

National co-ordination during emergency animal disease incidents

Post, Walker and Lansdown outline the complementary roles of all levels of government in the co-ordination of national emergency animal disease incidents

Abstract

In Australia, responsibility for the eradication or management of an animal disease is spread across all levels of government, (including local, State/Territory and Australian government) as well as animal industries. Major animal disease outbreaks place heavy demands on animal health authorities. This article outlines the complementary roles of local, State/Territory and the Australian Government in the co-ordination of national emergency animal disease incidents.

Introduction

In Australia, responsibility for the eradication or management of an emergency animal disease is spread across all levels of government, (including local, State/Territory and Australian government) as well as animal industries. Major animal disease outbreaks, especially when it is an exotic or unknown disease, place heavy demands on animal health authorities.

Australia exports about two thirds of its agricultural products. Trading partners importing our animals or products are unlikely to accept that a physical border (such as a state border) stops the spread of disease, thus making a national approach vital to safeguard Australia's trade during animal disease emergencies.

National co-ordination means that participants are aware of developments and can meet their

obligations. During an outbreak of animal disease:

- there can be consumer concerns about the safety of Australian food,
- there can be a high level of media interest and flow on socio-economic effects; and
- farmers may lose their livelihood while other industries, such as the tourism industry, can be damaged.

National co-ordination means there is a whole-of-government response to these problems and that all the participants have the opportunity to communicate and decide what is best for Australia collaboratively.

Australia's arrangements for national co-ordination Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD) and National Management Group (NMG)

When an unusual incident or an outbreak occurs there are several avenues through which it can be reported, including a 24-hour emergency telephone number. The incident or outbreak must be reported to the nearest State or Territory animal health authority as soon as possible. State and Territory officers then report the situation to their Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO).

The State or Territory CVO investigates the situation and can

place restrictions on movement of animals, people and vehicles to stop the spread of the disease. A quarantine area can be established where the disease is occurring. The CVO may also discuss the incident with the Australian CVO (ACVO) at the Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Together they decide whether the incident requires a nationally co-ordinated response.

The Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD) is called to co-ordinate the national technical response to terrestrial and aquatic animal health emergencies in Australia. This committee was first formed in 1941 and reconstituted as CCEAD in 1968. CCEAD is a sub-committee under the Primary Industries Standing Committee (PISC).¹ CCEAD allows rapid consultation between technical experts in the States and Territories and the Australian Government. This helps a rapid national response.

The ACVO is the Chair of CCEAD. The ACVO calls the CCEAD together when there are major outbreaks of animal disease, especially where there may be an exotic or a new disease and where there may be problems for public health or trade.

Membership of the CCEAD varies for different diseases and with the species. As well

¹ Members of PISC are the Chief Executive Officers or Directors of all the state and territory government primary industry departments

as the ACVO, regular CCEAD members are the CVO's of all the States and Territories, a member from Animal Biosecurity of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, a member from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), and a member from CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory.

For aquatic incidents, State/Territory Fisheries Managers or Directors of Fisheries may substitute for, or collaborate with, the CVOs. Other members of CCEAD may include livestock industry groups from affected and non-affected industries and Animal Health Australia.

For certain terrestrial animal diseases, CCEAD acts under the Government and Livestock Industry Cost Sharing Deed in respect to Emergency Animal Disease Responses (EADRA). The Australian Government, all State and Territory governments and major industry organisations are parties to the EADRA.

The EADRA sets out arrangements where the cost of a response to outbreaks of specified diseases is shared by all the parties. The EADRA currently covers 63 serious terrestrial animal diseases that have the potential to cause major socio-economic consequences for Australia, have significant public health or environmental

consequences, could severely disrupt trade, and cause severe production losses.

CCEAD meets to plan the sharing of resources (both physical and financial) to manage and control animal disease outbreaks. This is very important when the emergency is significant and/or widespread. For example, when an outbreak of a new disease in horses in Queensland and several outbreaks of Newcastle disease in NSW occurred, CCEAD planned the best to use resources from all States and Territories.

The CCEAD also meets to discuss laboratory results, the pattern of spread of the disease, how best to control or eradicate the disease, and the best quarantine measures.

CCEAD provides advice to the National Emergency Animal Disease Management Group (NMG). Under the EADRA, NMG is responsible for invoking the cost sharing arrangements once CCEAD advises them of the Emergency Animal Disease Response Plan. NMG oversees resources for the Emergency Animal Disease Response Plan (EADRP) and management of the national policy. NMG members are the chief executives of Australian, State and Territory governments' primary industries departments and the chief executives of industry bodies

affected by a particular outbreak. The Chief Executive of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is the Chair of NMG.

The NMG may be convened to discuss national co-ordination of a response to a disease which is a potential threat but has not yet caused an outbreak in Australia. The NMG can make recommendations so broader policy issues relating to animal disease prevention or control can be considered through formal inter-governmental structures such as the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC).

Other government involvement

In large-scale emergencies other government agencies providing health, employment and financial support and advice, may also become involved. These agencies play a key role in managing the flow-on effects such as social and economic disruption or possible human health concerns with the animal disease. Emergency management agencies may also be called to assist.

In readiness for a large-scale emergency, a whole-of-government committee structure has been developed. This means the response from all agencies can be co-



Table 1. National co-ordination arrangements in practice

Newcastle Disease 2002

CCEAD and NMG were convened following an outbreak of Newcastle disease near Sydney. Membership included representatives of the egg and chicken meat industries. CCEAD and NMG considered and agreed on a response plan prepared by the 'combat state'. CCEAD discussed technical issues relating to management of the outbreak and control in the future. NMG agreed to national cost-sharing arrangements and the budget and estimate of costs for eradication that had been prepared by NSW.

CCEAD also considered whether a compulsory national vaccination program would assist long-term control of the disease. Finally the CCEAD discussed and developed a longer-term Newcastle Disease National Management Plan.

Avian Influenza 2004

When severe outbreaks of highly pathogenic AI occurred in Asia in 2003 and 2004, CCEAD and NMG were called together. Members of the CCEAD and NMG included primary industries agency heads, CVOs from around Australia and representatives of the poultry meat, ostrich, emu, duck and egg industries.

Australia did not have an outbreak of avian influenza but CCEAD and NMG considered the risk posed to Australia by the outbreak in Asia and reviewed Australia's preparedness arrangements for this disease.

Actions to improve preparedness were proposed and endorsed prior to a potential outbreak. Contingency plans were also reviewed and up-dated. The disease had new risks for human health and these were considered in Australia's response plans. Members were not called to make a decision on the eradication of the disease or to decide on a response plan. Nor was there a need to invoke cost-sharing arrangement for a response. However meetings of CCEAD and NMG in situations like this, enable Australia to prepare in case of an outbreak. Australia can then respond rapidly in response to an outbreak and control the disease as quickly as possible. It also ensures awareness around Australia of arrangements and everyone is ready in case of a potential emergency.

ordinated for an holistic national response to all aspects of the animal disease emergency.

Responsibilities

Industry groups

Animal industry groups are responsible for the development of plans to prevent any spread of disease between properties and to prevent any incursion of disease into their enterprises. They must also make sure that animal disease outbreaks are reported to State and Territory government authorities as soon as possible.

Local governments

Local governments fit into national agricultural emergency arrangements through State government departments and State emergency management arrangements. Their responsibilities can include preparedness, response, and recovery activities in their local areas.

State and Territory governments

State and Territory governments are responsible for disease control within their boundaries. This includes responsibility for

interstate and local quarantine arrangements that include restriction of movement of stock and people on and off properties and around their State. They also undertake surveillance, investigation and response activities. States and Territories work to improve awareness about the situation and disease within their boundaries.

States and Territories report any occurrence or any suspicion of an emergency animal disease to the Australian Government and decide with the CVO if the CCEAD should be called together. Table 1 outlines national co-ordination arrangements in practice.

Animal diseases pay little heed to jurisdictional and legal boundaries. These boundaries do not stop the spread of animal diseases. Some diseases can be spread through the air as aerosol particles, others with animals as they move from place to place. Diseases can also be spread by people and vehicles carrying contaminated material across borders.

The Australian Government

The Australian Government has responsibility for quarantine at the Australian border and for surveillance for and intelligence on important animal diseases before they reach the border.

The Australian Government reports to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) about disease status. It is responsible for maintaining access to overseas trading markets, including, where possible, during a disease outbreak. It makes sure that import and export requirements are aligned with international obligations. This maintains a reputation for excellent animal health while trade is facilitated.

The Australian Government also has a prime role to co-ordinate a response to an emergency animal disease and to co-ordinate communication arrangements. It has specific responsibilities under the EADRA.



Summary

Australia's arrangements for the management of emergency animal disease enjoy a long history of success. Australia has controlled and eradicated several diseases. Over time, key groups have gained experience in working together to reach an informed decision using the best information available from both government and industry. Decisions are made by consensus of the group so the best outcome for Australia can be achieved.

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Authors

Lyndel Post is the Secretary of the Consultative Committee for Emergency Animal Disease. Lyndel works closely with the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer and the State and Territory Chief Veterinary Officers on national animal health policy and emergency management of animal diseases. Lyndel has also worked in AQIS and in Animal Biosecurity within the Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry. Previously Lyndel worked for the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority and was in private veterinary practice in rural NSW for several years. Lyndel has an honors degree in veterinary science and postgraduate teaching qualifications.

Linda Walker has worked on aquatic animal health issues for the past five years for Product Integrity Animal and Plant Health, in the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. In this time, she has developed and run simulation exercises on emergency disease management and developed and run courses on Aquatic Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases. She has previously worked for the Bureau of Rural Sciences, AQIS and the Australian Government Department of the Environment. Linda has a PhD in behavioural ecology.

Philip Lansdown is the Secretary to the National Emergency Animal Disease Management Group (NMG) within the Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry. He is also Secretary to the Primary Industries and Natural Resource Management Ministerial Councils and their Standing Committee of Officials. In this capacity, he works closely with Australian Government, State and Territory agency heads responsible for primary industries policy, including animal health and emergency animal disease management. Philip has degrees in applied science and arts.