

FOR INFORMATION

NSDIP Advisory Committee Annual Meeting 2020

Agenda Item 2.1

Last updated: **31 August 2020**

Prepared by K. Cox-Witton

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

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

BACKGROUND

2. The NSDI Program has included wildlife in its scope since 2010, and Wildlife Health Australia has administered the national NSDIP wildlife disease investigation funds since 2016. NSDIP funds also support a sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network coordinated by WHA.

DISCUSSION**3. Wildlife disease investigations**

WHA and the state/territory WHA coordinator make decisions jointly on whether to provide NSDI funds for an 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.

Target Outcome

NSDIP Target Outcome: Non-government veterinary practitioners initiate and conduct significant disease investigations in collaboration with state/territory governments and Wildlife Health Australia (WHA)

In 2019-20, 14 wildlife disease investigations were approved for funding through the NSDIP, of which 5 were from NSW, 5 from Victoria, 3 from QLD and 1 from SA.¹ There were at least 15 additional enquiries or applications that did not progress, either because they did not meet the NSDIP criteria, or were approved but could not be completed e.g. no further cases presented or samples could not be obtained. Samples were submitted to government, university and private laboratories.

Species involved in funded investigations included:

- Birds (8 events): long-billed corella, currawong, crimson rosella, lorikeet, red wattlebird, silver gull, brush turkey, magpie
- Marsupials (5 events): greater glider, agile wallaby, eastern grey kangaroo (2), koala
- Other mammals (1 event): grey-headed flying-fox

Presenting signs for funded investigations were: mass or increased mortality (8), neurological signs (4), weakness/depression (1), and illthrift/weight loss (1).

Examples of funded investigations include:

- Mass mortality event in agile wallabies
- Unusually high numbers of lorikeet paralysis syndrome

¹ Three additional investigations in wildlife (native and feral species) were approved through the NT & Qld NSDIP and were not included in the national wildlife budget.

- Emaciation and bony changes in koalas
- Mortality of juvenile grey-headed flying-foxes
- Neurological signs in currawongs and magpies

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

The veterinary subsidies for wildlife disease investigations ranged from \$350 to \$600 (average \$435) depending on the level of investigation, and laboratory subsidies ranged from \$0 to \$1870 (average \$310).

The 2019-20 NSDIP budget for wildlife disease investigations was \$10,860. While the full budget had been allocated to wildlife disease investigations, it is likely that the budget will be underspent. For several investigations the expected expenditure did not occur because planned laboratory testing was not conducted or could not be completed in a reasonable time frame. In one case the veterinary subsidy could not be paid as the vet did not provide a case report. There are five investigations still outstanding; at the time of this report it is expected that >90% of the budget will be utilised. It has been a challenging year for wildlife veterinarians due to the bushfires and COVID-19, which has made it more difficult to spend the disease investigation funds than in past years.

4. Sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network

WHA continued to manage a wildlife sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network in 2019-20. Veterinary clinics in the surveillance network have a large or dedicated wildlife caseload, or expand the geographic or species range of the surveillance system. Eight clinics are currently participating, and additional suitable clinics have been identified by WHA for future participation if additional funding is available. 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.

Target Outcome

Australia's activity and capacity in disease surveillance includes, and can be readily shown to include, non-government veterinary practitioners collaborating with governments and WHA

The participating sentinel veterinary 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 530 disease events involving 86 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 clinics see a total caseload of over 24,000 free-ranging wildlife cases per year.

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. Sentinel clinic participants, through their involvement with the network, have increased engagement and collaboration with the state/territory government agency in relation to wildlife disease investigations.

Budget expenditure

The 2019-20 NSDIP funds of \$10,860 were utilised for payments to clinics for their participation in the sentinel veterinary clinic surveillance network (\$5,000 per clinic).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATION

N/A

NEXT STEPS/ACTIONS

N/A

FEEDBACK

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 Coordinator that can lead to better investigations 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.				

Q4 Animal Health Australia is managing the National Significant Disease Investigation Program effectively/satisfactorily.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Please explain your answer, including any suggested changes: The program is managed very well and WHA has no suggested changes.				