



# Buffalo News

VOLUME 11 No 1 - March 2012

Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council (ABIC)

## Buff calving, preg rates up in 2011

### Free-rangers on the rise

In his 2011 annual report, NTBIC President Michael Swart reported that numbers of free-ranging bush buffalo were rising, with most on Aboriginal land. "We're getting a lot of inquiries from communities and traditional owners," he reported. *Cont. Page 2*

Things are looking good on the buffalo cross-breeding front. Top End researchers involved in the RIRDC-funded *Riverine Buffalo and Cross-breeding Project* have been buoyed by significantly reduced calf losses and improved pregnancy rates in 2011. Last year's calving losses were down to 6% from the previous year's 11.2%, which was up from an average 8.8% over the previous four years.

"Dingoes and mis-mothering in heifers have reduced markedly," Chief researcher

Barry Lemcke said in his latest update presented to the recent ABIC annual meeting. "The heifers group was kept separate from the main breeder groups and placed in paddocks close and handy so they could be more closely observed. It is also important not to disrupt the dam-calf bond too early, especially with heifers to do the tagging and weighing of new-borns."

Pregnancy rates also improved in 2011 over the previous year, when the success rate was under 50% due to a lot

of late calving (in February) in the breeder groups the previous year.

Barry also reported that the imported Italian semen which produced a new crop of bulls in 2010 will be used in 2012 for mating duties, initially with heifer groups. "Some of the 10 top genetic bulls in Italy were represented in that shipment of semen, which is much better quality than previous purchases over the last six years. This new semen regularly achieves the required 50%+ conception rates."

### ABIC reps on buffalo business

*Nation-wide buffalo stalwarts flew or drove into Victoria for ABIC's 2012 AGM, conference and field trip on 11-12 February.*

*The host centre was Warragul where the State Reps were able to check out district industry advances and discuss the intricacies of producing buffalo under local conditions.*

**PICTURED:** TOP: Reps check out local producer Bruce Murray's herd during a field trip - (L-R) Michael Swart (NT), Milton Stevens (SA), Athel Smith (Vic), Doug Robertson (NSW) & Bruce Murray, Neroli and Geoff Eddy (All Vic). BELOW: Italian Bull 'Roger' with his swampy harem. ● **MORE CONFERENCE NEWS - Pg 3**



ABIC Website - [www.buffaloaustralia.org](http://www.buffaloaustralia.org)

## Industry voice on FSANZ

South Australian producer Milton Stevens was recently appointed to represent ABIC and the buffalo industry on the national body, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and attended his first meeting in Sydney in December.

The meeting addressed health aspects for all minor meat sectors, including rabbits, crocodiles, deer, kangaroos, wallabies, camels, wild boar, ostriches and emus - as well as buffalo.

## Live trade 2012

Australia's live buffalo export trade has started off quietly in 2012, with just 30 animals exported till the end of February, according to the latest *NT Pastoral Market Update*. All the buffalo were shipped to Brunei in January. A total of 1841 buffalo were exported live through the Port of Darwin in 2011. They included 1371 to Indonesia and 470 to Brunei - which incidentally, also imported 610 Australian goats through the Port of Darwin in 2011.

## 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:

**KERRY SHARP - EDITOR**

Phone: 08 8981 4999

Mobile: 0419 845 714

Email: sharp@octa4.net.au

Postal: PO Box 2227 Parap NT 0804

Buffalo News is funded by



# RESEARCH UPDATE:

## Trialling sexed semen on buffalo

*Buffalo researcher Barry Lemcke reports on recent AI trials*

Sexed semen has been available in the dairy cattle industry for a number of years, but only became available for buffalo in Italy in 2010. Some early anecdotal results were not encouraging. Italy's CoFA held off releasing the new product until thorough testing was carried out.

In December 2011, the first AI round in Australia using sexed semen was conducted at Beatrice Hill Farm in the NT. Twenty head of buffalo were inseminated using sexed and non-sexed semen from two bulls sourced from CoFA in Italy during this year.

With the first ultra-sounding in January we are pleased to show in the first small batch of cows that there was virtually no difference in the rate of calves conceived from the sexed versus the normal semen for both bulls. Although the rate of conception for the whole round was disappointingly lower than we have come to expect (only 7 out of 20), in retrospect we think we know where we went wrong (and won't do it again!)

A follow-up round of AI was done in early March on 14 head still available for AI. Unfortunately due to a mis-diagnosis of pregnancy from the first round we found that another of the sexed semen 1st round cows had also been pregnant which would have made it 8 pregnant out of 20.

Sadly the synchronizing protocol caused this cow to abort the calf so we have a double miss as that prevents a pregnancy during the latest round. So only 13 were AI'd, but in better conditions for hopefully a better conception outcome in the second round. They will be tested with the ultrasound in mid-April.

So, not without some mishaps, we can say that there appears to be no difference in the conception rate with the sexed semen compared with the same bull's normal semen at this preliminary stage. We hope to confirm this with the results of the second round.

The economics is the next consideration. To purchase the semen we paid 4.61 times the price of standard semen for the sexed semen at the source, but were informed that the difference due to a price rise from the manufacturer of the sexed semen would next time be 6.15 times the normal semen.

This new technology will be most useful to the milk producers, where females in a herd build-up phase are a premium commodity and usually bulls, nowhere near the same value.

There may be some situations where a farmer may wish to get a bull calf from a particular excellent producing cow and this is an option available.

The next and final test of the system will not be available until the calf is born (next October) to confirm that the sexed semen conceptions are all female. We can only wait patiently for this event!!

## More bush buff

*Cont from Page 1*

"They're wanting to turn off buffalo and are asking what markets are available. "We need to provide market opportunities for these animals, especially because people are promoting buffalo as an environmental problem."

He expressed industry concerns that 'Caring for Country' funding programs could address this view to the detriment of the wider buffalo sector. Those concerns extend to recent media reports on a joint ANU and wildlife consultancy study suggesting culling bush buffalo could reduce carbon emissions and help communities make money through the carbon farming legislation.

*We thank Platinum Genetics for facilitating the latest shipment to three buyers in Australia in a tank bringing in dairy cattle semen from Italy. We also acknowledge the assistance of Arturo Casali of CoFA in getting the shipment through all the Australian quarantine hurdles. It was with deep regret that we learnt of Arturo's passing late in the year.*

# Industry reps check out buffalo work at Warragul



(L-R): Researcher Dr Sally Gras, with reps Milton Stevens (SA), Doug Robertson (NSW), Geoff Eddy (Vic), Athel Smith, Neroli Eddy & Bruce Murray (All Vic) and Michael Swart (NT).

Research advances, animal licensing, on-farm developments and the new constitution were among issues covered at the ABIC AGM and conference at Warragul, Vic in February.

Research took centre stage with buffalo specialist Barry Lemcke presenting an extensive update on his team's RIRDC *Riverine Buffalo and Crossbreeding Project*, and Melbourne University's Dr Sally Gras speaking to members about her dairy-focused project.

The meeting voted in Ian Massingham (NSW) as President, Mitch Humphries (Qld) as Vice-President and Marg Thompson (Qld) as Secretary-Treasurer.

The weekend included a field trip to inspect Bruce Murray's district buffalo farm, where he runs a robust swamp herd serviced by the resident three-quarter Italian bull, 'Roger', bought by a Victorian consortium in May 2011.

Darwin will host the 2013 AGM.



Above: Bruce Murray surveys his herd.  
Below: Italian bull 'Roger'.



Below: Bruce's robust swampy cows.



## RESEARCHER PRESENTS AT CONFERENCE

Melbourne University's Dr Sally Gras is researching aspects of buffalo milk production in a project supported by RIRDC.

Her findings have yet to be formally published but she was happy to accept an invitation to outline some key points of her research during the Warragul ABIC conference.

Sally's presentation covered the work she and her team have done so far in gauging the differences between cow and buffalo milk and the differences in dairy products such as yoghurt made from cow and buffalo milk.

"There are a number of different properties that can help the buffalo industry differentiate their product in the marketplace," Sally told delegates.

"In response to manufacturer feedback, we have been looking at how manufacturers can reduce syneresis in buffalo yoghurt, as the whey generated on storage can be perceived as a defect by consumers.

"Some parts of the Australian buffalo industry also freeze milk for preservation and as a tool to regulate supply and demand, so we are looking at how freezing impacts on milk quality and how the rate of freezing can potentially be controlled to reduce any damage to milk fat globules.

"Finally, we are also looking at the genetics of buffalo milk production with Christophe Lefèvre from Deakin University. This research should assist the buffalo industry to keep pace with technologies in the broader dairy industry.

## Progress on buffalo manual

Preparation of an Australian Buffalo Manual is underway, with 13 chapters planned at present. The authors say some progress on preparing chapters has been made and things are now at a stage where more production data from recent animal work needs to be analysed by UNE Breedplan. This could hold up progress on publication of the manual by the deadline of May 2012.

# Buffalo News & Views . . .

*from around the country*

## NEW SOUTH WALES

- Licencing issues remain a key focus for NSW buffalo farmers who have continued to lobby state authorities on a decision to class buffalo as non-indigenous livestock. The farmers want buffalo classified in the same category as sheep and cattle. After a stream of furious correspondence from the state's non-indigenous animal breeders, the minister has directed the department to go back and consult with industry. There'll be no licence changes for the next 12 months.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- Half a dozen or so farmers are currently producing buffalo in the state, including the biggest, the Haldanes who have 250 head. Two decks of heifers were brought in from the family's Yambuck operation in Victoria last year. The state trucked 100 buffalo to the NT for meat last year.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- A new buffalo enterprise could be in the wind for Western Australia. A local

couple has expressed interest in setting up a farm near Bussleton, south of Perth, starting off with Swamp buffalo and a Riverine bull.

- Long-time producer Andrew Stewart has reduced his herd at nearby Vasse. Another active producer, Mullalyup producers Daryn and Beck Rowlands have reported a disappointing AI program and will now look at introducing a bull to their herd.

VicBIC believes Australia still needs Bulgarian Murrah semen to infuse into dairy buffalo to produce a hybrid milking animal.

- Another Victorian is looking at buying stock to set up a buffalo dairy outlet. The prospective farmer attended the February ABIC annual meeting and was provided with helpful herd and production details.

## NORTHERN TERRITORY

- In a move to advance the TenderBuff program, 10 head of buffalo in two age groups were finally processed at the Oenpelli Meatworks in 2011. Two samples from each went to the UNE Meat Laboratory for analysis covering shear force, compression, pH, colour, cooking losses and other aspects.
- AACo's planning for a major export standard abattoir at Noonamah near Darwin continues. An EIS is out for public comment and construction is ear-marked to start this year, depending on feedback regarding possible government support for associated road and port infrastructure.

## Australian Buffalo Industry Council State / Territory Representatives

### QUEENSLAND

**Mitch Humphries** (ABIC Vice-President) - Ph: 07 4097 2544  
Fax: 07 4097 2038 - Mob: 0407 254 435 - Email: mitch@dairybuffalo.com.au  
**Marg Thompson** (ABIC Sec/Treas) - Ph: 07 5494 4420 - Fax: 07 5494 4252  
Email: malenybuffalo@yahoo.com.au

### VICTORIA

**Athel Smith** - Ph: 03 5965 2368  
Mob: 0428 878 207 - Email: athel.smith@yahoo.com  
**Bruce Murray** - Ph: 03 5629 4270 - Mob: 0438 075 000  
Email: murraysbricks@hotmail.net.au

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Milton Stevens** - Ph: 08 8688 5032 - Mob: 0429 694 736

### TASMANIA

**Phillip Oates** - Ph/Fax: 03 6239 6712  
Mob: 0427 889 487 - Email: tasmanianbuffalo@westnet.com.au

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**Andrew Stewart** - Ph: 08 9381 5955  
Email: andrew@adhstewart.com.au  
**Daryn Rowland** - Ph: 08 9764 1951 - Mob: 0409 477 323  
Email: onthepass@bigpond.com

### NEW SOUTH WALES

**Doug Robertson** - Ph: 02 6848 5315 - Fax: 02 6848 5359  
Email: dougr@bordnet.com.au  
**Ian Massingham** (ABIC Pres) Ph: 1300 360 200 - Fax: 1300 360 800  
Mob: 0414 743 118 - Email: ian@ausenviroservices.com

### NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Michael Swart** - Ph: 08 89471661  
Email: michael@wrsc.com.au  
**Ernie Schlupe** - Ph: 08 8988 6092 - Mob: 0429 694 012  
Email: ernstschlupe@harboursat.com.au

### HONORARY MEMBERS

**Barry Lemcke** - Ph: 08 8999 2263 - Mob: 0429 095 809  
Email: barry.lemcke@nt.gov.au  
**Neil Ross** - Email: n.ross1@bigpond.com

## VICTORIA

- The Donnelly Review has recommended a halt to the state's RIRDC-funded Murrah AI research project. Despite the best efforts of the research team, the project encountered major logistical problems early on in accessing and importing suitable Murrah genetics from Bulgaria. Another recommendation that milk research be stopped, promoted much discussion at the recent ABIC annual meeting. Members argued that this research was vital to the success of the milk/dairy sector and needed to be continued and possibly escalated. ABIC's view will be submitted to RIRDC.

## Getting down to business



*Deep in discussion at the ABIC meeting. L-R: Michael Swart, Neroli & Geoff Eddy (standing), Athel Smith, Bruce Murray, Barry Lemcke, Doug Robertson & Milton Stevens.*