

For Immediate Release

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Pig virus hunter wins trophy

Dr Deborah Finlaison, a veterinary virologist at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, Camden, is the inaugural recipient of Animal Health Australia's Ralph Hood Award, which recognises leadership potential and a strong commitment to improving Australia's national animal health system.

In 2003, Dr Finlaison was asked to investigate an outbreak of an unusual disease at a piggery near Bungowannah in southern NSW.

That disease is now known as porcine myocarditis syndrome (PMC) and Dr Finlaison and her colleagues discovered its cause – a previously unknown pestivirus which has since been named Bungowannah.

"PMC was a mystery disease that a group of staff working at the virology laboratory and I were able to prove was caused by a virus," Dr Finlaison said.

"Through my research into Bungowannah virus I was not only able to prove that it is the cause of PMC, but also show that infection of a pregnant pig at different stages of pregnancy results in a different disease outcome."

"I was surprised and excited when I heard," she added. "I feel quite honoured and privileged to receive this award."

Dr Richard Sheldrake, Director-General of the NSW Department of Primary Industries said Deborah's research had contributed greatly to knowledge on the novel virus within both the national and international scientific communities.

"Deborah deserves to be recognised for her demonstrated commitment to improving animal health in Australia and her ability to provide ongoing leadership in this field," Dr Sheldrake said.

Bungowannah has since been eradicated from one of the two affected piggeries and Dr Finlaison continues to advise the owners in their efforts to get rid of the virus.

Dr Mike Bond, CEO of Animal Health Australia, sponsor of the Ralph Hood Award, congratulated Dr Finlaison as a "very worthy inaugural winner."

"Animal Health Australia has a long history of collaboration with Dr Finlaison on the National Arbovirus Monitoring Program, so we are particularly pleased the judging panel chose her from an incredibly strong group of nominees," Dr Bond said.

Dr Finlaison intends to use the \$15,000 award to extend her expertise by attending a major international virology conference and conducting a study tour of international diagnostic virology laboratories.

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Animal Health Australia's Ralph Hood Award honours the memory of Ralph Hood, former Chief Executive of the organisation, and his contribution to Australia's animal health system. It provides the winner with a \$15,000 grant to help them enhance their knowledge, skills and leadership potential in the cause of livestock health and welfare.

***For further information and photos of the award presentation, please contact:
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