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SCA·H·L·S

NEWSLETTER

SUB-COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY STANDARDS

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November Conferences and Workshops

A number of contiguous conferences and workshops will be held in Melbourne in November 2007. They are:

1. Subcommittee on Animal Health Laboratory Standards (SCAHLs) *Workshop on New Test Validation* – Sun 11 November 2007, Crown Promenade Hotel, Melbourne.

This workshop is of significant interest because new test validation is complex and submission of applications for SCAHLs approval of new tests now carries a fee of \$3,000 per test. This workshop is designed to give applicants advanced training in validating a test to the standards required by SCAHLs. All new tests to be used in national programs and for export health certification will be required to have SCAHLs approval.

2. World Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (WAVLD) in association with the Australian Association of Laboratory Diagnosticians (AusAVLD) and the Office Internationale Epizooties (OIE) – *13th International*

Symposium – Crown Promenade Hotel - Mon 12 to Wed 14 November 2007

This international conference (see details at www.wavld2007.com) has three themes:

Monday: GLOBAL RISKS AND CHALLENGES – Includes new and emerging diseases including zoonotics as well as trans-boundary animal diseases, avian influenza, foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever

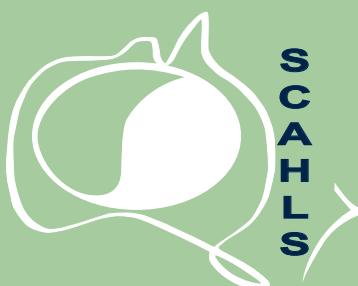
Tuesday: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE – Includes laboratory issues involving biosecurity, biosafety, new technologies, quality assurance and data management

Wednesday: OIE BIOTECHNOLOGY SYMPOSIUM – Covers the application of new technologies to the practise of veterinary pathology including in-situ-hybridisation, remote imaging, confocal microscopy, digitisation and in-situ-PCR/pathogen localisation

continued overleaf..

Sending Specimens Overseas

For some time there has been considerable concern about sending biological specimens overseas for diagnosis or further characterization. There is a possibility that an overseas diagnosis could have serious implications for Australia without the full knowledge of Government. There is also the danger that the sample could be used for other purposes that could be detrimental to Australia. In future therefore, it will be necessary for those sending biological samples overseas to inform and seek approval from the Chief Veterinary Officer of the state in which they reside. SCAHLs will post a policy statement on its website and encourages anyone wishing to send samples overseas to be aware of the requirement.



November Conferences and Workshops (cont.)

3. Australian Society for Veterinary Pathology (ASVP) Annual Conference 2007 – Thu 15 to Sat 17 November 2007 – Venue to be announced.

The ASVP Annual Conference is an education and research forum, in which anatomical pathology is presented by the Society in association with the CL Davis Foundation in the USA. Speakers include eminent Australian and USA pathologists. The conference is excellent for continuing education of experienced pathologists and trainees.

Reference Laboratories

A performance review of the four State-based Australian Reference Laboratories was recently conducted by the committee. Following discussion of the results at SCAHLS 22 in Perth, it was resolved that the four existing ARLs would continue to operate as national reference laboratories. The four laboratories are: Tuberculosis (Department of Agriculture & Food WA, South Perth), Ovine Footrot (DAFWA, Albany), Paratuberculosis (PIRVic, Attwood) and Anthrax (PIRVic, Attwood). Two of the ARLs are also OIE Reference Laboratories (Tuberculosis and Paratuberculosis).

In addition, the committee also recognises a number of OIR Reference Laboratories within the Australian Animal Health Laboratory at Geelong. These include Bluetongue, Avian Influenza, Newcastle Disease, Hendra and Nipah Virus Diseases, Rabies, Brucellosis, Epizootic Haemorrhagic Necrosis, Yellowhead Disease and the OIE Collaborating Centre for New and Emerging Diseases.

Updates to NEW TEST EVALUATION PROCESS

At SCAHLS 22 in Perth there were significant improvements made to the procedures for new test evaluations. Submitted data are now assessed using a peer review process in a similar manner to refereed publications. Due to the complexity and volume of the material to be assessed in each application, the completion of the review can take up to six months. Potential submitters should take this into account when developing work objectives. The assessment fee is \$3,000 per test.

The size of the working group responsible for initial review of these submissions has been substantially enlarged from four to nine experts. A separate working group has been assigned the role of developing validation templates, defining policy and maintaining the list of new tests being developed (available at www.scahls.org.au).

Refinements have been made to the policy and procedures covering new test evaluations. These documents, which will be posted on the SCAHLS website, provide guidance for those developing new tests and detail the steps required to obtain approval of tests as 'fit for purpose'.

The chairs of the two working groups are:

- New Test Development, Mike Johnson, AAHL, Geelong, Vic
- New Test Evaluation, Joseph O'Keefe, IDC, Wellington, NZ

For further information, visit www.scahls.org.au or contact the SCAHLS Executive Officer, Jill Birrell (jbirrell@agric.wa.gov.au).

National Animal Health Laboratory (NAHL) Strategy

The NAHLS Advisory Group met face-to-face for the last time on 7 March 2007. Subsequently, the Primary Industries Health Committee endorsed the NAHL Strategy and noted the development of a work plan.

The work plan provides a framework within which the proposed laboratory network can operate. Key items are the development of deliverables and key performance indicators for the national laboratory system. These will be used to identify areas where individual laboratories may contribute and highlight gaps in the existing system.

One long-identified gap is the lack of availability of trained laboratory specialists. Consequently, a training sub-committee will be formed (in the near future) to look at provision of appropriate training as well as enhanced recruitment, particularly in the government sector.

After consultation on the work plan, the NAHL Strategy Advisory Group will submit its final report to the Primary Industries Standing Committee at its September meeting. It is envisaged that a new group (NAHLS Coordinating Committee) will be formed at that time to facilitate activities identified in the work plan.

Exercise Hippolytus

Exercise Hippolytus is a program to evaluate and enhance the ability of Australian animal health laboratories to respond to a national emergency animal disease (EAD).

The development team has proposed that, rather than a single one or two day exercise, greater value would be obtained through a program of targeted activities for individual laboratories as well as a national 'linked-up' event. The program would also provide opportunities for senior laboratory personnel, EAD responders and senior animal health managers from all jurisdictions to explore and resolve issues that may impede an effective contribution by laboratories during a major outbreak. The focus of the program will be highly pathogenic avian influenza but the outcomes will be applicable to any communicable EAD.

At its March meeting SCAHLS endorsed this approach. A detailed project plan is currently being developed and will be put before Animal Health Committee and Primary Industries Health Committee in the near future. The program will be rolled out across the country over the next 16 months commencing with a capacity evaluation exercise at AAHL in late May 2007.

Further information concerning Exercise Hippolytus can be obtained from Greg Flaherty in the Emergency Risk Management Unit of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry. His email address is greg.flaherty@daff.gov.au.

Australian Biosecurity CRC update

The AB-CRC is now in the fourth year of its seven-year term and many of the centre's early research projects are maturing. As a consequence, a strong emphasis is now being placed on technology transfer of specific projects within the research portfolio. Adoption Forums are being trialled as a means of drawing together related projects to ensure the adoption of research findings is coordinated and meets the overall aims of the AB-CRC.

One example of a project with a highly successful outcome is the adoption of a new RT PCR test for avian influenza, led by Hans Heine at AAHL. During 2006 a number of Australian laboratories participated in an AB-CRC funded project aimed at transferring this newly developed test nationwide and to New Zealand. With support from RIRDC and AAHL, this trial proved successful and the test has now been submitted to SCAHLS for approval. Implementation of this new test around the country using a standardised approach is a significant advance in Australia's preparedness for an avian influenza incursion.

The strength of the AB-CRC's training program is also expanding. More than 45 students have been recruited through the education and training portfolio and a further round of scholarships, expected to attract an additional eight students, is imminent. Scholarships have been awarded to students undertaking research projects across three research themes (technologies to enhance detection, ecology of emerging infectious diseases and advanced surveillance systems), thereby enhancing Australia's biosecurity capacity.

Most recently, a consultative survey was undertaken with stakeholders in national research and education programs. The results of this survey indicate there is strong, nation-wide support for continuation of the AB-CRC model. Accordingly, briefing sessions are planned for mid April 2007 for parties interested in a CRC Mark II in most capital cities and strategic planning sessions are planned for late July 2007 in Brisbane.