

History of OJD Management in Australia

The six-year National Ovine Johne's Disease Control and Evaluation Program (NOJDP) commenced in 1998 and concluded in June 2004. It was an initiative of the livestock industries and State and Australian governments and was managed at the national level by Animal Health Australia. States were responsible for managing and implementing operational aspects of the program.

The NOJDP resulted in the accumulation of a world leading body of knowledge relating to the diagnosis, management and control of Ovine Johne's disease. At the conclusion of the program the national sheep industry now has a better understanding of the extent of the disease within Australia and also the challenges facing producers and governments who implement control and management programs. The disease was more widespread than had been initially anticipated and a traditional control program, based on regulation, is now considered unnecessarily restrictive on trade.

Research projects over the six years of the NOJDP included:

- testing current on-farm eradication strategies;
- evaluating vaccination for on-farm control;
- evaluating factors important for on-farm control strategies;
- research into spread and development of ovine Johne's disease within a flock;
- development of techniques to assess the level of contamination in paddocks and how infective are the different levels of contamination;
- abattoir surveillance techniques;
- evaluation of the risks associated with the use of semen from infected flocks;
- assessing the level of production losses attributable to Ovine Johne's disease; and
- refining existing tests and evaluating new tests.

During the NOJDP, surveillance was used as a method of establishing the true ovine Johne's disease status of regions and identifying infected flocks.

While determining the extent of the disease through the surveillance program and carrying out the R&D program, States also attempted to minimise the spread of the disease. The strategies that were undertaken were largely based on traditional regulatory disease control tools including:

- identification of infected flocks and flocks suspected of having ovine Johne's disease;
- restriction of movements from infected and suspect flocks; and
- zoning, which prescribes minimum disease control standards and requirements for moving animals to zones of higher status.

National Management of OJD in Australia

The two-year National Approach to the Management of Ovine Johne's Disease in Australia (NAOJD) which commenced in July 2004 set the new approach to managing OJD through increased industry leadership and management and less government-imposed restrictions. It provided a nationally agreed framework for the management of Ovine Johne's disease in Australia. Responsibilities for the ongoing operational management rest with the State governments and the National Sheep Industry. The national approach was coordinated by Animal Health Australia on behalf of stakeholders.

The new NAOJD had three main objectives, to ensure that:

- Areas currently free of disease remain free;
- Prevalence Areas would be maintained or reduced for the Very Low Prevalence, Low Prevalence and Medium Prevalence Areas; and
- Prevalence would be reduced in High Prevalence Areas such that prevalence area status may be reviewed in the longer term.

The three objectives were based on producers managing the risk of ovine Johne's disease within their flocks and on assessing the risk of sheep that they buy. Vendors are now strongly encouraged to declare the level of assurance of sheep they are selling. A [Model Sheep Health Statement](#) was agreed by Australia's Animal Health Committee for this purpose. Data collected from surveillance activities undertaken during the NOJDP was used to estimate the current regional prevalence of ovine Johne's disease in Australia. This information was used to establish the [Prevalence Areas](#) which continue to be the starting point for the allocation of credit points in the [Assurance Based Credit \(ABC\) Scheme](#) upon which the NAOJD was largely based.

Abattoir surveillance, used to monitor area prevalence, was funded by the Australian Government, the States and the national sheep industry. States had responsibility for managing and controlling the disease within their respective jurisdictions. The national management and reporting functions undertaken by AHA are funded by the national sheep industry, the States and the Australian Government.

The national sheep industry component is funded through existing levies contributed by all sheep producers and managed by the Sheepmeat Council of Australia. This funding goes towards R&D, and abattoir surveillance activities, communication and program management.

Within the framework of the NAOJD the State governments provided:

- technical support for affected producers;
- financial assistance through subsidised vaccination programs (in some states);
- ovine Johne's disease management advice to producers; and
- the development of state policies on ovine Johne's disease management.