



FACT SHEET

STRENGTHENING EMPHASIS ON INTERNAL BIOSECURITY

June 2019

Key learnings from the African swine fever (ASF) simulation Exercise Rapid Strike, conducted in SA by PIRSA Biosecurity in May

The purpose of this communique is to summarise post-border ASF preparedness and response issues that industry should consider with support from APL. It also covers business continuity issues at the industry and enterprise level.

In tandem with the Department of Agriculture's focus on border biosecurity, compliance activities and assuring Australia's appropriate level of protection to defend Australia from African swine fever, preparedness activities by industry and state jurisdictions are critical.

The three-day field simulation Exercise Rapid Strike (ERS2) tested and developed South Australia's local capability and capacity in meeting biosecurity roles and responsibilities in response to an African swine fever incursion in its jurisdiction. The simulation involved infected farms and an abattoir (*Infected Premises*) classified to be within *Restricted Areas*. Specialist industry representatives were involved to develop common operating procedures and to inform tracing, planning and product recalls. Allied emergency agencies (e.g. police) attended to be briefed on how their services would be required.

This exercise identified a number of considerations that need to be acted upon jointly by industry and jurisdictions to make improvements to preparedness, response and recovery against ASF.

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At a national level, Animal Health Australia manages the development and review of the Australian Veterinary Emergency Plans (AUSVETPLAN) on behalf of its members.

AUSVETPLAN contains the nationally-agreed approach for the response to emergency animal disease (EAD) incidents in Australia.

The plan is detailed in a series of manuals and supporting documents and covers 66 categorised animal diseases, including one on ASF. (see www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/our-publications/ausvetplan-manuals-and-documents/)

For ASF, the AUSVETPLAN describes the disease strategy for the management of an outbreak of ASF in Australia and response policy. The manual covers:

- information about the disease (Section 2);
- the relevant risk factors and their treatment, and the options for management of a disease outbreak, depending on the circumstances (Section 3);
- the starting policy and guidelines for agencies and organisations involved in a response to an outbreak (Section 4);
- declared areas and premises (Section 5);
- quarantine and movement controls (Section 6);
- and how to establish proof of freedom (Section 7).

The current version, Version 4.1, of the ASF AUSVETPLAN manual is being revised, with a writing group being managed by Animal Health Australia as part of this process. APL is represented on the writing group together with state jurisdictions and AHA. Input is being sought from pig veterinarians as this proceeds.

Exercise Rapid Strike identified a number of considerations for the ASF AUSVETPLAN's writing group. Whilst some of these considerations are beyond the scope of the manual, these need to be considered by jurisdictions and industry now, before any disease incursion is experienced within Australia to ensure that we are prepared and response strategies are well thought through.



Key areas for consideration for producers:

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

- Producers need to have an **on-farm management plan** that outlines how pigs will be managed, fed and/or housed to minimise animal welfare impacts if a pig and product standstill is called in response to a disease incursion and pigs cannot be moved on or off a property for an extended period.
- **Develop Destruction and Disposal plans** that meet animal health, welfare and EPA environmental regulations for options e.g. burial, composting etc.
 - **Develop contingency plans** for on-farm disposal on each individual property. It is possible that a stock standstill could plausibly last for 2-3 weeks which allows for tracing, evaluation of suspect farms, testing and potentially one incubation period of the virus to ensure no new cases emerge.
 - Producers should work closely with their veterinarian to develop a section of the on-farm biosecurity plan, which includes a crisis management response plan that includes on-farm destruction and disposal if possible.
- **Emergency Movement Permits (EMPs) for multi-site production** risk assessment of routes and biosecurity measures will assist with managing animal welfare and business continuity. This preparation will also help to reduce the load on the “permits team” during any incursion. The simulation exercise highlighted the need for national agreement on SOPs for transport criteria such as routes, truck and driver biosecurity and health monitoring at source and recipient sites. EMPs are based on compartmentalisation (implementing and maintaining a disease-free establishment to facilitate disease control) of multi-site entities.

Note: actual incident EMPs will still need to be approved by CVOs and the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Disease, using SOPs agreed across jurisdictions. The approach is being piloted in SA.

• Planning for recovery activities

- Ask your veterinarian or consultant to detail and assist with understanding the procedures that will take place if an exotic disease is detected in pigs on your farm to inform how these affect selection of future business options.

• Managing in the response phase

- The exercise also identified the need for each enterprise within a *Restricted Area* to be assigned a Case Manager (respected industry entity) to visit with a Control Centre official to explain why, what, how, when and compensation before the field team arrives. The role of the Case Manager would be to liaise with the Incident Control Centre and allied support services i.e. financial, wellbeing etc.

• Co-operation and involvement from abattoirs, transport associations, stockfeed associations and artificial breeding (AI) centres.

- At the ASF Summit, AAHL (Australian Animal Health Laboratory) advised that there is little evidence that semen is a high risk product for ASF (though it is for classical swine fever). Early clearance of AI centres is paramount given that approximately 90% of matings are done by AI and there is a large interstate semen trade.
- This was discussed by the ASF AUSVETPLAN writing group. It will be raised to Animal Health Committee (with this Committee comprising Chief veterinary officers from each state) via Animal Health Australia for consideration in each of their state response plans.
- It is also apparent that allied industry sectors need to be prepared to provide expert advice under direction of the CVO at the outset in the Incident Control Centre.



Key issues for consideration by the processing sector

- The SA ‘Exercise Rapid Strike’ ASF simulation highlighted that the processing sector has a critical role in an ASF incident response.
- Opportunities to reduce uncertainties include:
 - defining the criteria that an abattoir must meet to be released from *Infected Premises* status (a property where animals are meeting the case definition or there is reasonable suspicion that an exotic disease is present, declared by a Chief veterinary officer or their delegate);
 - decontamination risk assessment to prioritise actions including clothes, personnel (including drivers), waste, decontamination priorities, truck biosecurity, and access to rendering that meets virus inactivation criteria.
- Each state needs to examine specific state-based issues. As part of this, considerations of cross-border access to major export licensed abattoirs by pigs from piggeries in an *Outside Area* in the affected state so that they can be processed in an abattoir in other states classified as *Outside Areas*.
- The need to develop various options including dedicating an abattoir(s) and rendering plant(s) as an option to deal with diseased pigs for a defined timeframe period.
- Determine the capability and capacity of each abattoir to be able to deal with the backlog of pigs that could not be slaughtered due to a stock standstill.
 - Chiller space will be the key determinant of a processor’s ability to catch up processing of pigs that could not be routinely slaughtered (provided buyers accept bigger carcasses). For a SA statewide stock standstill alone, this may involve approximately 20,000 pigs/week (excluding pigs grown interstate and routinely slaughtered in SA processing plants);
 - How a processor schedules the slaughter of the backlog of pigs will depend on the size of the incursion i.e. reduced numbers due to the extent of infected pigs.

Key considerations for AUSVETPLAN manuals

- The ASF AUSVETPLAN manual is being updated
- The writing group needs to consider whether the inclusion of SOPs within the response document could be beneficial.
- Currently each state has their own roles and responsibility plans but including generic SOPs to operationalise the AUSVETPLAN the ASF manual is currently being discussed.
- Some suggested SOPs include property risk assessment for tracing and the issuing of permits for transport of pigs, major risk factors of exposure, product recall on fresh, frozen, manufactured, offal, and meat meal, surveillance of feral pigs, and criteria for an ASF stock standstill release.
- **Surveillance**
 - “*Surveillance*” is highlighted at all stages and areas in the AUSVETPLAN manuals but these manuals do not outline specific activities.
 - There is HIGH value in testing acute deaths with clinical history for which ASF is a differential diagnosis; consultation with Australian Pig Veterinarians Association and Australian Veterinary Association is paramount.
 - There is a need to define effective surveillance programs for farms (small and large holdings), abattoirs, AI centres and feral pigs for freedom of disease testing.
- The Valuation document for compensation needs to be updated to clarify and reflect current pig prices. APL will work with Animal Health Australia to update the AUSVETPLAN Pig valuation manual.

APL recognizes that much of this preparation will require national collaboration with Biosecurity agencies to set the “rules” that enables confident development of plans at the individual enterprise level. Joint planning and communication is paramount.

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