

# **Statement of Biosecurity Policies and Programs for the Australian Capital Territory**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There are a variety of policies and programs conducted in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) that contribute to biosecurity for animal diseases. These include:

- Passive disease surveillance;
- Disease investigation and notification;
- Regulation and certification of animal holding establishments;
- Exotic disease preparedness;
- Public health; &
- Feral animal control.

## **BACKGROUND**

The total area of the ACT is 235,829 hectares of which 53% is conservation area 21% rural and the remainder urban.

All rural land in the ACT under private control is held under some form of lease, license or agreement. Tenure for rural leases ranges from one month to 99 years. All new leases require the lessee to prepare a Land Management Agreement. This agreement requires the lessee to identify the type and number of stock to be held on the lease. It also requires the lessee to identify feral animal problems and to identify a control program and timeframe in which to undertake this program.

Grazing of sheep and cattle is the primary activity conducted on rural land in the ACT. There are 190 leases ranging in size from 1 hectare to 2 500 hectares. There are normally about 78 000 sheep, 12 000 cattle, 1 500 horses and 200 000 chickens held on these lands, however recent drought and bushfires have reduced overall livestock numbers by approximately 10%.

There are currently no feedlots, abattoirs or piggeries in the ACT. It is unlikely that any will be established due to unsuitable economic and physical environments. These industries are identified as industries requiring special planning approvals.

There is one poultry farm with approximately 200 000 laying hens chickens. There is no other poultry farm for at least 50 kilometres.

The ACT government is responsible for the monitoring of the Canberra saleyards. Approximately 400 – 600 cattle pass through these saleyards each fortnight.

There are two significant zoological establishments in the ACT, one is the National Zoo and Aquarium (exotic and native animals), the other is Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (native animals).

## **DISEASE SURVEILLANCE**

The ACT is involved in passive disease surveillance. All cattle sold in the ACT are required to have a stock tail tag. This identification system for disease tracing and a well established network established with NSW Agriculture and surrounding Rural Lands Protection Boards has created an effective identification and traceback system.

In addition an ACT government veterinarian regularly attends and inspects stock at Canberra Saleyards.

Most of the rural properties are visited by departmental staff at least once each year and are available to attend at more regular intervals if requested.

## **DISEASE INVESTIGATION AND NOTIFICATION**

The ACT government has 1.4 veterinarians. Under the ACT's *Animal Diseases Act 1993* these veterinarians:

- Investigate, notify, and respond to exotic disease incursion;
- Investigate and monitor notifiable endemic incidences;
- Regulate and monitor the above tail tag system; &
- Participate in national endemic and exotic disease control and eradication programs such as Ovine Johne's Disease, Bovine Johne's Disease, Ovine Footrot, Newcastle Disease and Avian Influenza.

## **REGULATION AND CERTIFICATION**

Stock movement certification related to interstate animal movement requirements is provided by ACT government veterinarians. Presently "stock" are controlled under the *Stock Act* and *Animal Diseases Act*.

Environment ACT's licensing division regulates the movement of exotic and non-exempt native animals into and out of the ACT – under the *Nature Conservation Act.*, and in cooperation with other government agencies (e.g. Environment Australia and AQIS). All keepers of these animals must be licensed. Permit conditions include pre determined animal health criteria. ACT government veterinarians provide specialist advice to the licensing section regarding animal health and housing issues and inspect animal enclosures as required.

## **EXOTIC DISEASE PREPAREDNESS**

The ACT has an Emergency Plan, and a separate “Sub-plan” concerning animal disease. Management plans are being prepared for at risk establishments for response to individual exotic disease outbreaks (e.g. Saleyard management plan for vesicular disease). The ACT participated in Exercise Minotaur and has been actively involved in other exotic disease training programs. The ACT is presently negotiating a MOU with New South Wales regarding exotic disease response capabilities.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH**

Surveillance for zoonotic diseases is conducted by disease reporting (notifiable diseases).

## **FERAL ANIMALS**

The ACT Vertebrate Pest Strategy provides a framework for reducing the likelihood of new species establishing, and effective integration of control strategies for existing species across land tenure boundaries.

While it is the responsibility of each landowner to control feral animals, vertebrate pest management has been an important element of land management in the ACT since its inception.

Environment ACT administers the relevant legislation, undertakes extension and education functions and maintains liaison and collaborative links with other government agencies and institutions, and community-based organisations. Environment ACT also undertakes vertebrate pest management directly as a public land manager and coordinates vertebrate pest management as a function of land management throughout the Territory. A regulatory function also is undertaken that involves surveillance and authorisation of movement, keeping and trade of animals with pest potential.

Responsibility and authority for on-ground vertebrate pest management in the ACT is shared between Government land managers and the rural community. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service, within Environment ACT, is the major non-urban land manager. Parks and Conservation interacts with ACT Forests, Canberra Urban Parks and Places and the rural community when a coordinated approach to vertebrate pest management issues is required.

Environment ACT has a longstanding relationship with institutions that undertake vertebrate pest management research programs—for example, the University of Canberra, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, the Australian National University, the Australian Alps Liaison Committee and the Cooperative Research Centres for Freshwater Ecology, Biological Control of Pest Animals, and Conservation and Management of Marsupials. A range of management options and control techniques

have been explored in conjunction with these institutions and some notable advances in knowledge and methodology have occurred. Together with participation in national and regional forums for vertebrate pest management, a continuation of these relationships is vital to maintenance of essential skills and knowledge of contemporary vertebrate pest management.

Coupled with this continuing quest for a high standard of vertebrate pest management capability, there is an increasing focus on ensuring that the substantial resources committed to management programs are used efficiently and effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a small jurisdiction with limited resources, the ACT faces unique challenges in maintaining its biosecurity programs, however the above measures contribute to the effective control of exotic and endemic diseases and pests within ACT borders.