



Review of BJD Management in NSW

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Executive Summary

- The Association supports Industry & Investment NSW's ('I&I NSW') move to a more risk-based market approach and the removal of BJD zones. However, the Association recognises the need for further consultation to ensure that NSW producers are aware of the risks when trading cattle.
- An Association survey into BJD revealed that 51 percent of respondents indicated that they had a high knowledge of BJD prior to March 2008, with 40 percent indicating that they had a medium knowledge of BJD.
- The survey showed that 75 percent of farmers surveyed were aware of the regulatory changes that occurred in March 2008.
- The survey revealed that most producers are aware of the move to a more risk-based market approach and some producers have changed their management practices to adapt to a more risk-based approach.
- The Association supports a national approach to controlling BJD.
- The Association supports the development of a cost effective vaccine to use on cattle.
- The Association believes that in order for BJD to be effectively managed, the stigma attached to the disease needs to be removed.
- The Association believes there is the need for more accurate and reliable testing.
- The Association supports the need for continued representation on the NSW BJD Summit Executive Committee and the Dairy Section would like dairy representation increased on the Summit.

Introduction

The NSW Farmers' Association (the 'Association') welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the review of Bovine Johne's Disease ('BJD') management in NSW.

The Association represents farmers in NSW from a diverse range of enterprises including cropping, livestock and wool to more intensive operations including dairy, horticulture, eggs, poultry, goats, oysters and pork. The Association's Cattle Committee and Dairy Committee represent the interests of cattle and dairy Members in NSW. The Association Cattle Committee and the Dairy Committee consist of Members representing a geographical spread of farmers across NSW.

The Association supports the move to a more risk-based market approach and the removal of zones

The Dairy Section is a Specialist Commodity Section within the Association. As such, it is afforded a degree of policy autonomy where it can separately determine commodity policy in respect of the dairy industry. As this submission represents the Association's policy position and that of the Dairy Section, where the policy pertains specifically to the Dairy Section it is identified as such.

The Association supports the Industry & Investment NSW move to a more risk-based market approach and the removal of zones. However, the Association recognises the need for further consultation to ensure that NSW producers are aware of the risks when trading cattle.

The Association has consulted with cattle and dairy Members on the implementation of Stage 2 through a survey. The survey was sent to Members seeking their feedback on a range of issues including:

- their awareness of BJD prior to 2008;
- if their awareness has changed since 2008;
- If they were aware of the changes to the program;
- If their farming enterprise has changed since the new program was implemented; and
- If the changes in zoning will have an impact on trade.

The results from this survey have been included in this submission.

In preparing this submission the Association has addressed the terms of reference as identified on the Industry & Investment NSW website.

Farmer awareness of BJD and the control programs

One of the concerns with the move to a risk based trading control program for BJD was the reliance it placed on the understanding within the farming community of the disease and the trading arrangements. From the Association's survey 51 percent of respondents indicated that they had a high knowledge of BJD prior to March 2008, with 40 percent indicating that they had a medium knowledge of BJD. Of the respondents there was a mixture of beef (70 percent), dairy (20 percent) and mixed (10 percent) cattle farmers. Similarly the geographic spread of respondents covered the majority of the cattle and dairy areas of the state from Walgett and Casino to Albury and Tumut. These results suggest that there is a sound understanding within the cattle industries of BJD. Furthermore 63 percent of respondents indicated that BJD was an important disease to control with 15 percent of respondents indicating they were unsure.

In the survey the Association asked a number of questions to gauge farmer awareness of the BJD control program prior to, and following the changes in March 2008. From the respondents, 96 percent indicated that they were aware of the BJD control programs prior to March 2008.

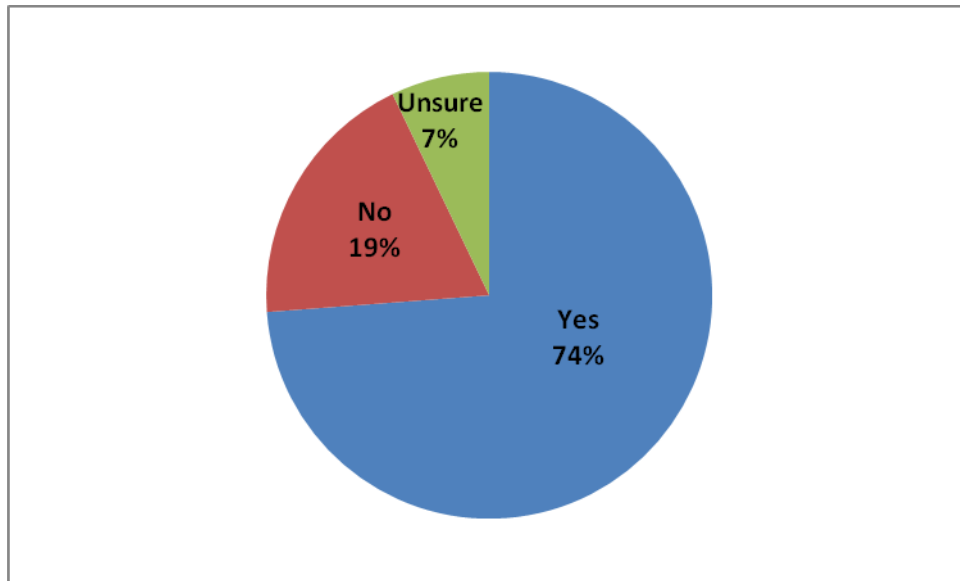
In the Association's survey, Members were asked to indicate if they were aware of the changes to the BJD control program and if their farming practices had changed

as a result of the changes to the BJD control program. The survey showed that 75 percent of farmers surveyed were aware of the regulatory changes that occurred in March 2008 (

96% of surveyed producers indicated that they were aware of BJD control programs

Figure 1). Most people outlined that they became aware of these changes through advice from the NSW Farmers' Association, industry information and the media.

Figure 1 Awareness of changes to the BJD program



Following the changes to the BJD control program and the associated media and education campaigns 49 percent of respondents indicated that their awareness of BJD has improved.

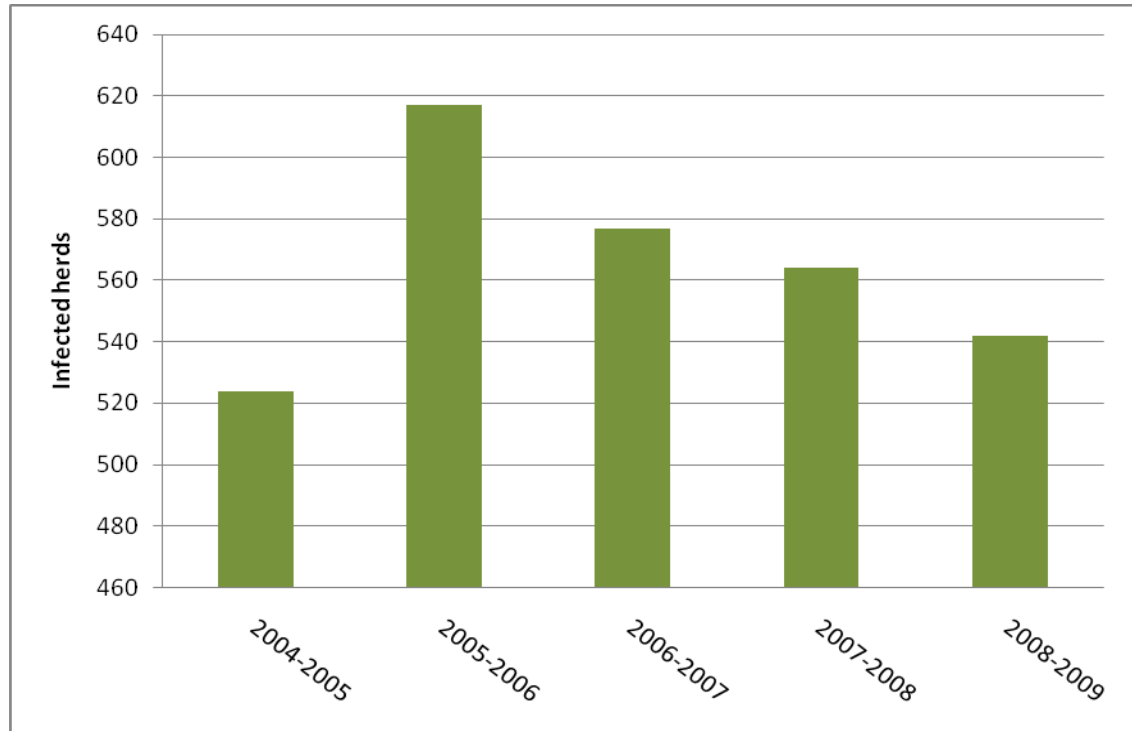
Impact of Stage 2 on producers

Since 2004, the NSW cattle and dairy industries have moved to a more risk-based approach for managing BJD designed to reduce the negative impacts on farmers if their herd contracts BJD. As part of that process, regulatory changes occurred in March 2008.

Step 2 of the new management approach aimed to achieve equal or better control of BJD using different tools, give producers the power to take control of the BJD risk on their property and introduced new tools to reduce the risk of bringing BJD into their herd to producers.

Figure 2 illustrates the number of infected cattle herds in NSW for the periods from 2004 to 2009. The figure shows that after a large increase between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 there has been a gradual decline in the number of infected cattle herds in NSW. Between February 2007 and March 2008 there were 564 herds in NSW infected with BJD. In comparison, between February 2008 and March 2009 there were 542 herds infected. While modelling has not been conducted to determine if there is any direct correlation between this gradual reduction and the improved awareness and changed trading arrangements, it is important to recognise that following the changes introduced in March 2008 there has not been an increase in infected herds, but rather a continuation of the gradual decline.

Figure 2 The number of infected cattle herds in NSW¹



Coupled with the introduction of Stage 2 and the move to a more risk based approach there was an education campaign undertaken to inform farmers and industry of the changes. From the response of surveyed Members, 74 percent were aware of the Government's move to a more risk-based approach.

From the Association's survey, 69 percent said that there have been no changes in their management practices since the regulatory changes were introduced. Of the Members whose management practices have changed, 13 percent now ask for the BJD status when purchasing cattle (Figure 3).

Surveys conducted by Dairy Australia in April 2008² and November 2008³ indicate that whilst NSW dairy farmers have greater awareness of the Dairy Score (NSW 95 percent compared to 72 percent nationally) and of the 3-step Calf Plan (NSW 76 percent compared with Victoria and Tasmania 60 percent), there are fewer farmers in NSW adopting hygienic calf rearing measures to prevent the transmission of BJD than in other states. For example results from a survey conducted in May 2009⁴

¹ National Animal Health Information System. Available from http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/nahis/public.php?page=out_showtable&outputid=40 [accessed on 5 November 2009]

² Animal Husbandry Survey conducted by Dairy Australia

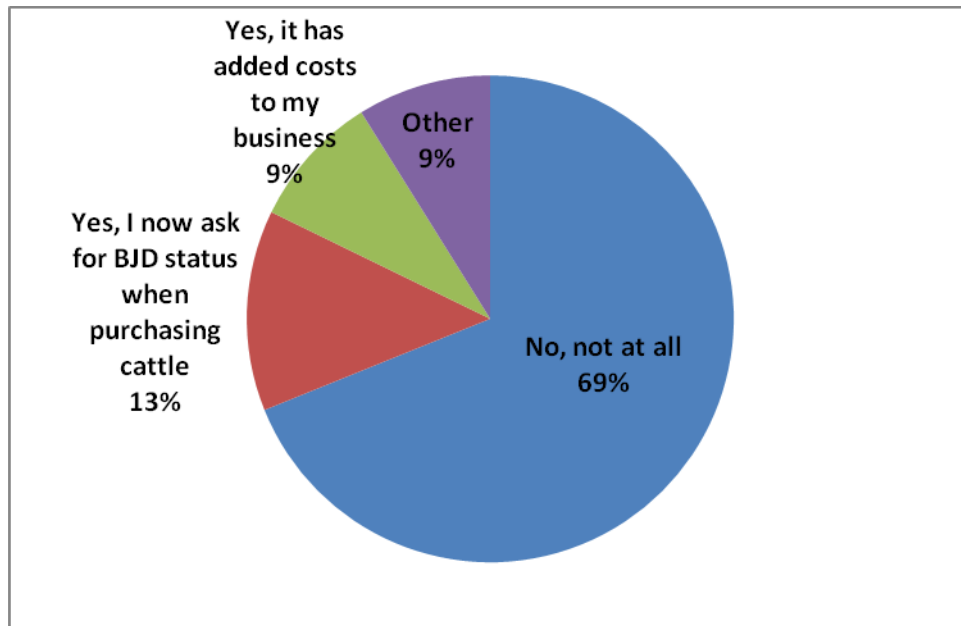
³ 3-Step Calf Plan Survey conducted by Dairy Australia

⁴ Calf Rearing Survey conducted by Dairy Australia

suggest that in NSW 50 percent of surveyed producers do not separate calves from cows within 24 hours of birth compared to 22 percent nationally.

Given the indication that the NSW producers are not adopting the 3 step calf rearing program, consideration should be given to encourage producers to adopt management practices such as the 3 step calf rearing program to reduce the incidence of BJD.

Figure 3 Change in farming operations since March 2008



The Association's survey revealed that most producers are aware of the move to a more risk-based market approach and some producers have changed their management practices to adapt to a more risk-based approach. However, the Association suggests that Industry & Investment NSW run a campaign targeted at beef producers educating them on ways to reduce the chance of BJD occurring on their property.

Changes to the level of BJD surveillance

Feedback received by the Association suggests that there have not been significant changes in the level of BJD surveillance as a result of the new approach.

Industry & Investment NSW run a campaign targeted at producers, educating them on ways to reduce the chance of BJD occurring or spreading on their property

Changes to BJD incidence in each industry sector

The Association is not aware of any changes to the level of BJD incidence in each industry sector.

The NSW Government needs to ensure that the introduction of a more risk based system does not compromise NSW trade with other states

The changes to the BJD control program and the introduction of Stage 2 have provided a more open approach to BJD with the removal of quarantine restrictions in the dairy industry, however the Association is not aware that this has led to any increase in the incidence of BJD in dairy or beef herds. While quarantine restrictions for trade between dairy herds both in control and protected zones have been relaxed, restrictions still remain for trade between beef herds.

Consistency with the National BJD strategic plan and the National Johne's Disease Program

The Association supports a national approach to controlling BJD. The National Johne's Disease Control program aims to limit the spread of BJD between areas and properties and reduce the impact on affected herds. Controlling Johne's disease involves limiting its spread between areas and properties and reducing the impact in affected herds.

Association Policy Recommendation

The Association strongly support a national approach to BJD to keep the disease to a minimum or eradicate

Dairy Section Policy Recommendation

The Association's Dairy Section supports a national approach to BJD to keep the disease to a minimum or eradication

In order to support a nationally consistent approach, the Association supports the introduction of a more risk-based trading arrangements by other States.

Possible impacts of removing BJD zones in NSW

As part of the move to more risk based approach to BJD control, the quarantine restrictions and zoning requirements have been relaxed. Under the national BJD program, trading arrangements are set for trade between different zoning areas. Without reassurance, other Australian states may interpret the changes in NSW as a reduction in the overall BJD status for NSW (ie a move from protected to control

status). The NSW Government needs to ensure that the introduction of a more risk based system does not compromise NSW trade with other states.

Association Policy Recommendation

The Association supports the move to a more risk-based market approach and the removal of BJD zones in NSW.

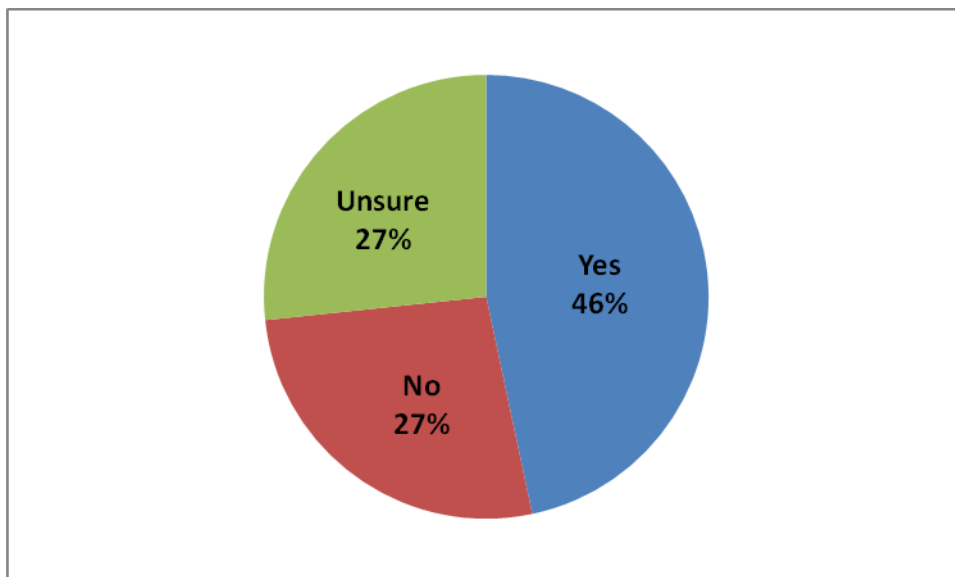
Dairy Section Policy Recommendation

The Dairy Section support the removal of zoning in NSW

Whilst the Association supports the removal of zoning in NSW, some Members have expressed concerns that the removal of zones will restrict or have an impact on intra and interstate trade. Some Members are concerned that the removal of zones in NSW would mean that some states would regard NSW as a Control Zone, making it difficult for trade with States with Protected Zones such as Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory. A number of Members have outlined concerns that the removal of zones will cause the disease to spread further and infect more herds. Conversely, some Members believe that the removal of zones will make producers more aware of BJD when purchasing cattle and that the removal of zones will not have an impact on trade.

In the Association’s survey of Cattle and Dairy Members, 48 percent believe that the removal of zones will have an effect on trade, 27 percent thought that the removal of zones would have no impact and the remainder were unsure (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Will the removal of zones have an impact on inter or intra state trade?



Further steps or alternative approaches

Association Policy Recommendation

The Association support a BJD program which includes the following elements:

- a) The development of an accurate and affordable test for the testing of cattle;
- b) Abattoir surveillance of cattle throughout Australia;
- c) The development of a cost effective vaccine; and
- d) A full investigation of the cost and means of funding a financial assistance scheme.

The Association supports the development of a cost effective vaccine to use on cattle. The development of a vaccine would enable producers to use it as a management tool to prevent BJD in their herd.

There needs to be wide consultation with producers to ensure they know the risks when trading cattle

In a survey conducted by Dairy Australia in November 2008 it was identified that there remains a stigma associated with BJD. 25 percent of dairy farmers in NSW indicated the stigma associated with BJD was increasing compared with 10 percent in Victoria and Tasmania.

The Association believes that in order for BJD to be effectively managed, the stigma attached to the disease needs to be removed. The Association seeks that Industry & Investment NSW adopt a program aimed at educating producers to make informed decisions when purchasing cattle as well as making them aware of measures to prevent and control BJD infecting their herd.

If Industry & Investment NSW is moving to a more risk-based program, there needs to be wide consultation of producers. This will ensure that producers know the risks when trading cattle and in the controlling of the disease. The Association would like to see greater promotion to encourage producers to participate in BJD programs.

The Association supports the development of a cost effective vaccine to enable producers to use as management tool

Some producers raised the need for more accurate and reliable testing. Producers surveyed also questioned the effectiveness of the tests. Other members discussed the need for opportunities to reduce the costs associated with external audits. There also needs to be incentive for beef producers to test their herd.

The Association supports the need for continued representation on the NSW BJD Summit Executive Committee and the Dairy Section would like dairy representation increased on the Summit.

Following consultation with Members the Association seeks clarification from addressed by Industry and Investment NSW on the following comments and questions:

1. Should Dairy Herds that have tested negative for several years should be able to maintain a high score without further testing, if they do not introduce cattle with a lower score?
2. What is the situation with regard to flood reserves and the treatment of non-infected cattle and the introduction of cattle that have not been tested?
3. Why cannot all infected herds be purchased and properties quarantined? Then restocking allowed.
4. What is being done to change the requirement for trade with Queensland?
5. When will it be determined if the process is successful or not?