

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

**THE INCIDENCE OF OVINE JOHNE'S DISEASE IN THE
AUSTRALIAN SHEEP FLOCK**

FIRST REPORT

**Senate Rural and Regional Affairs
and Transport References Committee**

JULY 1998

© Commonwealth of Australia 1998

ISBN 0 642 25168 1

This document was produced from camera ready copy and printed by the Senate Printing Unit,
Parliament House, Canberra

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Senator John Woodley (Chairman)
Senator Winston Crane (Deputy Chairman)
Senator Paul Calvert
Senator Michael Forshaw
Senator Brenda Gibbs
Senator Bill Heffernan
Senator Shayne Murphy
Senator Kerry O'Brien

Participating Members

Senator Abetz	Senator Bartlett	Senator Brown
Senator Brownhill	Senator Chapman	Senator Colston
Senator Conroy	Senator Cook	Senator Crossin
Senator Eggleston	Senator Ferris	Senator Lundy
Senator Margetts	Senator West	

Committee Secretariat

Mr Andrew Snedden (Secretary to the Committee)
Mr John O'Keefe (Senior Research Officer)
Ms Trish Carling (Research Assistant)
Ms Judith Wuest (Executive Assistant)

The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Tel: 02 6277 3510
Fax: 02 6277 5811
Internet www.aph.gov.au/senate
Email rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Membership of the Committee	iii
List of Abbreviations	vii
Executive Summary	ix
Terms of Reference	ix
Conduct of the Inquiry	ix
Structure of the Report	xi
Committee’s Observations and Report to the Senate	xi
Recommendations	xiii
CHAPTER ONE	1
BACKGROUND: SETTING THE SCENE.....	1
Introduction	1
How OJD is transmitted	2
Extent of the disease	3
New South Wales	3
Victoria	4
Tasmania	5
Western Australia	5
Queensland and South Australia	6
Reliability of estimates of the extent of the disease	6
Cost of Ovine Johne’s Disease	7
Export markets and trade	9
Social costs of the disease	10
Stigma	12
CHAPTER TWO	13
CONTROLLING AND ERADICATING THE DISEASE.....	13
Views on how the disease should be dealt with	13
The New Zealand approach to the disease	14
Feasibility and cost of OJD eradication and control	15
Calls for action now	20
Cost of eradication	21
Problems of identifying the disease	23
Diagnosis and identification of OJD	23
Surveillance and abattoir testing	26
Development of new tests for OJD	27
Control measures	29
De-stocking over two dry summers	29
Zoning	32
Culling sheep at an early age	35
Availability of clean sheep	35
An OJD vaccine	36
Problems associated with the use of an OJD vaccine	38
Progressive eradication without compensation on a voluntary basis	38
Progressive eradication with compensation	39
Immediate eradication of all affected areas with compensation	40
Compensation and incentives to eradicate OJD	41
Fixed payment for compensation	43
“Exceptional Circumstances” support	44
Committee Observations	46

CHAPTER THREE 49

VICTORIA AND NEW SOUTH WALES CONTROL PROGRAMS.....49

The Victorian program	49
Issue of consultation	51
Criticism of Victorian de-stocking policy	53
Claims of inadequate compensation under the Victorian scheme	53
Claims of lack of notification under the Victorian scheme	55
The New South Wales program	56
Criticism of the NSW scheme	58

CHAPTER FOUR 59

A NATIONAL PROGRAM59

In support of a national program	59
Opposed to a national OJD program	59
Suggestions concerning what should be in a national OJD program	60
Problems of financing a national OJD program	61
Early national initiatives.....	62
Agreement on a national program	64
Financing of the interim program.....	68
Financing of the national program.....	69
Support for the Hussey and Morris national program	70
Role of the Commonwealth Government.....	71
Committee observations on the proposed national OJD program	74

Appendix 1	List of submissions made to the inquiry
Appendix 2	List of witnesses who gave evidence to the inquiry
Appendix 3	Document: <i>Approved by AAHC Board 26 March 1998 National Ovine Johne's Disease Control and Evaluation Program (NOJDCEP) – Planning Process</i>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAHC	Australian Animal Health Council
AAHL	Australian Animal Health Laboratory
ABARE	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
ARMCANZ	Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand
ASJDMAP	Australian Sheep Johne's Disease Market Assurance Program
BTEC	Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign
BRS	Bureau of Resource Sciences
DNRE	Department of Natural Resources and Environment
ELISA	enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
EVD	OJD Enhanced Vendor Declaration
JD-SISC	NSW Johne's Disease Sheep Industry Steering Committee
MAP	Market Assurance Program
NOJDC	National Ovine Johne's Disease Committee
NM	"Monitored Negative"
OIE	Organisation Internationale Epizooties
OJD	Ovine John's Disease
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PDEP	Property Disease Eradication Plans
SCARM	Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management
SD&Rs	National Standard Definitions and Rules
VFF	Victorian Farmers' Federation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Terms of Reference

On the 19 November 1997 the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report. There was no reporting date set down at that time:

(a) The incidence of Ovine Johne's disease (OJD) in the Australian sheep flock, with particular reference to the problems in identifying the disease and the effectiveness of the current research effort into the identification and management of the disease, including the following options to manage Ovine Johne's disease:

1. appropriate management practices by individual producers;
2. a voluntary eradication program without compensation;
3. progressive eradication with compensation; and
4. immediate eradication of all affected flocks with compensation; and

(b) The level of funding from both the industry and Government necessary to implement the above options, the level of compensation to apply where flocks are eradicated and the establishment of a market assurance program to assist sheep producers to prevent the spread of the disease and strategies to overcome the social impact of the eradication program on affected rural communities.

Conduct of the Inquiry

During mid-December 1997 an advertisement calling for submissions to the inquiry was placed in *The Land (NSW)*, *Country Life (Queensland)*, *the Weekly Times (Victoria)*, *Tasmanian Country*, *Stock Journal (SA)* and *the Countryman (WA)*. In addition to advertising, invitations were sent to individuals and organisations, both government and private, inviting submissions.

The Committee received 87 submissions, including two supplementary submissions. A list of individuals and organisations that made submissions to the inquiry appears in Appendix 1.

During the inquiry, the Committee held nine public hearings in the following locations:

Launceston	9 February
Flinders Island	9 February
Melbourne	10 February
Hamilton	11 February
Bairnsdale	11 February
Orange	17 February
Canberra	24 February
Canberra	27 March
Canberra	3 April

Ninety witnesses, appearing as private citizens or representing organisations or government bodies gave evidence to the Committee at these hearings. A list of witnesses appears in Appendix 2.

A detailed national plan is presently being developed by State and Commonwealth Governments and industry to deal with OJD. This national plan, which is discussed in chapter four of this report is to commence in August 1998. The fact that a national plan is now being actively developed presented some difficulties in establishing what role this report can and should play in supporting efforts to eradicate the disease.

This inquiry widely canvassed the views of individual producers, producer groups, veterinarians, government bodies, both Commonwealth and State, concerning Ovine Johne's Disease. The report examines the impact of the disease on producers and the industry as a whole, what actions have been taken to deal with it, including the present development of a national program.

It is the hope of the Committee that the views expressed throughout the report, particularly in relation to the operation of the Victorian and New South Wales eradication and control schemes, will assist those responsible for the development and implementation of the national program. It is also hoped that the report will increase community awareness of OJD, its potential impact on the national economy and how it directly effects sectors of the rural community.

Structure of the report

The report consists of four chapters. CHAPTER ONE is largely an introduction to the report setting out what the disease is, how it is transmitted and its extent in Australia. The cost of OJD, both economic and social, is dealt with in this Chapter.

CHAPTER TWO deals with the significant issue of how the disease can be controlled and hopefully eradicated. The issues of how feasible it is to eradicate OJD and the costs involved are dealt with, along with the major problems involved in identifying the disease. Various measures that can be applied to control OJD are discussed as is the important issue, particularly to infected producers, of compensation and how such compensation should be applied.

In CHAPTER THREE the programs put in place by the states of Victoria and New South Wales are examined. The experience of these two states will have a significant impact on elements of the national program now being developed.

CHAPTER FOUR deals with the national program presently being developed in the hope of eradicating OJD. This Chapter sets out the decisions made relating to the planned implementation of a national program in August 1998. The crucial issues of financing and areas of responsibility in relation to the program are also dealt with in this Chapter.

Committee's Observations and Report to the Senate

The Committee has considered carefully the evidence it took during the course of the Inquiry, and the current status of the developing national program for dealing with OJD, which is described in Chapter 4.

The Committee believes it is premature to make further comment until the national program to combat OJD has been determined. Once that process is complete a realistic assessment can be made on the direction of the program, the likely cost and timetable of the implementation of the plan.

The Committee was concerned by the extent of economic and social dislocation experienced by producers who have been, or are currently still affected, by OJD infection on their properties.

This concern extends to matters relating to compensation paid for the eradication program undertaken in Victoria and the need for further assistance for producers who have not been able to operate their properties effectively for some years because of the presence of the disease.

The Committee's further examination of the national OJD program will focus on four factors which are central to the effective control of OJD. They are:

- The timetable for the program.
- The likely cost of any the isolation and elimination of the disease from the Australian sheep flock.
- The extent and nature of any research program on OJD testing techniques and/or possible vaccines to treat OJD.
- The contribution that will need to be made to funding the program by government and industry.

Accordingly, the Committee's conclusions on its inquiry at this stage are limited to observations regarding the various measures that might be applied to control OJD in the future. The programs already in place in Victoria and New South Wales are to continue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The Commonwealth must ensure that adequate funds are made available to ensure an ongoing and effective OJD research effort can be maintained.**
- **The Commonwealth considers any application for exceptional circumstances assistance arising from the effect of OJD as part of a regional assistance package.**
- **The Commonwealth, the state governments in Victoria and New South Wales and relevant local government authorities develop regional assistance packages based on the Rural Partnership Program model for regions affected by OJD.**
- **The Victoria Government review the level of compensation paid to growers who were required to destock their properties in 1997 in the light of the economic analysis prepared by Mr Andrew Patterson from the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment.**

Senator John Woodley

Chairman, References Committee

2 July 1998