



Buffalo News

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Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council (ABIC)

NTBIC elects new committee

The Northern Territory Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) held its AGM on 28 April, the final under an arrangement where it received executive and administrative services through the NT Cattle-men's Association.

The meeting elected Ernie Schluep as President, Angus Fleming as Vice-President, Secretary and Public Officer, and Michael Swart as Treasurer.

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New Italian buff semen trials produce first bumper babies

The first buffalo calves produced from the new Mediterranean buffalo semen purchased from Italy last year have been born at the Northern Territory's Beatrice Hill Farm.

Senior research officer with the RIRDC-sponsored AI project, Barry Lemcke, says the most recent of these new calves caused worries for a while just before it was born.

"The cow was observed wandering around for several hours with legs poking out of its rear end," he said. "But just as we were about to intervene, the cow came good and passed the calf on its own.

"The newborn tipped the scales at 50.4 kg, a pretty good start in life for a calf - so no wonder Mum took her time."

Barry says the most recent Italian data rates two of the bulls used as Nos. 3 and 4 in Italy. Another two are also in the top 16 for milk production.

"Some of the younger bulls may also appear on this list within a few years as their semen gets more widely used," Barry says.

"The top bull on the list is Malandrino 111, an exceptional sire whose semen is virtually unobtainable now. His Mozzarella Index is far ahead of any

other bull in the system.

"We have some bulls available that are related and trust they will produce some very productive progeny.

"In the last two months, there is increasing Australian and overseas interest in accessing dairy buffalo, so we need to be able to get suitable animals ready to supply this trade. This requires good weaner training so that only the right temperament heifers are supplied.

"This should be the priority for buffalo producers everywhere to try to build the population of suitable stock as quickly as possible to get the industry to a sustainable size."

Barry says the research project still awaits an operating abattoir to compare the tenderness of varying ages of TenderBuff animals.

"As we still mostly get 50% males in a dairy situation, a suitable meat market is a necessary adjunct to a thriving dairy industry.

"The latest data from ABRI-run buffalo database indicates that not only is there the 40% increase in the F1, but also another boost supplied by the Italian genes of a further 40% in growth rate of the progeny. This further reduces the time required to produce a tender sought after meat product.

A further update in next newsletter.



DOING THEIR BIT TO BUILD AUSTRALIA'S BUFFALO GENETICS: *Pure-bred riverine AI buffalo with calves at foot on the lush wet season pastures of the Top End's Beatrice Hill research farm. This group is now producing the first calves resulting from AI with the recently imported Italian semen.*

ABIC Website - www.buffaloaustralia.org

9th WORLD BUFFALO CONGRESS - ARGENTINA

Some 475 people from 33 countries attended the 9th World Buffalo Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina in April. They included Queensland ABIC rep Marg Thompson and NT Government buffalo specialist, Barry Lemcke. Barry's report follows.

A Pre-Congress cheese course was held at the Universidad Nacional de Lujan which has a Pilot Plant Cheese factory on campus so students can learn the trade. Delegates watched and learnt as six different cheese and yoghurt products were prepared over six hours. A cheese (and wine) tasting session followed. The next day delegates visited La Salamandra Dairy Farm, a goat cheese factory and a rural show.

The Congress proper involved more than three days of plenary sessions and paper and poster presentations. Delegates heard the newest breakthrough in buffalo genetics is the availability of Italian sexed semen at just over twice the price of normal buffalo semen. This will allow dairies to produce nearly all female calves (or bulls). The outcomes are about 95% accurate for sex. The efficiency of the semen conception rates is yet to be confirmed.

Delegates also heard that the world now has an estimated 180.7 million - a 20m increase in the last 10 years (96.4% are in Asia). 54.6% of total are in India. Buffalo milk accounts for around 68% and 57% of total milk production in Pakistan and

India respectively. Meat production from buffalo is 3.36 million tonnes per annum world wide. Brazil has the highest buffalo population of the Americas with 3 million head and rising rapidly.

The four-day post congress tour to the northern provinces of Formosa and Chaca allowed participants to visit four buffalo ranches and also attend the 3rd National Buffalo Show where cows, bulls and heifers were auctioned. The highest priced bull (Italian genetics) fetched ARS10,000 and best heifer (pregnant) ARS3,000. 1AUD = 2.96ARS (Pesos).

Long lunches were a feature of the tour with plenty of beef, buffalo, wine and cheese. The favourite was the outdoor barbecue of huge chunks of beef (buff) roasted over coals and carved off onto your plate, plus rib bones and sausages. Argentina

has an estimated 100,000 buffalo and the population is rising. The countryside we saw was basically endless flat plains with very little undulation. There was a lot of swamp country where buffalo are gaining popularity because they can use land that cattle won't use. One 14,000 ha cattle and buffalo ranch visited was built on floodplain with the roads formed by excavating channels next to them, which in turn provide the drainage to get rid of the excess water from the area. The pregnancy rate of the buffalo breeders is currently 71% and has been as high as 85% in previous years. 2008 and 09 were both drought years. The buffalo were in very good condition.

All cattle and buffalo work is done by horse-riding gauchos for which Argentina is famous. (RIRDC is gratefully acknowledged for funding the congress trip).



Congress field trip

CAN YOU SUPPLY BUFFALO HORN TO AUSTRALIA'S STICKDRESSERS?

If so, please contact Erle Bartlett
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Buffalo News

We welcome contributions on any issue or activity relating to Australia's buffalo industry. Stories and/or photos can be sent to, or discussed with:

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Buffalo Horn - a niche market

Erle Bartlett is one of a few 'stickdressers' in Australia who regard buffalo horn as a valuable resource but who have great difficulty sourcing any locally apart from the odd 'trophy' set which sell at a premium. He says it's ridiculous that he and his fellow craftspeople have to import buffalo horn from India via Scotland - and he's on the hunt for local supplies. In this brief article, Erle explains the processes involved in producing items from buffalo horn

Everyone is familiar with the pair of buffalo horns mounted over the bar. Whether that is your decorating style or not, whenever you see a set, you are looking at is the expression of a unique market, that for buffalo horn. What you are seeing there is the premium end of the market - in terms of size and, indeed, value. Check E-bay on your computer!

Niche markets also exist for horns which don't quite reach the premium end of the market, for those horns from younger beasts, or that are short or curly, broken or mismatched. Stick-dressing is the craft related to making walking sticks, shepherds crooks and the like. For a short, curly but solid horn, the end result is likely to be like the crook made from buffalo horn illustrated here. The horn is heated to exploit its plastic-like qualities and, while hot, is bent and clamped around a former and left to cool and set into the desired shape. Many hours can then be spent carving and polishing the horn to the desired finish. The smaller thumb-stick is a good use for short pieces of horn, but no less care goes into its preparation.

Gunsmithing traditionally uses buffalo horn for stock and fore-end caps, and knifemakers use it for handles. Musical instrument makers find many uses - from decorative mounts on bagpipes to guitar pins. Bone-carvers use horn as an alternative material to bone, and pen-turners are increasingly using pieces of horn as small as 15 mm square by 100mm long! A market for buffalo horn definitely exists in Australia but the present demand is largely satisfied by horn from India, sent by way of Scotland (Google Highland Horn).



Buffalo horn crook and thumb-stick made by Jeffrey Pitts, courtesy Tasmanian Stick Dresser.

Victorians keen to become buffalo dairy stronghold

The Victorian buffalo industry group, VicBIC, sees a future role for the state as Australia's leader in buffalo dairies.

VicBIC raised the concept at the recent Australian Buffalo Industry Council AGM, suggesting that dairy type animals could be brought in from the Northern Territory.

VicBIC President Athel Smith promoted the idea in his annual state report to the 2009 Australian Buffalo Industry Council (ABIC) AGM.

"The thoughts of our members are that some of the Northern Territory's buffalo breeders and VicBIC should initiate an agreement for a semi-load of dairy type heifers, and

possibly a bull, to be sent to Victoria," Athel wrote. "Once here, they would be agisted and advertised for sale or lease to a dairy. Athel says VicBIC members would like to see a greater role for the Victorian buffalo industry. "We feel that Victoria will be the leader in buffalo dairies in the future," he said.

Victoria is already home to Australia's longest running buffalo dairy, Roger Haldane's Shaw River venture, and Robyn and Chris Richmond also began milking buffalo late last year.

Northern Territory buffalo producer and ABIC President Michael Swart said Victoria's idea has merit and NT producers

would be happy to supply suitable animals.

"There is keen interest in milking buffalo from people in Australia and around the world and most NT producers who are running riverine buffalo are in it to meet this demand," he said.

"I have personally been buying suitable heifers to build up a herd of milking buffalo breeders so we produce heifers to supply the milking industry. "

ABIC received regular inquiries for dairy animals, including three in one fortnight from New Zealand and one from Egypt for significant numbers.

Another request came for a large amount of semen for Nili Ravi or Jafarabadi milking type buffalo.

NTBIC gearing up to tackle challenges

The NT Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) continues to field many enquires for meat and milking buffalo - but is presently hamstrung in turning them into sales.

"We desperately need to get a system in place to slaughter and process buffalo meat," NTBIC's Michael Swart said after the council's April AGM.

"The loss on Litchfield Abattoir has left us with a large vacuum to satisfy local demand for meat.

"We also need a large export market paying reasonable prices so that Arnhem Land's traditional owners have a sale outlet for their buffalo.

"Such a market would stop the shoot to waste campaign now happening in Arnhem Land.

"Current overseas price makes it uneconomical for most traditional owners to muster their buffalo."

NTBIC welcomed the latest advances in A1 research, saying the technology needs to be confirmed then passed on to industry.

"The Minister has always said we're sitting on a gold mine. We need to prove him correct," Michael said.

Julie set to take on RIRDC buffalo role

With RIRDC's Dr Peter McInnes due to retire in June, Julie Bird has been progressively taking over his responsibilities for business and project implementations in the New Animal Products and Rare Natural Fibre research areas. Julie has been a Senior RIRDC Research Manager since 2008 and currently heads the National Research, Development and Extension Strategies for New and Emerging Industries, and Bioenergy. She was previously Director Agriculture with the Department of



Climate Change. During nine years in the NT, Julie worked as Katherine Regional Head of Crops, Forestry and Horticulture (2005-07), as senior government extension officer (2002-05) and as Landmark Darwin and Katherine region agronomist (1998-2002). Away from work, she raises cattle, sheep, stock horses and working dogs in the Snowy Mountains outside Canberra and is a keen campdraft competitor and skier. Julie says she looks forward to her future dealings with the buffalo industry. "I have had a particular interest in this industry, since my time living in the Territory," she says. "I am excited to see that the industry now has a more diverse range of products and markets to those of earlier times. R&D will play an important part in the further development of these new opportunities." (Photo: Julie with Mal Thompson in Darwin in February)

BUFFALO EXPORT TRENDS: 2002-2009

MARKET	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Brunei	3359	2774	2279	816	492	306	306	327
W/Malaysia	173	32	1556	672	5777	582	280	0
Indonesia				100	820	2865	3815	3274
Sabah					659	152	236	176
TOTALS	3589	2806	3835	1588	7748	3905	4637	3777

Buffalo News & Views . . .

from around the country

Queensland

Queensland members continue to expand their businesses successfully. Heifers resulting from the importation of the first Italian semen are now milking and proving their worth. The first heifer calf by a bull from that first lot of semen is now on the ground. The bull successfully mated with the cow at 16 months of age, making him now 25 months old, with many more good years ahead of him. The dairies are expanding their numbers and production while the processors continue to win prizes for their product. A buffalo pie making business is also successful after much preliminary work.

Highlights from 2009 ABIC State/Territory reports

Queensland producers continue to be expected to meet stringent licensing requirements. Members have continued to gain good publicity for the Buffalo Industry and its products. Churchill Fellowship winner Marg Thompson is now well into the throes of her comprehensive overseas study tour after attending the 9th World Buffalo Congress in Argentina in April. Marg, in company with her daughter-in-law Anne Lethbridge, is reportedly setting a hectic pace in visiting buffalo farms and facilities in the United States, Bulgaria and Italy as part of her study tour.

Victoria

Victorian buffalo producers continue to face major challenges in getting their animals processed for meat. VicBIC reports that while the local demand for meat is still there and waiting, producers failed again in 2009 to find an abattoir that was willing to kill buffalo in Victoria.

The state's introduction of Murah bloodlines from Bulgaria is well underway after some initial delays in getting the semen from overseas. Some members have purchased extra animals to be part of the program.

Producers around Australia will be watching the project results with keen interest.

South Australia

South Australian producers have been supplying buffalo meat to the Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria, with 70 animals processed for manufacturing and 35 for the trade market. They were applauded for their efforts to keep the buffalo product before the public.

Western Australia

Western Australia is slowly building up its buffalo herd again. State rep Andrew Stewart was commended during the 2010 ABIC AGM for his 'admirable job' in providing a draft constitution for debate at the meeting.

Indonesian delegation checks out Australia's dairy buffalo

An Indonesian delegation visited Australia in December to study lot feeding and the investigate the feasibility of starting a buffalo dairy industry in parts of Indonesia. If this offshore industry was to be established, it could prove lucrative for the Northern Territory in terms of supplying milking foundation stock.

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ARGENTINA is famous for its horseback gauchos. *This friendly fellow was only too happy to pose for cameras during the 9th World Buffalo Congress. Photo: Barry Lemcke*

TRADING POST

YOUR ONLINE MARKET PLACE

ABIC members and industry stakeholders are encouraged to make good use of the council's online facility - **TRADING POST** - for advertising buffalo, buffalo products or other related goods and services. **TRADING POST** is accessible through: www.buffaloaustralia.org

ADVERTISING RATES

ABIC Members \$30 for 3 mths/\$50 for 12 mths
Non-ABIC Members \$50 for 3 mths