

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WAY FORWARD

7.1 It is clear to the Committee that there are differences in the approaches proposed in regard to the management of OJD. It is also clear, however, that notwithstanding such differences there is a considerable degree of consensus. There is now general agreement between the states, peak industry bodies and individual producers that a priority is for control and management of the disease. Even those who suggested various proposals for deregulation also stressed that they were not proposing a "do nothing" approach.

Eradication

7.2 There is still considerable debate as to whether it is possible to eradicate OJD. There was also considerable argument put during the Inquiry about whether it was appropriate to continue using valuable resources to determine whether, in the long-term, eradication was a desirable or achievable outcome.

7.3 For example, Mr Paul Crew of the Australian Animal Health Council (now AHA) indicated during the Committee's initial Inquiry that it was not possible to make a decision about the cost effectiveness of eradicating OJD until there was clear information about the prevalence of the disease and the rate of its spread.¹

7.4 The Committee notes that it is still difficult to ascertain whether, three years later, there is sufficient information to make a decision about the feasibility of eradication.

7.5 Professor Ann Daniel's submission observed that farmers refer to programs for the eradication or control of OJD as the "new growth industry" and that those producers whose flocks were infected with OJD were "unanimous in denouncing the eradication option"². Professor Daniel also told the Committee that producers cited the inconsistency of testing; the fact that other animals carry the disease; and, the lack of convincing evidence from Australia (or overseas) as some of the reasons they would not support a Program based on eradication.

7.6 The view put forward by the NSW Farmers Association during the current Inquiry was indicative of views expressed by other peak industry bodies. The Association made it clear that the focus of the NOJDP should be on control and evaluation, rather than on eradication.

1 Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, *The Incidence of Ovine Johne's Disease in the Australian Sheep Flock, First Report*, July 1998, p. 16.

2 *Submission 24*, Professor A. Daniel, p. 4.

On-Farm Controls

7.7 The NSW Farmers Association also supported a move toward risk based strategies and on-farm control methods, and indicated that whilst deregulation of OJD was premature, there should be a move toward a more market driven approach. In evidence, a representative of the Association, Mr Bernard O'Sullivan, stated:

New South Wales is currently seeking support from the state and Commonwealth governments and the National Veterinary Committee for recognition of the importance of on farm control methods. This would be based on property disease reduction plans and not eradication plans, which we have seen so much in the past...³ It is also generally agreed that it is important to continue to investigate the possibility of eradicating the disease - particularly in those areas of low prevalence.

Vaccination

7.8 During the Committee's Inquiry there have been increasing calls for an OJD vaccine to be made more widely and less restrictively available. The Australian Wool Growers Association was one industry group which was supportive of moves to make the OJD vaccine available to all producers. They stated:

By embarking on such a course of action, the onus would be on individual producers to protect themselves from the disease by way of management and at the same time offer protection to others at times of stock trading.⁴

7.9 At the hearing conducted in October 2000, Mr Martin Clancy, a sheep producer from Gunning, informed the Committee that he had the "dubious record of having the highest mortality rate by far in Australia". Because of the high mortality rates on his property - and based on anecdotal evidence of positive results from the Blayney vaccination trial - Mr Clancy was keen to vaccinate his entire flock (not just the lambs) to facilitate better results. The Committee was advised of opposition to this approach taken by NSW Agriculture, and the problems Mr Clancy experienced in obtaining sufficient quantities of the vaccine.⁵

7.10 The Committee notes that in a recent paper prepared by NSW Agriculture it has been acknowledged that the prevalence of OJD infection in the NSW Residual Zone and the surrounding Control Zone has reached a "level where existing control strategies are inappropriate and unacceptable to many affected producers".⁶ The paper also outlines problems associated with the increased 'lateral' spread of the disease which require control measures which are aimed at prevention or significant reduction

3 *Evidence*, New South Wales Farmers Association, p. 322.

4 *Submission 78*, Australian Wool Growers Association, p. 2.

5 *Evidence*, Mr Martin Clancy, p. 393

6 NSW Agriculture, *Principles for Use of Strategic Vaccination to Control Regional Spread of Ovine Johne's Disease*, 4 April 2001, p. 1.

of environmental contamination and environmental spread of OJD. The paper goes on to propose:

.... the wider use of vaccination as a critical element of effective disease control for OJD in NSW - as an addition (and not as an alternative) to current disease control strategies for reducing regional spread of this disease. [their emphasis]

Vaccination is currently the only likely effective strategy to achieve widespread reduction of environmental contamination, and hence lateral spread in the Residual Zone and in infected foci in the Control Zone.⁷

7.11 The Committee believes that vaccine should be made more widely available for use as a management tool, and it endorses a proposal to allow its wider use - particularly in NSW. The Committee notes with some concern, however, the fact that the vaccine proposed for use - Gudair - is still unregistered in Australia. While the National Registration Authority (NRA) has issued a permit to CSL to import the vaccine for experimental use, a formal application has not yet been made to register the vaccine for general use.

7.12 AFFA's submission notes that "given the scale of OJD and the limited alternative management strategies, the NRA could be expected to respond as quickly as possible to such an application".⁸ The Committee understands, however, that even if the NRA does respond quickly, it will still take some months to process the application - further delaying producers' access to the vaccine.

National Approach

7.13 The Committee is also aware that future financial costs and risks associated with Ovine Johne's Disease will be largely dependent on the strategy adopted at a national level to manage and reduce the spread of the disease.

7.14 The Committee notes that during the course of this Inquiry, there is an increased awareness of the need for a nationally focused and coordinated approach to the management and control of OJD. The Committee recognises however, that there is a considerable way to go to reach agreement on who should take a lead role in any such program.

7.15 Opinion varies considerably regarding whether leadership should come from the Commonwealth, from state industry, from national industry or from state governments. The view expressed by the NSW Stud Merino Breeders Association however, was one that was echoed by a number of witnesses:

7 NSW Agriculture, *Principles for Use of Strategic Vaccination to Control Regional Spread of Ovine Johne's Disease*, 4 April 2001, p. 1.

8 *Submission 80*, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, p. 7.

.... if we are going to see some leadership on this issue [OJD] New South Wales has to show it.⁹

National Workshop on Control Strategies for Ovine Johne's Disease in NSW

7.16 NSW Agriculture indicated its commitment to the development of a more national approach when it organised the National Workshop on Control Strategies for OJD in New South Wales, which was held in Canberra on 17 and 18 April 2001.

7.17 The workshop was convened following proposals from NSW representatives to the Technical Sub-Committee of the National Ovine Johne's Disease Program Advisory Committee (NOJDPAC). Representatives from NSW, the state with the highest level of OJD infection, lobbied strongly for changes to the existing control strategies for OJD.¹⁰

7.18 In response to the concerns raised by NSW Agriculture, NOJDPAC supported the organisation of a workshop to provide the opportunity for the proposals to be discussed and assessed. The Terms of Reference for the Workshop were established by the NOJDPAC and the funding was provided by Meat and Livestock Australia under the National OJD Program.

7.19 The workshop was Chaired by Dr Robin Vandergraaff and facilitated by Mr Denis Hussey. Participants included those with technical expertise from the states most affected by OJD, veterinarians with particular expertise in disease management and control, sheep producers from affected areas, and representatives from the sheep industry. The workshop also invited a number of observers, including a member of the Committee's secretariat staff, representatives of CSL Limited, the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, the NSW Stud Merino Breeders Association and the Wool Council of Australia (see Appendix 3 for the full list of participants).

7.20 A proposal put forward by NSW Agriculture related to zoning. Following considerable discussion, which took into consideration the problems being experienced by producers who were unable to trade, the National Workshop agreed that changes should be made to the zoning arrangements. It was agreed that control of OJD in NSW should be administratively managed in three zones, based on: known disease prevalence, regional industry (producer) control objectives and consistency with the overall state disease control plan.¹¹

7.21 The Workshop also agreed that the three zones in NSW will be designated as:

- Residual;

9 *Evidence*, New South Wales Stud Merino Breeders Association, p. 364.

10 *Workshop Papers prepared for the National Workshop on Control Strategies for Ovine Johne's Disease in New South Wales*, Canberra, 17 & 18 April 2001, p. 2.

11 Consensus Resolutions from NOJDCEP National Workshop on Control Strategies for Ovine Johne's Disease in New South Wales, Canberra ACT, April 17-18 2001, p.6.

- Control (Admin 1) or C1Z; and
- Control (Admin 2) or C2Z.

7.22 The zone identified as C1Z is that area of the current Control Zone in NSW adjoining the current Residual Zone and which has been identified as a moderate disease prevalence area for OJD. The C1Z is also that area of the NSW Control Zone which is unlikely to progress to Protected Zone status at the same time that the C2Z part of the Control Zone in NSW and the Control Zone areas of other states progress to Protected Zone status.¹²

7.23 The Workshop also agreed to recommend that the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of Veterinary Committee review the merits of all of the available tests for OJD. TAG would also be asked to ascertain whether the PFC test should become the only screening test approved on a national basis for either surveillance or market assurance purposes.¹³

7.24 Vaccination was also discussed in detail, and it was recognised as being a potentially key element in developing an effective OJD control program for NSW. The workshop also noted that vaccination should be used in conjunction with other disease management strategies and with strategies to ensure the containment of vaccinated sheep (for example, security of fencing).

7.25 It was also agreed that the introduction of a national livestock identification scheme is critical for the effective future control of OJD. The workshop acknowledged that on-farm disease control is likely to be more effective if management strategies designed to reduce on-farm transmission of OJD are introduced at the same time as vaccination.¹⁴

7.26 In addition, the Workshop also reached agreement that:

- it is important to maintain the ongoing control of Ovine Johne's Disease;
- in the light of new scientific and surveillance data, there is a need for significant changes to OJD control strategies in NSW;
- any changes to the National Program will only be effective with financial support for producers;

12 Consensus Resolutions from NOJDCEP National Workshop on Control Strategies for Ovine Johne's Disease in New South Wales, Canberra ACT, April 17-18 2001, p.6.

13 Consensus Resolutions from NOJDCEP National Workshop on Control Strategies for Ovine Johne's Disease in New South Wales, Canberra ACT, April 17-18 2001, p.7.

14 Consensus Resolutions from NOJDCEP National Workshop on Control Strategies for Ovine Johne's Disease in New South Wales, Canberra ACT, April 17-18 2001, pp. 2-4.

- the level of support necessary to contain the spread of OJD is unlikely to be achieved without financial assistance (for affected producers, including those in high prevalence areas); and
- lateral spread of OJD (between adjoining properties) is now recognised as an important factor in disease spread.¹⁵

7.27 The Resolutions from the workshop were circulated following the meeting and it was proposed to provide a more detailed report of the proceedings to the Technical Sub-Committee of the National Ovine Johne's Disease Program Advisory Committee (NOJDPAC) and the national Veterinary Committee. (A full list of the Resolutions is provided at Appendix 4).

Mid-Term Review

7.28 As discussed in Chapter Two, the National OJD Program Deed of Agreement required that a Mid-Term Review be conducted at the end of the first three-year period (the half-way point of the Program).

7.29 The Mid-Term Review Committee began its review in February 2001 and released its report on 3 June 2001. A more detailed account of the Review process is provided in the following chapter.

15 Consensus Resolutions from NOJDCEP National Workshop on Control Strategies for Ovine Johne's Disease in New South Wales, Canberra ACT, April 17-18 2001.