

# Chief Veterinary Officer's foreword



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*Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly* is a veterinary science publication that provides a topical summary of animal health matters and reports of animal health surveillance activities undertaken in Australia during the previous 3-month period. As part of the National Animal Health Information Program (NAHIP), this report contributes to Australia's annual animal health report to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

Welcome to Issue 3 of *Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly* for 2020. The aquatic feature article in this edition is a rewarding tale of combating a new disease in Tasmania — salmon orthomyxoviral necrosis disease in farmed Atlantic salmon, caused by pilchard orthomyxovirus. It is a demonstration of how our combined scientific resources in surveillance, diagnostics and vaccinology can combat an emergent viral threat, in this case for fish health and welfare.

In terms of emergency animal disease exclusions and responses, it has been a busy time for government staff and relevant industry sectors, notably *Ehrlichia canis* in dogs and avian influenza in poultry species. At the national level, Australia's Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs), together with Animal Health Australia, peak industry groups, research and development corporations and non-government organisations, are developing an over-arching strategic action plan — to be known as AnimalPLAN — and further pursuing a specific focus on surveillance to incorporate new technologies and approaches.

Australia continues to invest in African swine fever (ASF) preparedness, with CVOs convening an ASF task force that ran from October 2019 to July 2020, concluding with a celebratory participant seminar on 7 October 2020. Importantly, this approach has demonstrated the fundamental value of collaboration between government and industry veterinarians, and others in the pig production chain, to deliver robust preparedness policy and plans.

This work phase has fortuitously been followed by the national Exercise Razorback (15 September – 14 October 2020), examining all aspects of pig euthanasia in a simulated ASF response in a range of different-sized Australian piggeries. While COVID-response restrictions have prevented travel, it has been inspiring to see the range of industry and government participants and the level of participation achieved in a digital forum. The exercise has helped to further tease out some of the practical emergency response issues for Australian piggeries.

The agreed outcomes from both processes will be incorporated into the relevant Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN) manuals and supporting documents, which form the nationally agreed emergency animal disease (EAD) response framework.

*Ehrlichia canis* diagnostics, surveillance and response measures are continuing to be progressed. The organism is well established in northern Western Australia and the Northern Territory, often with a severe impact on infected dogs. The exact strain of *E. canis* responsible is yet to be defined, and its ongoing future as a nationally notifiable disease is also yet to be decided.

The three avian influenza outbreaks in Victorian chickens, turkeys and emus this quarter have been successfully resolved, with ongoing surveillance to support the international case for proof of freedom proceeding well. The avian influenza response has demonstrated that EAD response management arrangements can operate successfully in a virtual meeting environment (necessitated by COVID-19).

CVOs and their staff have variously supported the COVID-19 response with some direct contributions by veterinary epidemiologists. CVOs have also been involved in measures to support the continued successful operation of animal product supply chains. Further interest has been taken in the overall COVID response to learn what we can from Australia's largest emergency health response, for the benefit of any future large EAD responses.

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