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INDUSTRY BIOSECURITY STANDARDS FOR MEAT PROCESSING – A NEW PROJECT

BACKGROUND

Biosecurity has become a major concern to the agriculture industry as a result of foreign and emerging endemic and exotic disease issues, the globalisation of agriculture and increasing public concerns over food safety. Biosecurity can be defined as the management practices enabling businesses in primary production and manufacturing to prevent the movement of disease-causing agents onto and off of their operations. This includes environmental contamination.

Biosecurity therefore involves many aspects of farm management, such as disease control and prevention (e.g. closed herds, direct consignment of transport, vaccinations, ante-mortem inspections), nutrient management and visitor control. Although controlling and limiting the movement of livestock is recognised as the most important biosecurity measure for most diseases, many important hazards can be carried on contaminated clothing, boots, equipment and vehicles.

As individual farms, feedlots, saleyards and processing establishments are now much less isolated and inputs are now entering these enterprises from further away, often from other countries. Issues such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, foot and mouth disease, avian influenza and Newcastle disease have brought concerns closer to Australia. It is imperative that Australia maintains its disease free status and clean and green reputation for wholesome food production.

Effective biosecurity at the enterprise and industry level is considered to be extremely important in mitigating the risk of the introduction and/or spread of animal diseases. This has been recognised by both industry and government as being particularly important in mitigating the risk of an emergency animal disease. Some of the industries and sectors have commenced establishing biosecurity plans, many of which are considering integrating these with their existing quality assurance and/or training arrangements. There is a lot to be gained by all sectors of industry through the introduction of better biosecurity and adoption of associated biosecurity standards on-farm, during transport and at the processing plant.

Previous disease outbreak examples in other industries, such as the 2007 equine influenza, clearly demonstrated the value of quick, decisive action during the first few days of a disease incursion from both industry and Government. One of the reasons that it worked so well was that there was no need for

lengthy argument about who would pay for the response. This was because the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) was triggered.

In addition to exotic diseases, there are many endemic diseases that currently require surveillance and monitoring, as well as feedback, across the supply chain. For instance, the State Departments have several projects operating with industry aimed at managing the identification, reporting, feedback and monitoring of diseases and conditions. Data currently shows variation between jurisdictions for the prevalence of liver fluke, *T. ovis* infection (sheep measles), caseous lymphadenitis and hydatidosis, for example – all of which have impacts on productivity and the ability for processors to meet particular specifications.



PROCESSING INDUSTRY BIOSECURITY STANDARDS, PLANS AND TRAINING (THIS PROJECT)

There is an identified need for comprehensive, operational industry standards for biosecurity that can be easily integrated within existing Approved Arrangement systems or quality assurance systems on plant and at related rendering, hide production or further processing facilities.

This project aims to develop and implement industry biosecurity standards and related resource materials that will cover practices and procedures to address endemic and exotic disease risks that can impact the meat processing industry. This project will also assist to operationalise the information contained within existing Government/Industry plans, such as AusVet Plan developed by Animal Health Australia. AMPC, AMIC and AHA have agreed to revise the



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meat processing component of the AusVet Plan as part of this project. Resource materials will also be produced, including a CD-Rom for disease identification and draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). AMPC is also seeking to invest in the development of training materials that underpin the standards and that will be delivered via Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to processors. AMPC will be updating industry and stakeholders on this project at MINTRAC network meetings in the next 6 months.

The standards and related resource material will cover all the major commercial livestock species and will integrate the current practices of processors, including existing ante-mortem procedures, inspection of livestock and best practice emergency actions. The standards, once implemented, will assist in the detection, management and prevention of biosecurity threats and risks to the industry, maintain market access and ensure that due diligence can be demonstrated to customers, government and trading partners.



THE EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASE RESPONSE AGREEMENT

The Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) is the agreement between government and industry that defines how to manage the cost and responsibility for an emergency response to an animal disease outbreak. It is a formal and legally binding document and covers the management and funding of the response to emergency animal diseases in accordance with designated emergency

diseases and response categories (1-4). For all disease categories listed in the EADRA, there is a preferred approach to an outbreak that has been developed and agreed to by governments and industry. These approaches are captured in AUSVETPLAN (Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan) for responding to an emergency animal disease. Industry costs for an emergency disease response are determined in relation to their GVP and government costs for a response is shared (50% by the Australian Government and the remainder is shared by the state and territory governments).

The implementation of agreed industry standards for biosecurity in the meat processing industry will also provide scope to link with those other industry sectors already commencing work on standards and biosecurity plans across the supply chain.

The standards will directly assist in providing a consolidated and practical document for easy integration of biosecurity requirements into Approved Arrangements/QA on plant. The standards will also underpin the responsibilities outlined in the EADRA and assist industry in minimising the exposure of industry to disease threats. Finally, the standards will (as demonstrated via previous projects), provide a mechanism to reassure customers, Governments and trading partners of industry efforts to ensure Australia remains disease-free (status).

THE PROCESS UNDERWAY (METHODS)

It is proposed that this same approach is utilised for the development of these industry biosecurity standards as was applied for the AMIC Animal Welfare Standards published in 2005, and revised in 2009 and 2012 (www.ampc.com.au and www.amic.org.au).

Through a similar process, a (project) biosecurity advisory committee, comprising representation from Government (State Department, State Food Authority, AQIS and DAFF), Animal Health Australia, technical and scientific experts, industry (processor) and others, will develop the industry standards and related resource materials. AMPC and AMIC will provide the materials to processor councils for eventual endorsement, before dissemination to companies. Consultation will occur with State jurisdictions that have, or are, currently developing their respective Biosecurity priorities and strategies.

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The first meeting was held in September 2012, where determination of the scope of the project (and materials), the format and detail required and key biosecurity issues were discussed. The national advisory committee, jointly chaired by AMPC and AMIC, contributed technical inputs to the first drafts of the standard. The advisory committee will reconvene early in 2013, to continue the project with the aim of completing the standards and resource materials by mid-2013 for wider feedback from processors. The final materials will then be provided to the AMIC councils for sign off and then distributed to processing businesses for implementation by the end of 2013.

For further information please contact AMPC on 02 9436 0042.

