

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates October/November 2005

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: PIAPH 01

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health

Topic: Trade with countries which have BSE

Hansard Page: 55

Senator Heffernan asked:

CHAIR—So it would be fair to say that all those people who would like to have the status that we currently have—but, unfortunately, they do not have it—and who would like to equalise the marketplace would not like to emphasise the fact that there is a lot of unknowns with BSE; for example, the incubation period. There is a whole lot of work that has not been completed, having read some of the paperwork from the countries that do not have our status and that wish to somehow equalise the marketplace by our ignoring this. With the OIE logic—some would say ‘illogic’—there is an understanding that you can have a trade in blood products from a country that has BSE as long as they come from a BSE-free herd. Is that your understanding?

Dr Murray—There are certain commodities or certain products from bovines that can be traded freely or with minor treatments from countries which have BSE. I do not have the complete list, but the products include calcium diphosphate, skins and hides, semen and things like that. But we can certainly get you the list.

Answer:

Article 2.3.13.1 of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (2005)* contains recommendations on trade in blood and blood by-products derived from cattle. That article is reproduced below in its entirety.

Article 2.3.13.1

The recommendations in this Chapter are intended to manage the human and animal health risks associated with the presence of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) agent in cattle (*Bos taurus* and *B. indicus*) only.

1. When authorising import or transit of the following *commodities* and any products made from these *commodities* and containing no other tissues from cattle, *Veterinary Administrations* should not require any BSE related conditions, regardless of the BSE risk status of the cattle population of the *exporting country, zone or compartment*:
 - a. *milk and milk products*;
 - b. semen and *in vivo* derived cattle embryos collected and handled in accordance with the recommendations of the International Embryo Transfer Society;
 - c. hides and skins;
 - d. gelatin and collagen prepared exclusively from hides and skins;
 - e. protein-free tallow (maximum level of insoluble impurities of 0.15% in weight) and derivatives made from this tallow;
 - f. dicalcium phosphate (with no trace of protein or fat);

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Answer:

The National Rapid Response Team (RRT) is made up of members from state, territory and Australian Government agencies. At present the RRT has 44 members who have training and experience that allows them to undertake 16 key positions in either a Local Disease Control Centre (LDCC) or State Disease Control Headquarters (SDCHQ) with many of the members being able to fulfil the requirements of more than one of the identified positions.

Activation of the RRT is requested by the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) of the affected jurisdiction through the Consultative Committee for Emergency Animal Disease (CCEAD), under terms set out in a protocol that has been agreed to by the Primary Industries Standing Committee (PISC) and Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC). This protocol states under the heading of 'Jurisdictional commitment':

'The success of the RRT concept is heavily dependent upon the ongoing support of all jurisdictions, particularly in relation to the availability of appropriate staff for training, assessment, exercising and, if necessary, deployment. Parties to the protocol agree that RRT members will be released for deployment without delay unless one of the following circumstances arise:

- *unavailable due to personal reasons (health, family etc); or*
- *work commitment exists that is of higher concern than the disease outbreak;*
or
- *disease risk for the donor jurisdiction is of sufficiently high concern that the expertise of a particular member cannot be lost at that time.'*

In line with this protocol, procedures have been established and trialled by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for the activation of the RRT. Exercises designed to test these procedures have confirmed the ability to deploy the RRT within 24 hours. This was further supported in one of the many lead up activities to Exercise Eleusis '05, where jurisdictions agreed to provide sufficient RRT members to South Australia, despite two of these jurisdictions being potentially affected by the simulated outbreak.

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Question: PIAPH 03

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health

Topic: Animal Health Australia consultation

Hansard Page: 63

Senator O'Brien asked:

Senator O'BRIEN—You also told the committee in May that Animal Health Australia was undertaking consultation regarding some 19 actions and amendments to the cost-sharing deed and was developing an explanatory memorandum to the deed. Has that process been completed?

Mr McCutcheon—It has not been completed, to my knowledge. My understanding is that they have had meetings with a number of industry organisations and have also had meetings with a number of state jurisdictions, but there is still some work to be done on that.

Senator O'BRIEN—When is that expected to be completed?

Mr McCutcheon—That is a question I would have to put to Animal Health Australia. Certainly, they are operating on the basis that it needs to be finished sooner rather than later.

Answer:

All of the issues relating to the cost-sharing deed have been substantially dealt with by government and industry parties through a consultative process managed by Animal Health Australia. Most of the identified proposals for implementation of the deed were able to be settled without the need for the deed to be varied. Variations to the deed were, however, required for four matters, while two further proposed variations have not yet been approved by all parties.

The explanatory memorandum was released in June 2005 following consultation with the parties. As it does not form part of the deed, it did not require formal approval by the parties as a variation.

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Question: PIAPH 04

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health

Topic: Australian Veterinary Reserve

Hansard Page: 64

Senator O'Brien asked:

Senator O'BRIEN—Can you provide an update on the Australian Veterinary Reserve? Can you tell us how many vets are currently part of the reserve? Perhaps you can tell us, on notice, where they are located and how much has been spent on the reserve.

Mr McCutcheon—For that amount of detail, I will have to take that question on notice.

Answer:

The aim of the AVR is to train 100 non-government veterinarians in two AUSVETPLAN roles by 30 June 2006. The training is in two parts – the first involves four days training to complete the Field Surveillance Veterinarian role and the second two days training for the Surveillance/Tracing Officer role. The program is delivered by Animal Health Australia.

There are currently 100 rural and regional private veterinary practitioners selected to be part of the Australian Veterinary Reserve (AVR) training program. To date 56 have been trained as Field Surveillance Veterinarians (FSV's)s and another 23 will be trained in December 2005. The balance will attend training in May 2006. The Surveillance and Tracing Officer (STO) training commences in January 2006 and will be completed by June 2006.

The distribution of private veterinary practitioners is as follows:

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NSW	34	Ballina, Bathurst, Berry, Broken Hill, Casino, Coffs Harbour, Coonamble, Cowra, Deniliquin, Finley, Gerogery, Gilgandra, Glen Innes, Gloucester, Goulburn, Hay, Inverell, Leeton, Maitland, Moss Vale, Mudgee, Muswellbrook, Narrabri, Nowra, Port Macquarie, Quirindi, Tamworth, Taree, Tucki, Unanderra, Wauchope, West Armidale, West Wollongong, Yass
Victoria	23	Ararat, Bairnsdale, Camperdown, Colac, Corryong, Drouin, Echuca, Granite Rock, Koonwarra, Lang Lang, Maffra, Mildura, Moama, Myrtleford, Newborough, Rochester, Tallangatta, Timboon, Toorak, Wangaratta, Warragul, Warrnambool, Wonthaggi
Tasmania	4	Rocky Cape, Scottsdale, Smithton, South Launceston
South Australia	9	Burra, Kadina, Kingston SE, Mount Gambier (2), Murray Bridge, Tanunda, Victor Harbor, Willunga
Western Australia	9	Albany (2), Brookton, Broome, Busselton, Dunsborough, Eaton, Kununnara, Toodyay
Northern Territory	1	Katherine
Queensland	20	Auchenflower, Brisbane, Brookfield, Bundaberg, Bungunya, Charters Towers, Fernvale, Goondiwindi, Hermit Park, Kingaroy, Mareeba, Montville, Mount Isa, Nanango, Richmond, Sarina, Smithfield, Toowoomba, Warwick, Willows Gemfields

Total expenditure by Animal Health Australia on the Australian Veterinary Reserve project to 31 October 2005 was \$214,623.47. This is comprised of \$180,321.59 in the year ended 30 June 2005, and \$34,301.88 from 1 July 2005 to 31 October 2005.

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Question: PIAPH 05

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health

Topic: Veterinary Reserve – Geographic Coverage

Hansard Page: 65

Senator O'Brien asked:

Senator O'BRIEN—What about geographic coverage—or is that not an issue?

Dr Murray—We can find out for you, but the geographic coverage was a key component of the Veterinary Reserve—geographic coverage and population of animal coverage. We can advise you, if you wish.

Answer:

See answer to PIAPH 04.

Question: PIAPH 06

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health

Topic: Eucalyptus Rust

Hansard Page: 69

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—I had not realised that 'Product integrity' was all part of this and that then you would be leaving. I just wanted to ask about eucalyptus rust. I understand that it has been detected in Hawaii and that there is a national response plan being developed. I wonder if you could let me know what preventative action is being taken in relation to planning for that and if you have any updates in relation to it, because of the obvious ramifications if it were to get to Australia.

Ms Ransom—Eucalyptus rust is of significant concern to us and we are extremely worried that the disease has been confirmed in Hawaii. As a result, a number of actions have been taking place. An emergency response plan is currently being drafted. I have to talk on behalf of Biosecurity Australia. We have been in contact with the United States to ask for more information on the outbreak. I am not sure whether any response has been received. There are existing quarantine measures in place for eucalyptus rust. As you may be aware, the disease is well established in Brazil and has been for some time. There are continuing measures in place to prevent incursion through trade, particularly in timber products from Brazil. It is probably best for us to compile the information that you have asked for as a question on notice. Then we can ensure that all of the aspects of our preparedness are covered.

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Answer:

A national response plan for Eucalyptus rust is being progressed by the Office of the Chief Plant Protection Officer (OCPPO) in collaboration with ENSIS (ENSIS is the trading name for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Forest and Forest Products Pty Ltd, Scion Australasia Ltd), which is a joint venture between the CSIRO and the former Forest Research Institute of New Zealand. The plan will make reference to the draft national diagnostic standard for the fungus that was completed in April 2004. It will also include surveillance, treatment, containment and eradication strategies.

In October 2004, officers from Biosecurity Australia, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and the OCPPO attended a workshop on '*Development of an Asia-Pacific Strategy for Eucalyptus rust*', in Thailand. The workshop was arranged in collaboration with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The meeting sought to engage countries within the region to undertake basic risk assessments to identify potential hosts of Eucalyptus rust. It also stressed the value of early warning surveys to target high risk species, the need to raise awareness at senior levels in quarantine and forestry sectors of the need for diagnostic capability and procedures to ensure safe movement of germplasm. Australia has quarantine measures in place to prevent incursions through trade of Eucalyptus/Guava rust from countries where the pathogen is known to occur. These can be found in the Import Conditions database (ICON) on the Department website. They include specific conditions for the importation of known hosts. In summary:

- Imports of logs require a specific permit, and a permit would not be issued for logs of *Eucalyptus* species for any country where the disease is known to occur.
- Imports of timber of *Eucalyptus* species are currently suspended from all countries where the pathogen is known to occur, including Hawaii.
- Imports of cut flowers and cut foliage of known hosts are not permitted from countries where the pathogen is known to occur.

Imports of pollen material are treated on a case by case basis and referred to Biosecurity Australia for advice.