



ISSUE 11 November 2009

SCAHL S

NEWSLETTER

SUB-COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY STANDARDS

CONTENTS

- 2 Australian National Quality Assurance Program (ANQAP)

- 2 The Australian Animal Disease Diagnosis Training Initiative (AADDTI)

- 2 New Test Approvals

- 3 Update on Laboratories for Emergency Animal Disease Diagnosis and Response (LEADDR)

- 3 Building a virtual microscopy laboratory network through the Australian Biosecurity Intelligence Network

- 3 Appointment of New Editor for SCAHLS ANZSDP

- 4 Sample Submission to Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL)

- 4 Progress Update on STARS

- 4 Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) 2010 International Symposium and Workshop

CHANGES TO AQUATIC ANIMAL HEALTH GOVERNANCE: *Land finally meets sea at SCAHLS*

The National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) at their July 2008 meeting agreed that public policy and government decision-making on aquatic animal health would be transferred from the Aquatic Animal Health Committee (AAHC) to the Animal Health Committee (AHC). It was also agreed that the National Aquatic Animal Health Technical Working Group (NAAHTWG) working under AAHC would be retained in the new arrangements but with a modified role and terms of reference.

As a result of these decisions a new Sub-committee on Aquatic Animal Health (SCAAH) has been formed and endorsed to support AHC in their policy deliberations by provision of robust scientific and technical advice on aquatic animal

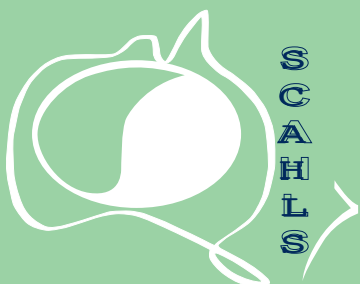
health. With this emphasis on policy advice and technical facilitation on aquatic animal health issues it has been necessary to amalgamate other former functions of NAAHTWG within the working remit of SCAHLS.

At the recent SCAHLS workshop in Darwin members agreed the incorporation of ANZSDP for aquatic animal disease, some aspects of proficiency testing and issues associated with laboratory aspects of aquatic animal diagnostics be addressed through the existing business structure of SCAHLS. It was also highlighted that a close liaison between SCAAH and SCAHLS be established so that the benefits of expertise in both groups be maintained, further developed and applied in the area of aquatic animal health.

Test and Expertise Database

At SCAHLS 26, the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) agreed to put together a demonstration of a database version of the test and expertise database that is currently collated in an Excel spreadsheet, which does not allow for easy access to information. The demonstration provided to SCAHLS members at the meeting was well received. AAHL will continue to develop this tool and will explore combining the new database with the existing capability listing maintained by ANQAP. The Animal Health Committee has recently moved to amalgamate the laboratory aspects of the Subcommittee on Aquatic Animal Health (SCAAH) to SCAHLS. AAHL will ensure the smooth incorporation of aquatics based matters into the continued development of the test and expertise database.

The database will be made available on the SCAHLS website in the near future.



Australian National Quality Assurance Program (ANQAP)

ANQAP are pleased to announce the reinstatement of their NATA accreditation as a proficiency testing provider. The ANQAP staff have worked hard over the last year to revamp the program and your understanding during this time was highly appreciated. One of the outcomes of the recent NATA

auditing process was the establishment of a technical expert panel that can assist ANQAP staff with specialist advice when required. The panel has been formed with members from various laboratories around Australia. Another outcome from the audit was a recommendation to remove

the ANQAP Test Booklet from the ANQAP website. However, given the feedback that many people find the information in this booklet useful, a decision has been made to move the link to the SCAHLS website.

Thanks to the participants who responded to the Customer feedback survey conducted in May 2009. The overall feedback received was very positive and encouraging for our new staff. Though the survey is now complete we still welcome your feedback.

Thank you to the laboratories that have donated bulk sera this year to ANQAP particularly the Regional Veterinary Laboratory Orange (NSW), Animal Health Laboratory (WA) and the Berrimah Veterinary Laboratories (Darwin) for their substantial contributions. It is requested that any additional laboratories with access to bulk sera for tests covered by the program please contact the ANQAP coordinator, Sonia Rizzi (03 9217 4360 or at Anqap.Quality@dpi.vic.gov.au).

The Australian Animal Disease Diagnosis Training Initiative (AADDTI)

The Australian Animal Disease Diagnosis Training Initiative has been developed to strengthen training for animal health laboratory diagnosticians, with an initial focus on the veterinary pathologists. We are identifying funding opportunities for postgraduate training following a curriculum developed by universities working together as the Australian Consortium for Animal Disease Diagnosis (ACADD).

This training initiative was developed under the auspices of Animal Health Australia (AHA) and advocated earlier this year to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) by the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), Mike Bond (of AHA), Mike Nunn (of Biosecurity Australia), and Justin Toohey (of the Cattle Council of Australia) and Richard Whittington (of the University of Sydney). DEEWR representatives noted that the Australian Government funding for student places is provided by the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS), primarily for undergraduate courses and only postgraduate courses that meet specific requirements. They also noted that professional upgrading and specialist courses are expected to be full fee-paying courses (although eligible students may be able to pay their tuition in Masters Course using FEE-HELP loans). They also noted some funding might be available through the Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund which provides funding for the development of new courses but not support for operational costs or scholarships. Richard Whittington then surveyed all the universities in ACADD to see if they would be prepared to proceed with an application to this fund. To progress an application, AHA (with the support of AVA) sponsored a meeting of the universities in early July with a view to submitting an application by the end of July.

Professor Jim Rothwell of the University of Queensland has replaced Richard Whittington as chair of ACADD. Richard and his colleague, Michelle Dennis, provided major input to developing AADDTI over the past two years. The university representatives explored what could be achieved within their existing frameworks should the application for support not be successful. Their 'plan B' envisages working within existing structures to deliver courses that will have the same basic or core components with some variation depending particular requirements at each university. The minimum requirements would be a three-year program with at least six months course work, a six month research project, 18 months of applied pathology (on-the-job training), and a strong focus on case management. A favoured model is a research Masters with course work, in which there is requirement for a course fee and students are eligible for (tax-free) scholarships.

New Test Approvals

Within the past six months the following Australian and New Zealand Standard Diagnostic Procedures (ANZSDP) and new tests have been approved. New test for Pooled faecal culture test for bovine Johne's disease and two ANZSDP for Contagious Equine Metritis and Nematode Parasites of Small Ruminants, Camelids and Cattle, Diagnosis with Emphasis on Anthelmintic Efficacy and Resistance Testing were approved at the May 2009 Animal Health Committee (AHC) meeting. These test and procedures will be available on the SCAHLS website.

Update on Laboratories for Emergency Animal Disease Diagnosis and Response (LEADDR)

The concept of the Laboratories for Emergency Animal Disease Diagnosis and Response (LEADDR) network was first explored in detail some 18 months ago following the outbreak of equine influenza in Australia. In March of this year, following the submission of LEADDR strategic and operational plans, the Australian Animal Health Committee approved LEADDR as an operational activity. It was agreed that initially the LEADDR network would deal with three diseases: bluetongue, Newcastle disease and influenza.

Since its inception, LEADDR has met monthly by teleconference to exchange information and build relationships. However, the level of engagement could be improved with regular face-to-face meetings. The next face-to-face is planned to occur in November as part of the Australian Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD) meeting in Launceston (on 12–13 November).

Obtaining additional resources for the LEADDR network for standardisation of equipment and methods is difficult at this time, the LEADDR network has agreed to focus on a harmonisation and equivalency testing based on an effective quality assurance program. This will include the examination of routine control data for laboratories running LEADDR assays and the testing of proficiency panels for the LEADDR assays through ANQAP.

The recent occurrence of pandemic influenza A H1N1 2009 infection (so-called 'swine flu') in pigs enabled the LEADDR network to operate in a real event. The consolidated laboratory reports from LEADDR laboratories were very well received by the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD) and the utility of the LEADDR network was clearly demonstrated and appreciated. It will be important to build on this going forward. As a next step, we hope to appoint a full-time LEADDR coordinator in the near future.

Appointment of New Editor for SCAHLS ANZSDP

The Australian and New Zealand Standard Diagnostic Procedures (ANZSDP) provide detailed diagnostic procedures for the major emergency animal diseases that threaten Australia and New Zealand. They contain detailed information on clinical disease, as well as the samples to be submitted to the laboratory, linked to the range of diagnostic procedures that can be used in the laboratory to confirm a suspect clinical diagnosis. For each disease, an expert is chosen to provide an initial draft, or subsequent update, which is then sent to the SCAHLS ANZSDP editor who ensures consistency with other ANZSDP before final approval by the Australian Animal Health Committee and publication on the SCAHLS website. SCAHLS is pleased to announce that following an open invitation and selection process, Dr Barry Richards has been appointed as editor. Barry succeeds Dr Trevor Faragher who served SCAHLS for many years in this position and we thank Trevor for his dedication and hard work. We wholeheartedly welcome Barry and look forward to working with him in his new role.

Building a virtual microscopy laboratory network through the Australian Biosecurity Intelligence Network

The Australian Biosecurity Intelligence Network (ABIN) mission is to generate a whole of biosecurity national collaborative capability in research, surveillance, and response that will reduce the impact of disease and invasive species on Australia. This will be achieved by providing shared virtual workspaces, a common portal to access information, access to linked data sets and analytical tools, skills training and international development in local regions.

The creation of a virtual microscopy laboratory network is one of the proof-of-concept projects within ABIN's establishment strategy.

Participants will be able to

- Capture and share real time microscope images in a peer-to-peer or group context.
- Communicate and collaborate, from their work place, in a virtual environment and shared workspace, using video-conferencing and collaboration platforms.
- Access, share and add to information in knowledge repositories for animal-disease reference material, standards for testing, or research specific activities.
- Analyse laboratory accession data using a variety of tools including mapping technologies.

The project will network sites around Australia with the necessary work stations and components to allow collaboration within and between sectors, including the animal, aquatic, wildlife and plant sectors.

Sample Submission to Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL)

AAHL is establishing a centralised courier service to improve reliability of delivery of urgent specimens. The proposed system will have pre-printed consignment notes linked to a CSIRO contract. These will offer overnight delivery for Category 2 cases and same day delivery (where available) for Category 3. AAHL will supply consignment notes with the delivery address and shipping requirements pre-printed. This will allow AAHL and the submitting laboratory to track specimen transport and delivery with further enhancement planned via links with the STARS system. Submitting labs would need only to appropriately pack the specimens and call the toll-free number. The costs of this service, limited to Category 2 and 3 submissions will be met by AAHL.

Progress Update on STARS

Since the previous SCAHLS meeting, the STARS project has been refined into three distinct phases.

1. a web access to AAHL's LIMS that also provides the foundation for the further development of the system. This phase is complete and has gone live at <http://stars.csiro.au>.
2. development of corresponding software in each regional LIMS to allow automation of the linkage to the AAHL system. This phase has been successful in attracting funding from ABIN to expedite this development. Much of this work is anticipated to occur in the next 12 months.
3. extension of the concept to include a wider range of data sources and is currently only at the concept level.

Discussions have also been held with BioSIRT to establish the best path to integrating this process with BioSIRT functions.

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) 2010 International Symposium and Workshop

The FMD International Symposium and Workshop will be held on 12-14 April 2010 in Melbourne, Australia.

This international event provides the opportunity to inform scientists, policy makers, field staff and the livestock industries on the latest scientific findings regarding important aspects for managing the risks from FMD such as novel developments in:

- Epidemiology and surveillance
- Vaccines and their applications
- Diagnostics
- Understanding virus/host interactions

The first two days of the program will discuss the latest scientific findings, and the interactive workshop on the third day will explore different management options between FMD-free and endemic regions through a series of simulated outbreak scenarios.

For more information, please visit: www.FMD2010.com.au