

# REGULATING THE BIOSECURITY RISKS POSED BY VETERINARY LABORATORIES

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# Possible economic effects from escape of animal pathogen -

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- Interference with production of food of animal origin
- Disruption to public food security
- Creation of obstacles to international trade in animals and animal products
- Loss of domestic and international markets, market position and competitiveness
- Cost of destruction of animals and emergency responses
- Possible loss of faith in government and veterinary services and consumer confidence in food products

# Possible precautions to address biosecurity risks -

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- need for labs to be registered as having particular pathogens?
- record of what agents labs have?
- restriction of access in lab to pathogens and need to keep them securely?
- police checks on employees?
- clear understanding of procedures following accidental spill?
- restrictions on staff handling animals in their personal life?

# Veterinary laboratories

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- research and diagnostic labs
- include:-
  - AAHL
  - State government labs
  - University labs and biotech companies (including researchers working alone)
  - private industry labs
- may be general (eg - private vet pathology company) or species specific (eg - some in-house intensive industry labs)

# Risk?

The biosecurity risks posed and which vet labs pose those risks largely depends on the biological agent being dealt with by the laboratory

⇒ some pathogens more likely to be held by vet labs than others and

⇒ some pathogens more likely to cause harm than others

	OIE	Aust group	SSBA List	Natl List of Not'fble Animal Disease	AUS VET PLAN
Anthrax	+	+	Tier 1	+	Category 3
Q fever agent	+	+	-	-	-
HeV	-	+	-	+	Category 2
ABLV	-	-	-	+	Category 1
Newcastle disease	+	-	-	+	Category 3
Avian influenza virus (vir'lt form)	+	-	-	+	Category 3

# Voluntary regulation

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- OIE
- NATA (National Association of Testing Authority)
- SCAHLS (Sub-committee on animal health laboratory standards, of the Veterinary Laboratory Network Aust New Zealand)
- AQIS (Austn Quarantine and Inspection Service)
- AUSVETPLAN

# State regulation

- Animal disease control legislation – eg *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994* (Vic)
- Biosecurity legislation – eg *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (WA)

⇒ Implications for biosecurity in vet labs?

# Vet lab obligations per Victorian legislation

## 1. Reporting of disease or suspicion of notifiable disease

'If a person knows or has reason to suspect that a disease is present in livestock, livestock products or hives –

(c) dealt with by that person as a vet practitioner, ... the owner or person in charge of premises registered as a diagnostic vet laboratory, ...or other person dealing with livestock, livestock products or hives by way of a profession, trade or business –

the person must notify an inspector [within certain time limits and in certain manners]....'

⇒ Provides government with record of labs and possible agents

⇒ BUT - no obligations re storage of samples

# Vet lab obligations per Vic legislation (cont)

## 2. Testing for disease

- diagnostic testing / examination must only be done at premises registered as a vet diagnostic lab for that disease
  - is an offence to submit samples / specimens for diagnostic testing / examination to determine whether it is infected with any disease unless done at registered premises
- ⇒ Registration can be subject to conditions etc and therefore would provide way for government to impose biosecurity measure requirements on labs
- ⇒ BUT - Does not apply to research labs

# Vet lab obligations per Vic legislation (cont)

## 3. Reporting by registered vet diagnostic lab

Must record and report brief description of:

- sample / specimen submitted;
- diagnostic test / examination performed;
- results of diagnostic test / examination; and
- any provisional and final diagnosis

⇒ Again Victoria has opportunity to record what vet labs have which agents

⇒ BUT - Does not apply to research labs

# Vet lab obligations per Vic legislation (cont)

## 4. Prescribed standards of accreditation

- Owner / person in charge of registered vet diagnostic lab required to ensure facilities and operational practices of lab comply with any prescribed standards of accreditation for vet diagnostic labs
- Prescribed standard is AS ISO/IEC Standard used by NATA
- Therefore accreditation is an enforceable obligation for Victorian registered vet diagnostic labs
- BUT – Does not apply to research labs

# Vet lab obligations per Vic legislation (cont)

## 5. Possession of pathogens

- an offence to import livestock, livestock products, fodder or fittings or vehicles where an order has been made under border security provisions
- ⇒ No prohibition on import, possession or use of pathogens unless it is an exotic disease agent
- ⇒ 'Exotic disease' means foot and mouth disease, rabies or any other contagious or infectious disease or condition of livestock, that the Governor in Council declares to be an exotic disease

# Vet lab obligations per WA legislation

## 1. Possession of pathogen

Offence to -

- supply or
- possess

unlawfully imported organisms if the person knows / ought reasonably to know there has been a contravention of the prohibition on import

- Unlawfully imported organisms are prohibited organisms or organisms that have not yet been declared as permitted

# Compare to Vic position

Generally similar BUT -

1. Vic legn does not prohibit import of organism itself unless it is an exotic disease agent or imported in livestock, livestock products, fodder or fittings or vehicles
2. Control for Victorian purposes requires the condition to be declared an 'exotic disease' by Governor in Council  
Cf WA - if no action has been taken, default is that import of pathogen is unlawful

Reflects the fact WA legislation is aimed at biosecurity and regulating pathogens themselves, whereas Victorian legislation regulates to prevent livestock disease

# Vet lab obligations per WA legislation (cont)

## 2. Biosecurity within the state

Legislation -

- Imposes duty to report presence / suspected presence of declared pest;
- Imposes a duty to control declared pests; and
- Regulates introduction and supply of declared pests

and it is an offence to deal with a declared pest in the relevant area

# Vet lab obligations per WA legislation (cont)

- 'Deal with' includes keeping, breeding or cultivating the pest or an animal, plant or other thing infected or infested with the declared pest
  - 'cultivate' includes culture and 'keep' means 'have in possession or be in control of, and includes exhibit'
- > any vet lab may therefore 'deal with' pests
- This is allowed provided it is in accordance with authorisations issued under the Regulations
  - Presumably any vet lab will be able to seek authorisations and those authorisations could, if the Regulations allow, provide for biosecurity precautions to be taken by vet lab
  - NOTE – not limited to diagnostic vet labs

# Summary

- New Commonwealth moves to enhance biosecurity practices for biological agents have only limited relevance to most vet labs.
- Some voluntary measures (eg AQIS requirements) address biosecurity precautions, but all have obvious drawback of not being enforceable or having limited application
- State legislation, whether for the purpose of animal disease control (eg Vic legislation) or specifically directed at biosecurity (eg WA legislation), has potential to allow governments to regulate to require biosecurity precautions be taken by vet labs and certain facility standards be met

# Conclusions

- Whether this should be done depends on an assessment of
    - risks posed by pathogens held by vet labs
    - administrative responsibilities and costs that would be imposed on vet labs by changes in regulation
  - Increased funding to government and university laboratories required if changes introduced, particularly as the infrastructure at some of these laboratories begins to age
  - Possibly most important step is to ensure all those possessing and using pathogens aware of potential biosecurity problems, particularly research and university labs and researchers outside the main streams of communication
- ⇒ Discussion of these issues and possible responses can only enhance the improved awareness of these issues amongst those involved

# Thank you

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