

A web-based system for ongoing maintenance of Animal Health Australia's information sheets for animal diseases

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For many years, Australia has held an online collection of information sheets for animal health diseases, including both endemic diseases and diseases exotic to Australia. The main purpose of these sheets is to provide information about Australia's animal health status in support of international trade in animals and animal products. Information sheet maintenance is handled by the NAHIS (National Animal Health Information System) program; NAHIS is managed by Animal Health Australia¹ (AHA), a not-for-profit public company established and funded by the Australian, state and territory governments and major Australian livestock industry organisations. The information sheets underwent a major review and all were comprehensively updated between 2005 and 2006. In order to maintain relevance and accuracy, it is important that each information sheet is regularly reviewed, checked for appropriateness and accuracy, and updated where necessary. However, the process of updating information sheet content then implementing the replacement of the existing sheet (displayed as a static web page by AHA) was time-consuming and unwieldy; the information sheets in danger of becoming outdated. In 2006, AHA launched a new Central Animal Health Database (AHA-CAHD) for managing Australia's nationally-relevant animal information. This database includes a sophisticated user management system, which has since been linked to a customised wiki system for secure external collaborative development of a number of reports. Given the success and potential of these systems, it was proposed that the information sheets be moved from their existing format (static web pages) to become wiki pages, and that the access to, and status of these pages be managed from with the AHA-CAHD. Where appropriate, AHA-CAHD data was to be dynamically incorporated into sheets, ensuring it is up-to-date and accurate.

This paper describes the web-based semi-automated information sheet management system (ISMS) adopted by AHA for the secure, confidential editing, review, and approval of Australia's animal health information sheets. The process of launching several information sheets for review each week and communicating with nominated reviewers by autogenerated emails is quickly and easily managed by the information sheet coordinator from within the AHA-CAHD's ISMS module. Once the information sheet has been edited on the wiki, (final) reviewers vote to accept or reject the edited information sheet. Once accepted, the revised information sheet becomes the 'official' version, and replaces the previous version at a click of a button. The ISMS was launched in November 2008 and to date, several batches of sheets have moved through the system, with participants declaring the system easy to use and efficient.

¹ www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au