



20 May, 2008

Mr Roger Beale AO (Chairman)
Quarantine and Biosecurity Review Secretariat
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Beale,

**AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE HEALTH NETWORK SUBMISSION
QUARANTINE AND BIOSECURITY REVIEW**

Please find attached a submission to the quarantine and biosecurity review regarding feral animals, native wildlife and Australia's biosecurity.

The submission represents a collation of comments from AWHN management group members who represent most of Australia's government organisations and NGOs with an interest in, and carriage of, issues relating to animals, wildlife and biosecurity, as well as State and Territory wildlife coordinators from all jurisdictions (including Australian Antarctic Territory) and the greater than 900 people who subscribe to the Network from around Australia and overseas.

We are happy to discuss this submission and feral animal and native wildlife biosecurity issues with you face to face should you feel it would assist the review. Should we receive any further submissions we will forward them to you before the 28th.

The Australian Wildlife Health Network has made exceptional progress in the short time it has been operational. It is, however, still fragile and needs consolidation.

We hope that this submission helps you with this important work.

Best Wishes,

Rupert Woods
Manager, AWHN

QUARANTINE AND BIOSECURITY REVIEW: AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE HEALTH NETWORK (AWHN: THE NETWORK) SUBMISSION

Background

The Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN: The Network) is an unincorporated not for profit organisation that comprises a network of government and private stakeholders across Australia (Attachment 1). Its mission is to promote and facilitate collaborative links in the investigation and management of wildlife health (feral and native species) in support of human and animal health, biodiversity and trade.

The core business activity is collaboration with key stakeholders to coordinate wildlife health surveillance and information systems across Australia into a national database, with emphasis on supporting Australia's agriculture and trade. It is stressed that the network coordinates information and expertise in a way that is complimentary to existing organisations and does not duplicate their operations.

The AWHN directly supports the Animal Health Committee, Animal Health Australia and the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and Biosecurity Australia (BA) in their efforts to better prepare and protect Australia against the adverse effects of wildlife diseases. It provides priorities in wildlife health work to the Australian Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases (AB-CRC), administers Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system as well as facilitating and coordinating targeted projects.

Representation

The Network is administered under corporate governance. There is a three tiered structure. A management committee, chaired by an appointment from Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, provides strategic direction and advice to an operations committee, which oversees the running of the Network. The coordinator and administrative assistant provide support for the operations and management committees. It is important to note that there is representation on the AWHN governing committees from almost every agency or organisation (both government and NGO) that has a stake or interest in animal and wildlife health issues in Australia. In addition the Network also comprises more than 900 wildlife health professionals and others from around Australia and the rest of the world who have an interest in diseases with feral animals or wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact on Australia's trade, human health and biodiversity.

Immediate need

With respect to the quarantine and biosecurity review it is important for the Review Panel to understand that:

- 1. Emerging and emergency diseases need to be detected.**
- 2. Introductions and emergence of disease can occur in feral animals and native wildlife (e.g. foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever, SARS, avian influenza, Nipah virus, Surra etc) and;**
- 3. surveillance is required.**

The AWHN provides an effective surveillance framework for Australia for diseases with feral animals and native wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact on human and animal health, trade and biodiversity. However, it urgently needs support in both personnel and resources to make the services it provides both systematic and comprehensive for the nation.

Summary/ Recommendation

Feral animals and wildlife represent a threat to Australia's biosecurity.

There is an immediate need to address the infrastructure, processes and policies required to address the risks posed to Australia by diseases with feral animals and wildlife as part of their ecology.

Failure to address this need will leave Australia at an unacceptable level of risk to its trade, human health and biodiversity.

The nationally agreed vehicle to assist the many agencies involved with addressing these issues is the Australian Wildlife Health Network. It is, however fragile and requires immediate consolidation and support.

Attachment 1. About the Australian Wildlife Health Network

The Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN: The Network) is a national initiative of the Commonwealth government. Established in 2002 to address the nations need for a coordinated approach to wildlife health and disease, the Network has made exceptional progress in a relatively short amount of time, largely due to the efforts of a small, but dedicated number of staff.

The Network's core business is wildlife disease surveillance in feral and native animals but also includes facilitating the development of protocols, coordination of information in an emergency, advancing education and training, and prioritising and promoting survey and research activities related to wildlife.

From the initial stages of appointing a national coordinator in 2002, the Network now boasts a core staff of 2.5 (Rupert Woods (Manager), Leesa Haynes (Projects Coordinator) and Janelle Ward (Administrative Assistant); Wildlife Coordinators in each State and Territory; an informative website (www.wildlifehealth.org.au) with a rapidly growing bibliography and other resources; a weekly electronic Digest with the latest national and international wildlife disease news; a national database (eWHIS) with over 1,500 animal records on file and a rapid "first alert system" for exotic or emergency diseases, a national subscriber list of over 900 individuals; a national plan for surveillance of Avian Influenza in wild birds; and a national specialist group for Australian Bat Lyssavirus, amongst many other activities.

The Network now produces a number of surveillance and informative reports for a number of agencies, including the OIE, Animal Health Australia and the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer.

The vibrant AWHN newsletter has received some glowing feedback and is available on the AWHN website.

Core funding comes from agriculture (DAFF) through the Wildlife and Exotic Diseases Program (WEDPP), business support through the Taronga Conservation Society Australia and recently, funding from the Department of Health and Aging (DoHA) and Wildlife Diseases Association Australasian Section. Although the Network has made considerable progress, there is an urgent need for contributions from other agencies to allow for the continued growth of the Network and to enable the Network to address key issues pertaining to zoonoses, biodiversity and the environment.

For further information on the Network see the website: www.wildlifehealth.gov.au. If your agency would like to contribute to the Network, please contact Rupert Woods, Manager on 02 9978 4579 or rwoods@zoo.nsw.gov.au. If you would like to subscribe to the Network, contact awhn@zoo.nsw.gov.au or call 02 9932 4368.