



New market prospects bring hope for live traders

This month's Darwin protocol talks have been welcomed by the buffalo export sector as a big step in the right direction.

Vietnam is a potentially vital market for Australian buffalo producers, whose export trade has all but dried up in light of the crisis still impacting on the live cattle trade with Indonesia. Buffalo industry specialist Barry Lemcke says Vietnamese orders for live cattle are steadily growing and buffalo are also in the mix, with more importers lining up with inquiries.

"Vietnam is a price sensitive market but the main advantage is that they want to import large cattle and buffalo for direct slaughter," he says. "That's a specification our producers have not been able to supply for a considerable time."

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Protocol talks a significant step forward for prospective Vietnam live buffalo trade

The potential for Vietnam to import significant future shipments of Australian live buffalo took a critical step forward this month when a Vietnamese delegation visited Darwin for top level talks aimed at the resolving import protocol issues.

Vietnam has long been keen to access Australian buffalo but until now, a regular trade has been hampered by the lack of an appropriate health protocol. Reaching agreement on the protocol was a top priority for the delegation, which included Mr Nguyen Van Ry, Chairman of the Board of Directors overseeing Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Livestock Services Unit, and the General Director and Project Manager with the major northern Vietnam livestock importers, Animex Co from Hai Phong.

A meeting between the group, NT Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries (DPIF) Chief Executive Alister Trier and heads of the NT Livestock Exporters and NT Cattlemen's Associations reached agreement on

buffalo-specific wording for a new health protocol.

DPIF will now recommend that the protocol be established. The next step will involve top level communications between the Vietnam and Australian Governments. Once all parties have reached agreement on all aspects, the protocol will need to be ratified through the Federal Agricultural Department. DPIF senior buffalo researcher Barry Lemcke says that if everything goes to plan, the first of regular Vietnam-bound buffalo shipments could be leaving Darwin within a couple of months. "Vietnam is keen to get our buffalo and the good progress made at the meeting means we are now much closer to achieving this," he says.

The animals would be processed for meat to be sold through Vietnam's wet markets, to help fill the country's burgeoning consumer demand for red meat.

The Vietnamese delegates toured Beatrice Hill Farm to look at crossbred slaughter buffalo and the purebred breeder herd. They also visited Tipperary Station, watched loading of a live cattle shipment destined for Vietnam, and inspected livestock yards and other facilities during their week-long Territory stop-over.

PHOTOS: (Far Left) Australian cattle freshly arrived in a new southern Vietnam feedlot. The owners are keen to also import Australian slaughter buffalo. (Left) Visiting delegates (L-R) Mr Hoang Dung (General Director Animex Co), Mr Nguyen Van Ry, Chairman of Directors Board, Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development, Mr Tran Duc Hanh (Project manager Animex Co).



Final Buffalo Newsletter

This is the last *Buffalo News!* RIRDC has generously funded the newsletter for 11 years but tightening purse-strings and other factors mean it can no longer do so. RIRDC has advised that, to be accountable for appropriate expenditure, it must focus its funding on disseminating R&D results, and not industry business. It says outcomes of its limited buffalo R&D can be disseminated through R&D supplements and other such channels. No other RIRDC research sector now had its own newsletter. Hence ... farewell, and the best of good fortune with your ongoing efforts to advance the the industry. A big thank you to RIRDC, to former key personnel Peter McInnes and June Murphy, and to all contributors (especially Barry Lemcke) who have helped fill the pages of *Buffalo News* for 11 years. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you and will continue to take a keen interest in developments within this intriguing rural sector.

Regards
Kerry Sharp - Editor

Pioneering buff technician Alf hangs up his gloves

Alf Turner has been carrying out buffalo AI trial duties at the Primary Industry Department-run Beatrice Hill Farm near Darwin since 2008 - at no cost to the government agency. The former stockie-turned-technician worked more recently with Veterinary Field Research and was involved in pioneering work on buffalo semen diluents, semen collection and many other reproduction studies around the Territory. He went private in 1985 with his own NT Artificial Breeders P/L doing pregnancy and bull testing and AI programs in the NT and WA. He moved from Darwin to Perth a few years ago to live with family, but has up till now continued to provide AI technician assistance. At the last AI round in April he came up from Perth to supervise cattle research officer Tim Schatz in doing 27 head at Beatrice Hill Farm. Tim will be adding buffalo AI to his already crowded schedule from now on. Buffalo are not as easy



as cattle to AI, especially in heifers unless they are very well grown (above 500kg). Alf was responsible for BHF's first breakthrough of the 50% conception barrier, (62.3%) which was mainly due to the purchase of good quality semen from CoFA in Italy for the first time in 2009 with RIRDC funds. At 77, Alf still puts in a very hard day's work in the yards, despite many hard knocks over the years which would have retired most mortals. Tougher than "tuff" is our Alf. We need to thank him greatly for all his interest and aid for the buffalo over these past 5-6 years. We wish him well for the future but will no doubt see him back in the NT at times or forever if we work on averages of those that leave "for good".

(From Barry Lemcke)

Industry agencies help offshore importers with ESCAS compliance

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Mr Lemcke says the DPIF and MLA were actively supporting new Vietnam importers to improve their feedlots and slaughter management and to comply with ESCAS conditions in a bid to grow the market as rapidly as possible.

"The Vietnamese are extremely keen to import more buffalo. They regularly process buffalo from neighbouring countries because they don't have big supplies of their own," he says.

"Slaughter in Vietnam is not Halal and the slaughter method of choice there is electrical stunning, which is approved by ESCAS and so much less of a problem than it is in Indonesia. The Vietnam situation is unlike Indonesia in that feedlotting is not used to value-add at this stage, because most of the market is wet-market orientated. Slaughter is carried out at night (every night) and the meat delivered to shops and eating establishments before the start of business that same morning.

"Eventually there could be a chilled meat market established in Vietnam as the supermarkets do carry Australian vacuum-packed primals for sale at nearly twice the price of local beef cuts.

"The popularity of beef in this market of 80 million people is growing markedly, so there is good potential for growth in the market in the future.

"With all this said, our local industry is hoping this month's visit by the Vietnam delegation will lead to buffalo exports to that country within the next few months, adding a second market to the currently restricted one in Brunei."

Buffalo News

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RIRDC RESEARCH UPDATE:

Buffalo boys the unexpected offspring of sexed semen trials

During the past two years, the buffalo research team at the Northern Territory Government's Beatrice Hill Farm near Darwin have been steadily testing sexed semen, consisting of 20 straws each of O-B-One and Caesar, imported through the Italian artificial insemination centre, CoFA (Cooperativa di Fecondazione Artificiale). They have then been comparing it with the same sires using normal semen.

"As you then have to wait 310 days to see the results, it doesn't happen overnight," the project's senior researcher Barry Lemcke reports.

"We have had the first four calves born so far and unfortunately one out of the four has been a male.

"The sexed semen varies in price from 6-7 times the price of normal semen.

"We haven't so far detected any differences in conception rate between the two types from early pregnancy testing, which is welcome news, However, the appearance of a male so early is a slight setback when the percentage is supposed to be over 90% females."

NSW buffalo producers Andrei and

Elena Swegen, who farm near Sydney, have also reported a male calf born after they used the AI sexed semen.

"Hopefully these will be the last boys for a while," Barry says.

"Despite the bigger price tag, some dairy producers in the build-up phase may opt for sexed semen to speed up the growth of the herd.

"Dairies are best placed to carry out an AI program not using synchronizing drugs to determine the AI timing.

"This is due to their frequency of observation of the cows and better ability to detect cows on heat.

"By not having the expense of the drugs, they may be better able to afford the higher costs of the sexed semen.

"If all females are achieved then the herd build-up process is virtually at double the speed."



ABOVE & LEFT: An unexpected boy in the mix for NSW's Andrei (pictured) and Elena Swegen, who produce buffalo on their property near Sydney.



ABOVE: Senior buffalo researcher Barry Lemcke, who oversees the RIRDC-sponsored AI studies, inspects a herd at Beatrice Hill Farm near Darwin.



Stunning review seeking ways for buffalo to meet new ESCAS requirements

Since the introduction of the Australian Government's ESCAS (Export Supply Chain Assurance Scheme) requirements, the popularity of the percussive stunning in Indonesian abattoirs has increased to the extent that some Halal boxes are being consigned to the back paddock. However, the change has impacted badly on live buffalo exports to Indonesia - because buffalo have a heavier frontal skull thickness than cattle so are less vulnerable to percussive stunning.

"This has exacerbated the problem of Australian exporters being able to get buffalo back into the Indonesian market while complying with the new ESCAS rules and standards," Darwin-based Senior buffalo research Barry Lemcke says.

"The Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries has been endeavouring to formalise a process to get buffalo approved for Halal slaughter where the stunning basically has to be reversible (not fatal) to comply with Halal rules.

"This has resulted in our current contract with the CSIRO expert on animal stunning in Australia, Dr Alison Small. Alison has been reviewing international literature on stunning, with a view to recommending the proper procedures to follow in setting up a trial using different methods.

"The aim is to eventually regain the buffalo export slaughter market in Indonesia in a manner that will meet ESCAS and Commonwealth Government requirements.

Unfortunately for producers, a solution cannot be found overnight, but hopefully when it is, it will be a sustainable one."

Buffalo News & Views . . .

from around the country

● ABIC members continue to field regular queries from prospective domestic and overseas buffalo meat buyers. Unfortunately, potential major supply deals go begging due to the ongoing lack of abattoirs willing or able to process the meat. It's the one major stumbling block to growth of the buffalo meat sector. Recent inquiries have included one to Victorian rep Athel Smith from a Singapore-based commodities trading company with customers throughout

Asia, Africa and Europe. The company has indicated interest in sourcing Australia buffalo meat for export to CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries, which include Russia, Belarus and other former USSR republics.

● The Territory's only dairy is on the move. Sharon and Geoff Arthur have decided to expand their Lambell's Lagoon buffalo milk and cheese venture based on the outcomes of

R&D conducted over the past few years. "We are now going forward as Top End Buffalo," Sharon says. That means shifting their herd and dairy facility to Batchelor, an hour south of Darwin. The Arthurs have trialed a range of gourmet buffalo cheeses and yoghurt since setting up and these have been popular sellers at Top End restaurants and selected fresh food outlets. Production has stopped while the move is on but consumers can expect to

see the Arthurs' sensational buffalo milk goods back on the shelves very soon.

● Spotted starring in a recent TV replay - Top End buffalo filmed on the *MV Becrux* (now *Ocean Drover*) during an episode of the globally popular *Mighty Ships*. The ship's owners agreed to their super-sized livestock carrier being featured in the series to emphasise the excellent on-board conditions for cattle, buffalo and other passengers.

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