

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### ON THE FRONT FOOT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASES

An Australian multidisciplinary research project has proven the power of partnerships between producers and other animal health stakeholders when it comes to recognising and combating emergency animal diseases.

The Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) Ready Project\* commenced in 2017, establishing five producer-led 'pilot' groups to strengthen partnerships between producers, animal health professionals, government and other key stakeholders. The aim was to enhance these relationships to improve detection of, and response to, livestock diseases.

The five groups – one for each FMD-susceptible livestock species - were set up in five different states. Each partnership worked on animal health issues of interest to them and their industry. In late February 2020, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, members of all five groups, along with representatives from peak livestock industry councils, state chief veterinary officers and staff from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, convened in Canberra for the first time to discuss their findings, share learnings and look at the future of their work.

Dr Yiheyis Maru, Principal Systems Research Scientist at CSIRO, and leader of this component of the FMD Ready Project, said the workshop highlighted the importance of these partnerships.

"Each pilot group has been exploring factors which may hamper detection of an emergency animal disease within their industry sector and their region. These factors include gaps in knowledge and skills - such as a lack of awareness around signs and symptoms, and the absence of local networks and trusting relationships," said Dr Maru.

"Whilst each group had different priorities and experiences, all of them came away with similar achievements. Some of these successes include the development of materials to build producer awareness on key surveillance and biosecurity issues; the delivery of training which has helped fellow producers to carry out on-farm biosecurity and surveillance activities; the exploration of digital technologies; and the enhancement of relationships and trust among animal health stakeholders."

"Notably, all of the groups credited their success to the diversity of their membership and the ways in which that opened up new opportunities to share knowledge and build connections."

Colin Seiler, a producer in the beef pilot group, can provide a firsthand account of the value he received as a result of participating in the project.

"I enjoyed the sharing of experiences and the contribution of ideas from within the group, and gained a wider knowledge base from the various presentations we were able to attend," he explained.

Mr Seiler attended the cross-pilot workshop in February 2020 and enjoyed the opportunity to share insights not just within his own group, but with other groups from around the country working towards the same purpose.

"I found it very interesting and encouraging to meet people from other states and other industries with a similar sense of responsibility when it comes to biosecurity risk," he explained.

"I also gained a better understanding of the national preparedness and response framework for emergency animal diseases."

South Australian vet Dr Jeremy Rogers, who worked with the goat pilot group, hopes that the groups will continue to come together to share their experiences.

"The pilot groups and the workshop have enabled networks and relationships to begin that hopefully persist over time and enhance our surveillance capacity," he said.

"It was worthwhile to draw together all these people who probably would not be in the same room otherwise."

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William Oldfield, Sheep Health and Welfare Policy Manager for Sheep Producers Australia, attended the workshop and was encouraged to see that participation in the pilot groups had improved on-farm biosecurity and disease surveillance in their local area.

“Estimates for the impact of an FMD outbreak are in the billions of dollars lost from the Australian economy,” he explained.

“Our susceptible industries need to be equipped to detect an incursion quickly and respond appropriately; in this sense our investment in extension of biosecurity and surveillance resources is vitally important. Whilst we’ve seen success in this partnership model, the challenge now is to scale up the work of the group to include more people, industries and regions.”

Ashley Cooper, General Manager for WoolProducers Australia, was impressed to see the success of the pilot groups on display.

“The workshop provided many examples of innovative ways in which the various groups have achieved their purpose, especially in demonstrating positive behaviour change, which could also be deployed to tackle other challenges in the agriculture sector,” he said.

The workshop also touched on next steps for the pilot groups, including whether they will continue to operate and how they might effectively influence a wider range of stakeholders.

“Having heard about the outcomes they’ve achieved, I think there’s certainly value in fostering and supporting these sorts of producer groups,” Mr Cooper said.

“It remains to be seen whether the groups will continue to operate at the conclusion of the FMD Ready Project – though I get the sense they will!”

For more information about the project visit <https://research.csiro.au/fmd/>.

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### **About Animal Health Australia**

Animal Health Australia is the trusted and independent national animal health body in Australia, bringing together government and industry to deliver animal health and biosecurity.

With our members we scan the horizon for threats and opportunities, advocate for and drive solutions and take a whole-of-sector approach to ensure the long-term success of Australia’s animal health and biosecurity system.

### **\*About the FMD Ready Project**

This Project is supported by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), through funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment as part of its Rural Research & Development for Profit program, and by producer levies from Australian FMD-susceptible livestock (cattle, sheep, goats and pigs) industries and Charles Sturt University, leveraging significant in-kind support from the research partners.

The research partners for this project are the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Charles Sturt University through the Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation, the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and the Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, supported by Animal Health Australia (AHA).

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