

Position of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) on NAIT

MAF believes that New Zealand's animal identification and traceability systems should be enhanced to better manage biosecurity risk and to safeguard access to export markets.

It believes a national system that provides life-time traceability of cattle and deer will improve disease surveillance and reduce incursion response times.

In the event of an outbreak, such a system would help give assurance to export markets that New Zealand had identified and contained all the affected animals.

Robust animal identification and tracing systems would also allow "compartmentalisation" and "regionalisation" of a disease outbreak under World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) standards so that trade could continue for animal products from other parts of the country. In other words, New Zealand would be able assure importers that an outbreak had been isolated to a particular location or region. Delays in tracing at-risk animals during a response, and in providing disease freedom assurances to trading partners, would cost farmers and exporters real dollars in their bottom line.

Life-time traceability is attracting greater interest in our overseas markets (eg. Europe) for marketing and local pest and disease management reasons. It may only be a matter of time before such systems become either formal or informal requirements for access to some export markets for some commercial species. The OIE has two chapters on animal identification and tracing, one defining general principles and the other providing general guidance on the design and implementation of systems. In April 2008, the Director General of the OIE (Bernard Vallet) called for progressive implementation of animal identification and traceability systems worldwide.

Certainly some of our export competitors are, or already have, implemented mandatory animal tracing requirements for some species in response to these trends. Key purchasers of product are also signalling that life-time traceability will influence their purchasing decisions in the future. In MAF's view New Zealand should do the same in order to protect access for our animal and related products.

The Operation Waiheke response to a foot-and-mouth (FMD) disease hoax in 2005 showed the challenges in tracing individual animals under current animal identification traceability systems. Existing databases did not identify all the properties at risk of containing infected livestock.

A review of Operation Waiheke and an FMD simulation exercise (Exercise Taurus) recommended that animal traceability and property identification systems need to be improved to respond effectively to any future outbreaks. While current systems allow traceability at herd levels they do not allow tracing of all individual cattle and deer

movements. In addition, they do not provide national coverage and other features that could be required in the future. Also, they rely on paper records and individual memory rather than an accessible electronic system, potentially leading to costly delays in animal tracing during a major emergency.

While MAF supports NAIT in principle, it has some caveats. Any changes to the current systems for animal identification and tracing must be justified by a robust cost-benefit analysis. There must be suitable protections in place regarding access to and the use of regulated data by parties. MAF supports building on the existing systems covering cattle and deer to the extent this is practical. The addition of other species – whether flock/group or individual identification – to the NAIT system should only be considered once the system is up and running for cattle and deer.