



Buffalo News

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Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council

Industry research a key focus at Darwin ABIC meetings

ABIC board members from all states and territories convened in Darwin in early February for their AGM and general meeting and a field trip to inspect buffalo industry developments in the Top End.

The issue of buffalo research and development funding received plenty of attention in discussions throughout the two-day program. Doug Robinson gave a detailed account of money committed to the industry by

RIRDC and other agencies over the past decade and briefly outlined projects implemented to benefit the buffalo industry throughout Australia.

Progress reports were tabled on the Tenderbuff Development and Supply Project, Riverine Buffalo and Cross Breeding Project, both based at Beatrice Hill Farm (BHF) near Adelaide River, and the RIRDC Genetic and Reproduction Improvements in Australian Water Buffalo Project, being conducted at BHF and cooperating properties in the NT and Victoria. (See Page 3).

Key issues discussed during the weekend included ongoing work on the ABIC constitution, the proposed standard selection criteria for milking buffalo and registration, website upgrade and five-year plan guidelines.

RIRDC's Peter McInnes provided advice on how to prepare applications for research funding through the agency.

Representatives voted to hold the 2008 AGM in Victoria with the hope of touring the successful Haldane dairy venture.

The Sunday field-trip including the Litchfield Abattoir facility and Beatrice Hill Farm and surrounds, which are the focus of most NT buffalo research work.



ABOVE: AGM discussions - Clockwise from Left: Mal Thompson (Qld), Mitch Humphries (Qld), Peter McInnes (RIRDC), Doug Robertson (NSW), Milton Stephens (SA), Bill Lane (NT), Athel Smith (Vic), Phillip Oates (Tas), Bob Cook (SA) and Marg Thompson (Qld).



ABOVE: On the field trip to Beatrice Hill Farm - (L-R) Barry Lemcke (NT), Michael Swart (NT), Athel Smith (Vic), Phillip Oates (Tas), Marg & Mal Thompson (Qld), Bill & Maria Lane (NT), Mitch Humphries (Qld), Andrew Stewart (WA) and Doug Robertson (NSW).

ABIC EXECUTIVE 2007

PRESIDENT
Phillip Oates (Tas)

VICE-PRESIDENT
Marg Thompson (Qld)

SECRETARY-TREASURER
Athel Smith (Vic)

ABIC Website - www.buffaloaustralia.org

WA buffalo farmer looking for ways to make his 'pets' work for a crust

Western Australia's buffalo industry dates back to the 1980s when a consignment of Top End animals was introduced onto a property at rural Baldvis near Perth, and state industry interests set up the Australian Buffalo Breeders Association.

"There were more than 20 members in those days but most have gone now," says Andrew Stewart, who maintains one of a small handful of buffalo herds in Western Australia.

Andrew runs 40 head of a mix of swamp and riverine-cross buffalo on his farm near Busselton in WA's southwest.

The herd grazes on 60 acres of sandy loam country close the coast.

"My original animals came from the NT in the 1990s," Andrew says.

"In 2002, I purchased a three-quarter cross riverine bull and I'm now getting my second generation progeny."

Despite some local challenges in terms of support infrastructure, Andrew is pursuing all available options for making an income from his robust herd.

One possibility on the horizon is to supply milk for a



Andrew Stewart checks out local buffalo during his recent Darwin AGM visit

prominent local cheese factory.

"There's potential to provide milk from my herd but unfortunately, government policy has resulted in a number of dairy closures and I don't have easy access to dairy facilities at the moment," he says.

"There is also the potential to supply the meat market but the logistics of killing within reasonable distance of Busselton is difficult.

"The Cowaramup abattoir was ideally located but

has now been sold to a company which only processes its own beef.

"The only possibility for slaughter at present is near Bunbury.

"So, at the moment, I am maintaining a herd of very expensive pets. The little bug-gers are sending me broke with all the hay I have to keep buying for them."

Milking buff selection criteria accepted

The ABIC Committee meeting in Darwin has accepted a draft *Standard for Milking Breed and Registration of Buffalo*

Details for the requirements were compiled by Victoria's Roger Haldane, with additional information from Top End researcher Barry Lemcke.

The paper outlined selection criteria of:

- temperament
- udder
- feet
- horn shape
- milk production

During discussion on the paper, Queensland representatives Marg and Mal Thompson(observer) said there should be no importance placed on horns because they believed all milking animals should be dehorned.

The meeting agreed that the criteria be accepted with minimal emphasis being placed on the horns.

Further discussions will be held later in regards to genetic faults and some other aspects.

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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Genetic and Reproduction Improvements in Australian Water Buffalo

Researcher Barry Lemcke reports on this RIRDC-funded project

What's involved

The project has three main objectives:

(a) to develop a synchronisation protocol to deliver good AI outcomes

(b) to set up a database for the entire Australian buffalo industry to see it well into the future.

(c) to analyse and report on the genetics of the swamp buffalo from historical data held by the NT Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines Department (DPIFM).

Progress so far

In November 2005, six purebred cows and 11 crossbred heifers were inseminated at Beatrice Hill Farm (NT). Two cows and one heifer fell pregnant (ie.33% of cows and 9% of heifers).

In February 2006, a highly experienced Victorian dairy cattle inseminator treated 20 pure riverine heifers at Yambuk, and achieved a 50% pregnancy rate. This first really successful attempt showed the protocol appeared to work well with just a single insemination.

In April 2006, an experienced NT inseminator Alf Turner worked on another 10 cows and 15 heifers, which were all in top shape. The results were more pleasing with five cows and four heifers confirmed pregnant (50% and 27% respectively).

Another five heifers were detected at eight weeks but not confirmed three weeks later. There may have been too much early trauma and these foetuses lost but this is not a certainty.

The results of a fourth attempt in early July 2006 with the remaining heifers and cows plus some ex-

tra lactating cows, (7 crossbred and 4 purebred heifers, and 14 purebred cows) were particularly pleasing.

Early ultrasound confirmed pregnancy in 12 out of 25 (4 heifers and 8 cows of which 10 were lactating). Six of the cows were lactating at the time.

Nine of the remaining 13 in the total group were picked up by the back-up bull within one cycle of the AI attempt.

Data is now with ABRI for collation and analysis on the current herd at Beatrice Hill Farm (BHF).

The resulting ABRI collation data will become the basis of the register for buffalo in Australia.

The Yambuck herd's birth data has also been put onto a database provided by ABRI, with only sire information still to be added. This will also be added to the register.

Yambuk has recently indicated that it will be unable to accurately identify the exact sires for any calves due to the high turn-over of bulls and the frequent changes of cows between their three mating groups.



Eric Cox identifying some of the AI projects two-year-old year-old and yearling bull progeny from the calf records

The ABIC year reviewed

ABIC President Phillip Oates reflects on 2006

During 2006, we had input into a diverse range of issues, including maintenance of Australia's TB freedom from 1 January 2007. This was discussed with the Cattle Council of Australia (CCA), the AHA, DAFF and the Animal Health Committee.

The Primary Industry Ministerial Council (PIMC) has endorsed arrangements for maintaining Australia's TB freedom from 1 January with: (1) surveillance, (2) compensation, (3) legislation, (4) manual of operating guidelines for the eradication of Bovine Tuberculosis on a property, (5) eradication coordination, and (6) a reference laboratory service.

ABIC also provided feedback on the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock Incident Response Plan, Australian Animal Welfare Strategy Stakeholder Questionnaire, National Residue Survey and many other issues.

I hope the coming year will be a successful, that we can identify strategies to assist the industry, and that other people within the industry will also assist in this. I hope we can have more input from farmers themselves to build this industry, which should be driven and guided by the farmers of buffalo.

LIVE EXPORTS: the state of play

A total of 7748 head of live buffalo were exported from Australia in 2006 - to Brunei, West Malaysia and Indonesia.

Demand from the West Malaysian and Indonesian markets rose significantly during the year but Brunei is in decline.

A total of 219 animals were shipped out through the Port of Darwin in February this year. The consignment brings to 526 the total number to leave so far this year.

Indonesia has been this year's biggest importer, taking 150 Australian live buffalo in February and 457 in January.

Figures from DPIFM 'Pastoral Market Update' - Feb 2007

RIVERINE BULL FOR SALE

No: 5854
DOB: 25/12/05
Sire: Bill (AI)
Dam No: 5756
Birth wgt: 31kg
Weaned: 13/9/06
Weaned wgt: 246kg

Phone Michael
08 8947 1661

Buffalo News & Views ... from around the country

Victoria

- Drought has impacted severely on all Victorian buffalo farmers in 2006 and meant that limited promotional activities were undertaken during the year. Some VicBIC members have sold off their animals and left the industry
- VicBIC members are working to upgrade the riverine content in their herds. They are also investigating options for training young heifers of different riverine content, for milking.
- Victorian buffalo producers continue to be concerned over the lack of suitable abattoirs to process their animals, and the ability to sell off animals that are ready for market.

South Australia

- The disposal of smaller hobby type herds has seen a further decline in the state industry in 2006

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- A small swampy herd at Naracoorte continues to supply product for private and local ethnic use
- Good three-quarter cross and better heifers and bulls were exported from South Australia to Chile and South Africa
- An ongoing herd upgrade program, based primarily on temperament type and teat placement will continue during 2007 and 2008
- The state has about 90 good hybrid steers on hand to be marketed in early 2007.

New South Wales

- NSW presently has only two herds with significant breeders
- The capacity for service kill in the state appears limited to two abattoirs, one on the upper central coast and the other in the central inland. Export kill opportunities are unknown
- The present weather cycle is believed to be impacting on causing low interest in buffalo production, meat and milk.

Queensland

- Queensland continues to grow its small but significant buffalo industry, with another buffalo dairy starting up in 2006
- Mal and Marg Thompson are now running 30 head on their Maleny property and are supplying both milk and quality buff meat to local buyers
- A 2006 highlight was the historic start of a commercial joint venture between Millaa Millaa buffalo milk producer Mitch Humphries and the Italian cheesemaking Minola family's Vannella Cheese company
- Genetic improvement through natural mating and AI, using either pure bred or high percentage riverine types are continuing on both Queensland dairy operations.

SEE more state buffalo news in the next issue



TOP END FIELD TRIP: (L-R) Mitch Humphries, Barry Lemcke, Eric Cox and Athel Smith in deep debate about buffalo at Beatrice Hill Farm near Darwin in February