

AUSVETPLAN turns 25

By Dr Francette Geraghty-Dusan, AUSVETPLAN Veterinary Officer, Animal Health Australia

'World-class' and 'indispensable' were just some of the descriptions of the Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN) provided by past and present contributors at AUSVETPLAN's 25th birthday celebration in August 2016.

Managed by Animal Health Australia (AHA), AUSVETPLAN documents national agreements on the roles, responsibilities, coordination arrangements, and control policies and their implementation guidelines, for emergency animal disease (EAD) responses. The availability of AUSVETPLAN manuals ensures that information about the policies and procedures to manage an EAD incident in Australia are immediately at hand and the responsibilities of those involved are clear, so that no time is lost in mounting a response.

The Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System used by traditional emergency services provides the basis for the AUSVETPLAN Control Centres Management Manual. This means there is potential to use other emergency services staff during an EAD outbreak. However, responding to an EAD can be considerably different to responding to other emergencies such as a natural disaster.

AHA's AUSVETPLAN Manager, Dr Belinda Wright, said, 'In the case of a fire or flood, the emergency response may only last days or weeks, whereas an EAD response can last months. There is also the potential for diseases to spread rapidly across large distances with consequences not just for the local community or industry, but for other sectors such as national tourism and trade.'

AUSVETPLAN has had to address these challenges over the past 25 years, as well as undergo a process of constant review to ensure it remains useful in a fluctuating animal health environment. This has meant that since its inception in 1991, AUSVETPLAN has grown from 15 manuals to a suite of 95 technical documents that are now collaboratively written and reviewed using a cloud-based online authoring system and published by AHA on behalf of its government and industry members. It has proved its importance by guiding the successful response to Australia's 2007 equine influenza outbreak, addressed emerging diseases such as the Nipah virus, and, this year, received an Australian Biosecurity Award.

Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Mark Schipp said that AUSVETPLAN has become renowned as the international benchmark for EAD preparedness and response.

'AUSVETPLAN provides comprehensive response strategies for use in the event of an EAD outbreak. It has enhanced Australia's reputation for excellence in this area and assists in negotiations with our trading partners who often require evidence of disease prevention and control as part of the export certification,' said Dr Schipp.

Although AUSVETPLAN is developed specifically with the Australian context in mind, it continues to be adapted for use in other countries, most recently for Nepal, Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea.

Past CEO of AHA, Mike Bond, remembers the document's usefulness to many nations dealing with the H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza crisis from 2003 onwards.

'I recall that I received requests from the Chief Veterinary Officers of Belize and Tanzania asking for permission to use the AUSVETPLAN manual as a basis for their emergency planning, highlighting the respect and credibility that the AUSVETPLAN series had – and continues to have,' said Mr Bond.

Twenty-five years on from its inception, AUSVETPLAN continues to meet the needs of initial responders and remains the cornerstone of Australia's EAD preparedness and response. AHA looks forward to continuing to manage AUSVETPLAN on behalf of its government and industry members.



Dr Peter Dagg, Dr Francette Geraghty-Dusan and Dr Belinda Wright: the current AHA AUSVETPLAN management team.

Image: Animal Health Australia