

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates May 2013
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 102

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division/Animal Health Australia

Topic: AUSVETPLAN for Australian Bat Lyssavirus

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator RHIANNON asked:

1. The Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (Ausvetplan) for Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV) was under review for some period from 2010 to 2012 but the present published version is still dated 2009.
 - a. Where is that review up to?
 - b. What changes are anticipated?
 - c. When can we see the reviewed Ausvetplan for ABLV?
2. When will the AUSVETPLAN for lyssavirus be publicly released?
3. What actions and what is the timeline for those actions that are required for the AUSVETPLAN for lyssavirus be publicly released?

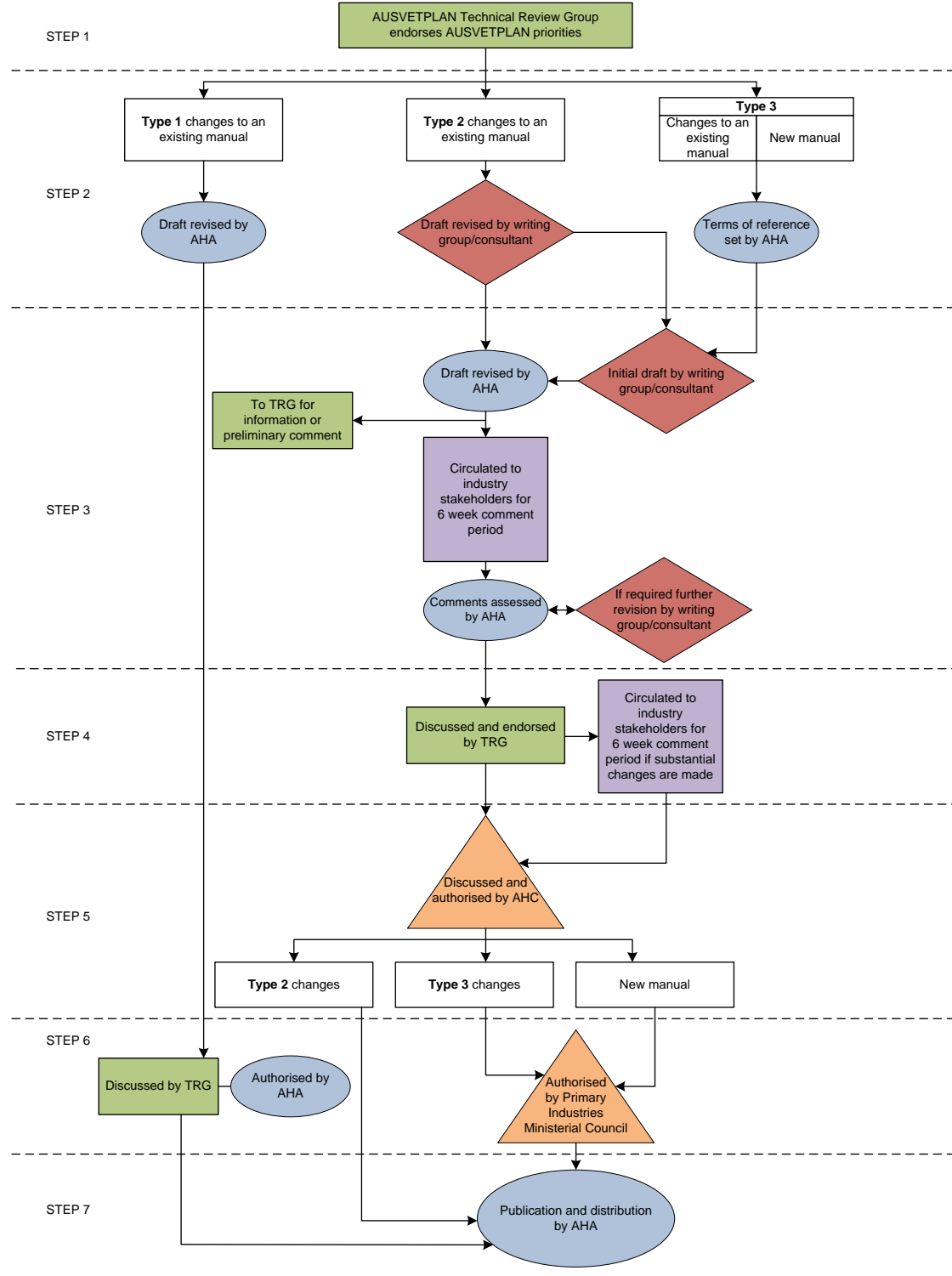
Answer:

1.
 - a. The last review of the Australian Bat Lyssavirus disease strategy manual was finalised in 2009 and resulted in the publication of the current version of the manual (version 3.0). The current manual is available on the Animal Health Australia (AHA) website at <http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/programs/emergency-animal-disease-preparedness/ausvetplan/disease-strategies/> . A review of this manual has been proposed by AHA; it is anticipated that this review will commence shortly.
 - b. In the proposed review, AHA anticipates changes to the existing manual relating to technical issues or operational policies and procedures. These changes will require authorisation by the Animal Health Committee (AHC) and will be determined by an Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN) Technical Review Group (TRG) writing group. The proposed writing group includes the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry as a member.
 - c. The revised manual will be available after the processes for the Type 2 review in Figure 1 are completed (see below). It is anticipated that these processes will be completed in the next 18 months.

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Figure 1 How an AUSVETPLAN disease strategy is developed and approved



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2. The revised Australian Bat Lyssavirus disease strategy manual would be publicly released following authorisation from AHC. The current manual is available on the AHA website at <http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/programs/emergency-animal-disease-preparedness/ausvetplan/disease-strategies/> .

3. AHA's processes and actions for reviewing a disease strategy manual are shown in the above diagram (Figure 1). AHA anticipates that the proposed review of the manual will be completed within the next 18 months. The revised manual would be publicly released following authorisation from AHC.

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Question: 103

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division/Animal Health Australia

Topic: Chicken Densities impacts on health and disease

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator RHIANNON asked:

1. Are you aware of any studies of how stocking densities of industrial farmed laying and broiler poultry affect the stress levels and thus behaviour of poultry, and risk of disease?
 - a. If so what is the department's response to these studies?
 - b. If not will the department assess at which densities, and under which conditions does poultry become so stressed as to self-mutilate or behave aggressively to other animals – necessitating beak cauterization and other procedures?
2. Are free range chicken densities and conditions as commonly understood, better for poultry's wellbeing and health?

Answer:

1. a. No. The Australian Egg Corporation Limited (AECL) would be aware of such studies should they exist.

1. b. Industry research and development questions are addressed through programs that are run by statutory Research and Development Corporations. The AECL is the industry owned body that coordinates research to meet the needs of egg producers.

These matters will be considered during the conversion of the Domestic Poultry Code of Practice (4th edition 2002) into national animal welfare standards and guidelines.

2. Regardless of the management system in place, there are welfare hazards that need to be effectively managed to ensure acceptable welfare outcomes under state and territory law.

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Question: 104

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division/Animal Health Australia

Topic: Myxomatosis Vaccine

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator RHIANNON asked:

1. The CSIRO website provides information about promising live attenuated myxomatosis vaccines, and a host-range defective vaccine, it had worked on before funding for that research was cut in 2005:
 - a. Why was funding cut for that CSIRO research project, given it was already up to a preliminary trial stage?
 - b. How much funding would be required to complete that project in order to provide a vaccine to rabbit pet owners and the industry?
 - c. Would the government consider funding the project to completion? If not why not, and if so what would need to happen for this to occur?
2. The CSIRO website states that live virus myxomatosis vaccines used overseas are not permitted in Australia due to concern the live virus could “potentially spread from vaccinated rabbits into the wild rabbit population and interfere with biological control by myxomatosis.”

However CSIRO also states ongoing coevolution of both the Myxoma virus and the wild rabbit, has led to natural selection for resistance in the wild rabbit population with the result that many wild rabbits are “quite resistant and survive (a now highly attenuated – ie mild) myxomatosis strain”.

Pet rabbits have not undergone the same natural selection and remain highly susceptible to this terribly cruel disease.

- a. What does the most current data and science say about the risk of using the original live virus vaccine on pet rabbits in Australia, given the coevolution of rabbit and virus in the wild?
- b. What will it take to have the government review the two available myxoma live-virus vaccines, and scientifically assess their likely impacts in the current Australian setting?
- c. Have any vaccine manufacturers applied to have their myxomatosis vaccines registered for use in Australia? If so are these assessments available and if so can a web link to this information be provided?

Answer:

1. a. The research was conducted as part of the then Pest Animal Control Cooperative Research Centre (now the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre), overseen by what is now Ausindustry within the Australian Government Department of Industry,

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Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIICCSRTE). Questions regarding the funding for the project are most appropriately addressed by either DIICCSRTE or CSIRO.

b. In general terms, the commercial development of vaccines is normally undertaken by commercial vaccine manufacturers. It is difficult to predict the level of funding that would be required as it may vary with the commercial context of each manufacturer and the specific challenges encountered in the development of each vaccine.

c. Questions regarding funding of the project are most appropriately addressed by CSIRO or DIICCSRTE.

2. a. Feral rabbit populations have developed some immunity to the circulating field strains of myxomatosis. However, myxomatosis infection still normally results in a mortality rate of 40 per cent or more in these populations. As such, myxomatosis remains an important element in the control of feral rabbit populations.

There are a number of modified live myxomatosis vaccines that have been available overseas for some time for use on pet and farmed rabbits. Infected rabbits shed the myxoma virus through their skin and the virus spreads from one rabbit to another via mosquitoes or fleas. When pet or farmed rabbits are vaccinated with this type of vaccine, there can still be enough of the vaccine virus in their skin for it to be spread by these insects into wild rabbit populations. This potential spread could result in wild rabbits increasing their immunity to myxomatosis. The potential for a vaccine virus to spread to non-vaccinated rabbits is recognised by some vaccine manufacturers on the vaccine data sheet.

b. A detailed assessment of the suitability of any vaccine for registration in Australia would follow the receipt of an application for the vaccine's registration – normally from a commercial vaccine manufacturer. Additional assessments are required should the applicant seek to import the vaccine into Australia. These assessments would be undertaken by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (for vaccine registration), the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (for import permit applications) and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (for vaccines that contain genetically-modified components). Such assessments occur under relevant legislation and consider possible risks to human and animal health, and the environment.

c. There have been no applications submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry or the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority for vaccines to protect rabbits against myxomatosis.