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Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies Freedom Assurance Program (TSEFAP)

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Abstract

The Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies Freedom Assurance Program (TSEFAP) is a successful Animal Health Australia (AHA) managed program supporting market access for cattle and sheep. All project milestones have been met and program activities are ongoing. The TSEFAP 2016-17 Annual Report has been published online, and is available on the TSEFAP section of the AHA website[1]. The report describes the surveillance activities within the program. TSEFAP reports have also been included in *Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly* and the *Animal Health in Australia 2017* report (see AHA website[2]). All sheep and cattle samples tested for TSEs were found to be negative for classical scrapie and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in 2017. As a result Australia maintained its *BSE negligible risk* and *scrapie free* status with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

[1] www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/disease-surveillance/tse-freedom-assurance-program/
[2] www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/our-publications/animal-health-in-australia-report/

Executive summary

All TSEFAP milestones have been met and program activities are ongoing. All sheep and cattle samples tested for the surveillance program were found to be negative for classical scrapie and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in 2017-18. As a result Australia maintained its *BSE negligible risk* and *scrapie free* status with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). TSEFAP reports are available on the AHA website and data collected has been included in *Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly* and *Animal Health in Australia 2017* reports.

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1 Background

The Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy Freedom Assurance Program (TSEFAP) is a program critical to Australia's ongoing claims of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) freedom within its cattle herd and is managed by Animal Health Australia (AHA). The project is funded by all Australian governments as well as a variety of industry stakeholders.

Australia is afforded 'negligible BSE' risk status by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) through the adoption of a resolution by the World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE at the General Session in May every year. Countries that have a disease-free status officially recognised by the OIE must submit an annual update on surveillance for BSE by the end of November every year. Australia is also considered classical scrapie-free.

Data from the TSEFAP underpins the information provided annually to the OIE and therefore Australia's ongoing market access for its cattle and sheep, and beef and sheep meat products to markets around the world, including the domestic market. This data also underpins Australia's scientifically backed restrictions on imports of cattle and beef products from countries afforded a lower BSE-related categorisation.

2 Project objectives

1. Expeditiously advise and report to stakeholders on detection of any TSE cases.

2. Provide an annual report for independent distribution on surveillance activities, prevention of feeding of restricted animal material to ruminants, management of import risks and confirming Australia's TSE-free status.

3 Methodology

3.1 National TSE Surveillance Program (NTSESP)

General surveillance

To maintain a continuous watch over the livestock disease profile so that unexpected changes can be identified, general surveillance activities include:

- pre- and post-slaughter inspection at meatworks
- inspection of animals at sale yards and other points of aggregation
- farm visits by private and government veterinarians
- results from laboratory testing.

Targeted surveillance

The NTSESP is complemented by targeted surveillance for neurological disease in all animal species with intensive follow-up investigations of cases involving unexplained neurological signs. Resolving the causes of these conditions gives additional confidence that Australia's comprehensive approach to surveillance is detecting rare neurological diseases and ruling out TSEs.

4 Results

- A TSEFAP final report for 2016-17 is available on the AHA website (https://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/disease-surveillance/tse-freedom-assurance-program/)
- AHA provided NTSESP and Australian Ruminant Feed Ban (ARFB) surveillance data to the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) in November 2017, which then reported it to the OIE. In return Australia continues to maintain its statuses of *BSE negligible risk* and *classical scrapie free*.
- Surveillance for BSE and scrapie was carried out on 679 cattle and 525 sheep samples from around Australia in 2016-17. A further 268 cattle and 257 sheep samples were examined from July to December 2017. All were negative for BSE and classical scrapie.
- There were 7,075 industry quality assurance audits completed nationally in 2016-17 for the Australian Ruminant Feed Ban (ARFB), with no corrective action reports (CARs) issued. This was complemented by 527 jurisdictional inspections of all sectors in the livestock feed chain. There were 36 CARs issued in the year, of which all except four were successfully finalised within the year.
- There were 71 feed samples tested for RAM with five positive detections, which have subsequently been resolved by government inspectors.
- The ARFB audits, inspections and feed tests are only reported annually (in August each year) so 2017-18 figures are unavailable at the time of compiling this report.
- All remaining imported cattle from countries that subsequently experienced a case of BSE have been inspected by state department staff in the last 12 months (15 remained at 31 December 2017).
- The TSEFAP National Technical Committee reviews all the operational and management plans for the sub-projects (NTSESP, ARFB and Imported Animals Quarantine and Surveillance Scheme) annually.
- Each issue of the Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly report contains information on the NTSESP (www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/our-publications/animal-health-surveillance-quarterly/).
- The 2017 TSEFAP data has been provided for incorporation into the Animal Health in Australia 2017 report, which is available at:
- www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/our-publications/animal-health-in-australia-report/.

5 Discussion

The TSEFAP continues to meet its objectives. There were no detections of BSE or classical scrapie in Australia in this period. Australia's OIE surveillance requirements were exceeded and reporting was completed in November 2018.
A five-year, external review of the program is currently being undertaken. However, it is likely that ongoing surveillance for BSE and classical scrapie will continue to be required for some time yet. While the OIE requires TSE surveillance data to be provided by countries in return for a negligible status, the NTSESP will continue to be an important surveillance program.

6 Conclusions/recommendations

TSEFAP is a successful, ongoing AHA program with a high degree of collaboration between governments and livestock industries. TSEFAP has been able to satisfy international reporting requirements for the OIE to date.
There are no specific, technical recommendations for MLA arising from this current work.