shingleback with neurological signs

The number of investigations funded has dropped over the last few years, in part due to the increasing cost of laboratory testing.

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.

Budget expenditure – disease investigations

In 2020-21, the NSDIP budget for wildlife disease investigations was \$11,023, of which \$10,993 was spent.

The veterinary subsidies for wildlife disease investigations ranged from \$400 to \$600 (average \$470) depending on the level of investigation, and laboratory subsidies ranged from \$0 to \$1800 (average \$530).

4. Sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network

WHA continued to manage a wildlife sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network in 2020-21. 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. Nine clinics participated in 2020-21, and additional suitable clinics were identified by WHA to join the program in 2021-22.

The participating sentinel veterinary clinics see a total caseload of over 26,500 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 600 disease events involving 80 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.

Budget expenditure – sentinel clinics

5. The 2020-21 NSDIP funds of \$11,023 were utilised for payments to clinics for their participation in the sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network (\$5,000 per clinic).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6. N/A

CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATION

7. N/A

NEXT STEPS/ACTIONS

8. N/A

FEEDBACK

9.

Q1 My organisation's needs and expectations of the NSDIP are being met.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: The NSDIP funds are very valuable for enabling wildlife disease investigations and supporting the sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network. The delegation to WHA of the administration of the NSDIP wildlife funds allows the program to function efficiently and effectively on a national basis.				

Q2 The National Significant Disease Investigation Program has provided opportunities to private veterinarians for gaining the necessary knowledge and skills to investigate and report on disease events.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: Private veterinarians that receive NSDIP funds for wildlife disease investigations interact with the state/territory WHA Coordinator to discuss appropriate diagnostics and submission of samples, which is an opportunity for the veterinarian to increase their knowledge on wildlife disease investigation. It creates and strengthens relationships between private vets and the WHA Coordinator that can lead to better investigations and reporting in future.				

Q3 The National Significant Disease Investigation Program has helped to improve the level of notifiable disease investigations through effective engagement with private veterinarians and assisting in funding investigations that may not have progressed otherwise.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: As for Q2.				