



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

INTERIM INSPECTOR GENERAL OF BIOSECURITY

**Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan
(AUSVETPLAN)**

**INTERIM INSPECTOR GENERAL OF BIOSECURITY
AUDIT REPORT
June 2010**

No: 2009-10/04

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Note:

For the public release of this report personal information will be removed in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1998*.

Introduction

The Australian Emergency Veterinary Plan (AUSVETPLAN) is a key strategic set of documented plans and reference material to ensure Australia maintains best practice in preparedness and responses to outbreaks or incursions of emergency animal diseases. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) plays an important role in the assembly and provision of technical and scientific advice that helps ensure all stages of the development of this strategic asset are undertaken to global better practice.

The responsibility for management of AUSVETPLAN rests with Animal Health Australia (AHA). This reflects its ownership by the Australian Government, states and territories and industry.

An audit of the effectiveness of discharge of obligations by the department to provide technical input into AUSVETPLAN development and review was part of the Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity (IIGB) 2009-10 assurance work program.

The IIGB engaged an external provider to undertake this audit on the IIGB's behalf. The audit report is at Attachment A.

Audit scope

The scope of this audit included an examination of:

- roles and responsibilities within the department, in relation to the maintenance and updating of AUSVETPLAN
- processes to develop and maintain policy and technical documentation required under AUSVETPLAN. This includes processes to
 - keep the content of the documents current
 - ensure the reliability and relevance of the evidence base that underpins the department's documentation
 - liaison and coordination arrangements with AHA in relation to maintenance of AUSVETPLAN and associated departmental documentation
 - liaison and coordination with other relevant stakeholders in relation to the department's role in the maintenance of AUSVETPLAN and associated departmental documentation
- the department's compliance with defined roles and responsibilities in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN.

This audit did not examine:

- the overall development and maintenance of AUSVETPLAN by AHA. This assignment focused on the department's processes to perform its obligations to maintain and update AUSVETPLAN
- the content and accuracy of departmental input into AUSVETPLAN and associated documents, such as policy, guidelines or technical strategies. Instead, this assignment focused on the department's processes to develop and maintain such documentation

- the department's roles and responsibilities under AUSVETPLAN in the event of an animal disease emergency response. This assignment was limited to the examination of the department's approach to maintain and update AUSVETPLAN and not the use of the plan in an emergency response.
- IT infrastructure and software that support the development and maintenance of the department's documents as part of AUSVETPLAN.

In 2007 the Auditor-General investigated Australia's preparedness for human influenza and made recommendations that impacted on the management of AUSVETPLAN. Following that, in 2008 the department conducted a review into its obligations for emergency animal disease outbreaks. These were considered as part of this project.

Fieldwork also included an examination of a sample of documents prepared by and actions undertaken by DAFF in supporting the maintenance and updating of the individual management plans relating to rabies, anthrax and finally milk handling during a foot and mouth disease outbreak.

Overview of findings

The audit did not find any instances where the department was not meeting its obligations in maintaining and updating AUSVETPLAN.

Some potential improvements were identified. They relate partly to organisational and succession planning issues and improvements in project management approaches.

Specific areas identified for further consideration by the department were:

- continue to develop and implement sustainable mechanisms to monitor and measure AUSVETPLAN workload, resourcing and performance, in line with departmental priorities
- continue to strengthen the department's approach to the coordination of AUSVETPLAN output to ensure that it presents a single whole of government or departmental point of view
- strengthen the department's project management mechanisms so it may more clearly identify and monitor its own AUSVETPLAN work in progress
- strengthen workforce planning arrangements across the Biosecurity Services Group within the department to ensure adequate succession planning and the retention of knowledge and skills in relation to AUSVETPLAN.

The audit also recognised that DAFF is meeting its resourcing commitments and has been providing some funding to AHA for AUSVETPLAN maintenance and development. This latter funding is additional to the department's mandated obligations; however the audit noted that this funding, regardless of its source, is seen as valuable in maintaining AUSVETPLAN and that AHA has concerns if the department were to reduce this additional financial support.

Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity advice

The audit focussed on the department's obligations under AUSVETPLAN. This is a single component of a large set of national relevant obligations and commitments by the governments and industry within Australia under AUSVETPLAN. The scope of the audit did not encompass the management by AHA or effectiveness of meeting obligations by other parties.

My experience and understanding, from wider sources, is that AUSVETPLAN remains an important asset to biosecurity management for emergency animal diseases, in particular for livestock industries. It also remains a respected strategic initiative by overseas trading partner countries.

It is a living suite of documents that must be reviewed and updated on a continuing basis; thereby reflecting changes in scientific understanding of diseases and response innovations such as new forms of prevention or treatment. The department contributes significant resources and coordinated high-value technical input to this refreshment process.

I consider that a generally adequate level and quality of input is provided by the department to the AUSVETPLAN development processes and that overall the department is meeting its obligations.

I consider to be valid, and support, the areas identified in the audit report for further consideration by DAFF. The wording of the findings provides scope for the department to approach the improvements to the AUSVETPLAN support model that best fit with wider organisational and project management initiatives recently made in relevant technical units.

In my association with this audit, it is clear to me that the additional financial support provided by the department to AHA, which allows it to dedicate a skilled part-time resource person to contribute and coordinate input of all other parties, is valued and appears cost-effective. This represents an enhanced return on investment for national benefit not just for the department.

For this reason, I support a continuation of this departmental funding to AHA. However, if the portfolio is not in a position to continue this additional funding then an alternative means of additional support should be pursued by AHA.

Overall, the audit has provided a satisfactory level of assurance that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is meeting its obligations under AUSVETPLAN. I consider that the additional improvement opportunities identified in the audit report are valid and should be addressed. I encourage the Biosecurity Services Group in the department to take necessary action to effect these improvements within the organisation.



Dr Kevin Dunn
Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity
June 2010



**Deputy Secretary and
Executive Director**
Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Ms Karen Nagle
General Manager
Audit and Evaluation Branch

Dear Ms Nagle

Thank you for your letter of 10 August 2010 providing me with the opportunity to comment on the draft audit report *Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN)* prepared by the Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity (IIGB).

I acknowledge the important contribution of the independent scrutiny provided by the IIGB across the operations of the Biosecurity Services Group (BSG). The AUSVETPLAN, managed by Animal Health Australia, provides a framework for identifying roles, responsibilities and policies to be followed by all agencies in an emergency animal disease response. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry contributes to the AUSVETPLAN as the Commonwealth Government member of Animal Health Australia. Since the IIGB's audit, the department's technical expertise in animal health has been drawn together into the BSG which represents the department's biosecurity functions.

I welcome the IIGB's findings that the department is meeting its obligations in maintaining and updating the AUSVETPLAN. I note the IIGB identified four areas for potential improvement and offer the following comments against each suggestion.

Area for further consideration 1

The department should continue to develop and implement sustainable mechanisms to monitor and measure AUSVETPLAN workload, resourcing and performance, in line with DAFF's priorities.

Biosecurity Services Group remains committed to supporting the development, maintenance and review of AUSVETPLAN, a core program of Animal Health Australia.

Area for further consideration 2

DAFF should continue to strengthen its approach to the coordination of AUSVETPLAN output to ensure that DAFF presents a single whole of government or departmental point of view.

I acknowledge the need for co-ordination and since the audit was conducted coordination mechanisms have been established to ensure that a whole of department view is developed for inputting into the AUSVETPLAN. It is worth noting that at the time of the review, the Biosecurity Services Group had not been established and there were a number of different parts of the department with responsibility for technical expertise in animal health. Since the establishment of

the Biosecurity Services Group coordination practices have been strengthened under the lead of the department's AUSVETPLAN Technical Review Group to enable a whole of department position.

Area for further consideration 3

That DAFF strengthen its project management mechanisms so it may more clearly identify and monitor its own AUSVETPLAN work in progress.

I note the IIGB's concern with Animal Health Australia's members keeping pace with policy and technical advances to ensure the AUSVETPLAN remains current. I agree there is merit in examining whether the work in progress on the plan is being managed efficiently.

Area for further consideration 4

DAFF should strengthen its workforce planning arrangements across BSG to ensure adequate succession planning and the retention of knowledge and skills in relation to AUSVETPLAN.

The issue of workforce planning is a challenge facing many organisations and is a particular challenge for organisations that provide technical expertise across a range of disciplines. The department is piloting a Workforce Planning Framework that will allow it to identify, analyse and address gaps between future workforce needs and the current workforce composition. The inclusion of provision of ongoing expertise to the AUSVETPLAN is worthy of consideration once the outcomes of the pilot are known.

Yours sincerely



Rona Mellor

15 November 2010

**Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan
(AUSVETPLAN)**

Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity

May 2010

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1. Executive Summary

Background

An examination of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's (DAFF) role in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN has been included as part of the 2009/10 Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity (IGB) audit work program.

The objective of this assignment was to consider the effectiveness of DAFF's approach to discharging its obligations in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN and whether the department is meeting these obligations. While consultations were held with Animal Health Australia (AHA), who is responsible for the AUSVETPLAN, the assessment did not include an examination of AHA activities, nor did it include an assessment of the sufficiency of the plans themselves.

AUSVETPLAN

The Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan or AUSVETPLAN is a coordinated national response plan for the management and, where possible, eradication of exotic disease incursions and outbreaks of certain emerging or endemic animal diseases. The use of AUSVETPLAN is mandated in the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA), under which the Australian Government is recognised as a major contributor to funding an emergency response.

Management of the update and maintenance of AUSVETPLAN is a core responsibility for AHA. DAFF's responsibility extends to providing its share of funding to AHA, as well as participating in forums such as the Technical Reference Group (TRG) along with other stakeholders.

As a key shareholder in AHA, and as the lead Commonwealth biosecurity agency DAFF, has an interest in the AUSVETPLAN being robust and up to date because inefficiencies in a national emergency disease response could lead to higher costs to stakeholders – of which the Australian Government carries the major public funding obligations.

There are additional reputational risks to Australia, and DAFF as the delivery agency acting on behalf of the Australian Government, where AUSVETPLAN is seen internationally as an Australian Government policy document on how Australia controls animal disease and is of particular relevance to both animal disease and trade. Access to overseas markets is dependent on Australia's ability to inspire confidence from our trading partners in our ability to contain and treat animal disease.

Key finding: Overall, based on our work we did not discover instances where DAFF was not meeting its obligations in maintaining and updating AUSVETPLAN.

The work undertaken by DAFF is largely project based where staff from the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and Animal Health Programs Branch¹ provide the majority of technical input and coordination effort for DAFF. There was evidence of substantial effort by DAFF over time in performing its role in the AUSVETPLAN process and based on our work, identified no instances where the department was not meeting its obligations.

Instances were noted where DAFF had made important contributions in addressing methodological issues (for example, in relation to foot and mouth disease (FMD)), providing consistency at the whole of government level (for example, in relation to anthrax), and additional insights to address risks at the national level (for example, in relation to rabies).

The responsibility for the detailed work in updating the AUSVETPLAN is with the TRG, a sub-committee of the Animal Health Committee and chaired by the AHA representative on the Animal Health Committee. The TRG is a group of technical experts representing the Australian Government and each state and territory agriculture department, and the CSIRO. It does not include industry technical experts, but particular writing groups can include such experts where their expertise is relevant to the subject being worked on. The TRG operates on an approved work program that distributes activity among the stakeholders, including DAFF, on the basis of responsibility (for example, government or non-government) and expertise and skills linked to disease strategy. The drafting work is undertaken by small groups (typically 3-4 people) taken from both government and industry, working collaboratively to update and refine the AUSVETPLAN.

¹ DAFF and the Australian Government is represented by the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and Animal Health Programs Branch, which provides technical and policy input to AUSVETPLAN through the Technical Reference Group, Animal health Committee and directly to the AHA.

The processes for updating AUSVETPLAN are generally complex, resource intensive and time consuming and require high level technical and coordination skills across both government and industry. The nature of the updating and refining process is a continuous process that occurs over many years as the TRG aims to address risk using the most up to date science and practices. Some of these manuals may take years to complete an update cycle.

As we are not assessing AHA, while we can appreciate the significant effort that DAFF commits in supporting these activities, and the AHA itself, we are not able to comment on the quality of this work, or on how it addresses DAFF's own priorities.

While, based on our work, no areas were identified where DAFF was not meeting its obligations in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN, we expected to find a more defined framework in place to coordinate effort and to manage performance and quality. Aside from a reliance on people to do the right thing, we were unable to identify how DAFF works to present a single point of view on issues, or how it strategically manages its own risks in relation to performance, timeliness and quality.

So, while no instances were identified where DAFF was not fulfilling its obligations the lack of a more structured and defined framework could potentially impact on the sustainability of current processes to support the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN.

While we recognise that DAFF can organise itself anyway it wishes provided its obligations in respect of AUSVETPLAN are addressed, we have provided a number of suggested areas for further consideration that may assist the department in harvesting improvement opportunities.

Overall, a more defined and structured approach to delivering AUSVETPLAN services would improve the sustainability as well as evidencing DAFF's contribution to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN, allowing DAFF to demonstrate better the efficiency and effectiveness of its contribution. This will require further refinements to strengthen:

- monitoring and resourcing in line with DAFF priorities (area for further consideration 1);
- horizontal business alignment (area for further consideration 2);
- project management and reporting (area for further consideration 3); and
- work force and succession planning (area for further consideration 4).

2. Introduction

Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN)

AUSVETPLAN is a strategic set of response plans which provide for a common nationally agreed response to specific emergency animal disease events. As part of the co-operative funding agreement set out in the EADRA the use of the AUSVETPLAN is mandated. The EADRA brings together the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and livestock industry groups and provides an innovative means to combating emergency animal diseases, including prescribing pre-agreed cost-sharing arrangements. Under the EADRA an emergency animal disease response plan must (unless a variation is permitted) conform to the relevant AUSVETPLAN management manuals and any applicable AUSVETPLAN disease strategy. Emergency animal diseases are diseases that are:

- exotic to Australia or
- a variant of an endemic disease or
- a serious infectious disease of unknown or uncertain cause or
- a severe outbreak of a known endemic disease, and that is considered to be of national significance with serious social or trade implications.

The development and maintenance of the AUSVETPLAN is the responsibility of AHA, a joint venture corporation between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and industry. AHA and the AUSVETPLAN process are designed to bring together the expertise across government and industry within a federated model, recognising that not one area of government or industry has sole responsibility for managing emergency animal disease outbreaks. The AUSVETPLAN is recognised internationally as being at the forefront of animal disease control and risk mitigation, and enhances the competitiveness of Australian agricultural exports.

There is a stakeholder (in particular industry) expectation that AUSVETPLAN is current and that the current version is available. AHA has overarching responsibility for the development of the AUSVETPLAN documents and their revision to ensure currency. AHA also promotes public awareness of AUSVETPLAN.

Risks to DAFF and Australia if AUSVETPLAN is not up to date

If key components of AUSVETPLAN, such as response plans and policy and technical documentation, are not up to date it could result in:

- a lack of coordinated approach to an animal disease outbreak or incursion, leading to longer and/or more expensive responses; and
- damage to the reputation and stakeholder interests, in particular DAFF, and Australian commodities more broadly.

In the area of animal health the Commonwealth's main responsibility is to maintain biosecurity through quarantine and other border measures. The power to manage an animal health outbreak is largely vested in the states and territories. In a co-operative federated model the nation will inevitably look to the Commonwealth to show leadership in areas of national significance, despite the division of power in the Constitution. In this way DAFF has a keen interest in maintaining its reputation as the peak biosecurity agency, and the Commonwealth's agent in managing biosecurity. It should also be noted that AHA is a three way partnership between the Commonwealth, the states and territories and industry, with the Commonwealth the largest stakeholder/financial contributor.

Under the EADRA, the Australian Government is recognised as a major contributor to funding an emergency response. As a major contributor, DAFF has a keen interest that the AUSVETPLAN process is robust and effective. As the lead Commonwealth agency, DAFF has an interest in protecting the nation's reputation as a leading practice biosecurity manager. The potential risk consequence is that inefficiencies in a national emergency disease response could lead to higher costs to stakeholders – of whom the Australian Government carries the major public funding obligations. It could also lead to damage to the reputation of Australia's biosecurity risk management approach and the biosecurity health status of Australian commodities.

It is important to note that while the primary purpose of AUSVETPLAN is for the direction and control of disease emergency responses in Australia, it is also used internationally as a reference document (for example, as an Australian Government policy document) on how Australia controls disease, and has particular relevance to both disease management and trade. This can create tensions in the maintenance and development of AUSVETPLAN, and challenges for DAFF in ensuring that the right balance is achieved between the competing interests of multiple stakeholders in addressing risk at the national level. Therefore there are risks to Australia's and DAFF's reputation if AUSVETPLAN is out of date and this may flow on to have impacts on the reputation, and therefore trade, of Australian commodities.

This assignment provides an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of DAFF's systems and processes to meet its obligations in terms of maintaining and updating AUSVETPLAN.

3. Objectives and Scope

The Interim IGB was appointed on 1 July 2009 to conduct independent systems audits and reviews of Australia's biosecurity functions for which the proposed National Biosecurity Authority is responsible. In advance of the establishment of the National Biosecurity Authority, the biosecurity functions undertaken by AQIS, Biosecurity Australia and the Product Integrity and Animal and Plant Health Division have been integrated to form the Biosecurity Services Group (BSG) within DAFF. The Interim IGB is independent of the BSG, has broad powers of audit and investigation, and reports to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

An examination of DAFF's role in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN has been included as part of the 2009/10 Interim IGB work program.

Objective

To examine the effectiveness of DAFF's approach to fulfil its obligations in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN and whether the department is meeting these obligations.

Scope:

The scope of this assignment included an examination of:

- Roles and responsibilities within DAFF, in relation to the maintenance and updating of AUSVETPLAN.
- Processes to develop and maintain policy and technical documentation required under AUSVETPLAN. This includes processes to:
 - keep the content of the documents current;
 - ensure the reliability and relevance of the evidence base that underpins DAFF's documentation;
 - liaison and coordination arrangements with AHA in relation to maintenance of AUSVETPLAN and associated DAFF documentation;
 - liaison and coordination with other relevant stakeholders in relation to DAFF's role in the maintenance of AUSVETPLAN and associated DAFF documentation.
- DAFF's compliance with defined roles and responsibilities in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN.

Out of Scope:

This assignment did not examine:

- The overall development and maintenance of AUSVETPLAN by AHA. This assignment focused on DAFF's processes to perform its obligations to maintain and update AUSVETPLAN.
- The content and accuracy of DAFF input into AUSVETPLAN and associated documents, such as policy, guidelines or technical strategies. Instead, this assignment focused on the department's processes to develop and maintain such documentation.
- DAFF's roles and responsibilities under AUSVETPLAN in the event of an animal disease emergency response. This assignment was limited to the examination of the department's approach to maintain and update AUSVETPLAN and not the use of the plan in an emergency response.
- IT infrastructure and software that support the development and maintenance of the department's documents as part of AUSVETPLAN.

In 2007 the Auditor-General investigated Australia's preparedness for human influenza and made recommendations that impacted the management of AUSVETPLAN. Following that in 2008 the department conducted a review into its obligations for emergency animal disease outbreaks. These were considered as part of this project.

As part of our fieldwork a sample of documents prepared by and actions undertaken by DAFF in supporting the maintenance and updating of the individual management plans relating to rabies, anthrax and milk handling during a FMD outbreak were examined.

4. Findings and Recommendations

4.1 Processes to Update AUSVETPLAN

The processes for updating AUSVETPLAN are technically complex, resource intensive and time consuming. The work requires high level technical input and coordination across AHA, government and industry. It is important to note that the ownership of AUSVETPLAN and the responsibility for ensuring its adequacy and relevance rests with AHA. DAFF's responsibility arises out of its membership of AHA, along with the states, territories, and industry.

AUSVETPLAN maintenance and update processes tend to concentrate around the Animal Health Committee, its subordinate group the TRG, and associated working groups. DAFF input within the TRG can take the form of:

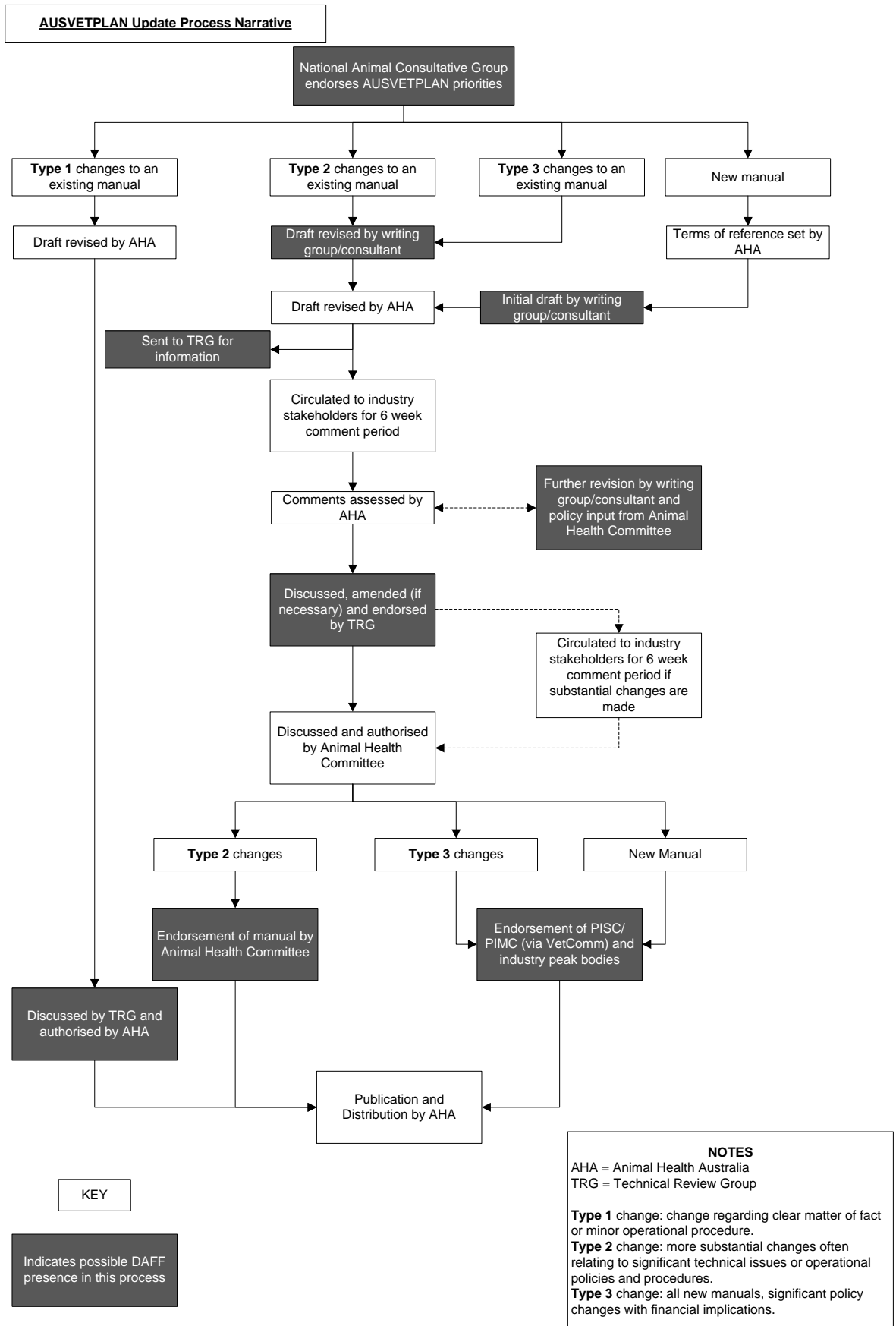
- leading TRG projects
- being part of a project working group
- requests to provide quality assurance feedback, or
- as part of its broader direct and indirect portfolio responsibilities.

The TRG operates on an approved work program and distributes drafting activity among the stakeholders on the basis of responsibility (for example, government or non-government), expertise and skills in the area of interest. The drafting work is undertaken by small groups (typically 3-4 people) taken from both government and industry, working collaboratively to update and refine the AUSVETPLAN. The work is largely project based where staff are requested to provide input to AUSVETPLAN according to their subject matter expertise.

The nature of the updating and refining process is a continuous one, conducted over many years as the TRG aims to address risk using the most up to date science and practices. We note that some of these manuals may take years to complete an update cycle, which makes it difficult to establish with sufficient precision the department's actual engagement with the process or specific contribution to product delivery.

The following diagram, created by the ANAO, is useful for understanding the complex processes and relationships in the AUSVETPLAN update system.

Figure 1 AUSVETPLAN Update Process Narrative



4.2 The Department's Obligations

The purpose of the AUSVETPLAN is to provide nationally agreed policy, information and guidelines for the consistent management of emergency animal diseases responses. While AHA is specifically accountable for the management of AUSVETPLAN, DAFF as a key stakeholder, has broad responsibilities to contribute to scientific, technical and operational input, and to contribute to the assessment of emerging risks.

As stated in the AUSVETPLAN summary document² the role of the Australian Government, represented through DAFF, is as follows:

- The Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer manages the development and maintenance of the response plans within DAFF such as the Critical Incident Response Plan in collaboration with the Biosecurity Emergency Management Unit
- DAFF is also responsible for official reporting to international agencies, such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and advising trading partners on Australia's animal health status.

DAFF takes on the responsibility of participating in an expert writing group where it has the relevant expertise in the area of interest. DAFF may also provide comment to expert writing groups when it is not participating directly.

Within DAFF, the Animal Health Programs Branch supports the Chief Veterinary Officer in his role of providing input into the development and maintenance of the response plans for Australian Government agencies as a whole. The Animal Health Programs Branch provides the majority of technical input and liaises with colleagues from the various jurisdictions and other departmental areas to ensure a nationally agreed position. Other staff in DAFF become involved where issues such as trade are impacted by the statements in AUSVETPLAN. Through the Chief Veterinary Officer and the Animal Health Programs Branch of DAFF, technical and policy input to AUSVETPLAN is provided to the TRG, Animal Health Committee and directly to AHA.

DAFF provides funding to AHA based on a pre-agreed formula applicable to all members. Funding is used in part for the development and maintenance of AUSVETPLAN. In meeting its obligations as a participant in the TRG process, DAFF also provides in-kind technical input for drafting changes where it has the appropriate expertise and available resources.

DAFF's areas of involvement are highlighted in figure 1 on the previous page

4.3 The Department's Performance

Key finding: Overall, based on our work we did not discover instances where DAFF was not meeting its obligations in maintaining and updating AUSVETPLAN.

For the case studies included in our assignment we did not find any evidence that the department was not meeting its obligations in respect of its responsibilities in maintaining and updating AUSVETPLAN. There was evidence that substantial effort by the department over time in performing its role in the AUSVETPLAN process.

The governance and accountability framework around maintaining and updating AUSVETPLAN arises out of the TRG, a body external to the department. From the samples of work sighted (rabies, anthrax and FMD), there appeared to be satisfactory progress and involvement by the department at the TRG. The TRG minutes did not note dissatisfaction with the contribution of DAFF. We note comments from AHA representatives that whenever DAFF is asked to contribute, their input is keenly anticipated for its expert quality.

In these examples, we noted instances where DAFF had made important contributions in addressing methodological issues (FMD), providing consistency at the whole of government level (anthrax), and additional information to address key risks at the national level (rabies).

² Animal Health Australia (2008). Summary Document (Version 3.1). Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN), Edition 3, Primary Industries Ministerial Council, Canberra, ACT. Accessed 24 March 2010 at [http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/fms/Animal%20Health%20Australia/AUSVETPLAN/SUMM3_1-19FINAL\(12Dec08\).pdf](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/fms/Animal%20Health%20Australia/AUSVETPLAN/SUMM3_1-19FINAL(12Dec08).pdf)

The department's response appears to match its obligations and we were not able to find any instances where the department was not meeting these obligations. That said however, it is not easy to assess whether DAFF may be picking up more than its own share of the partnership with industry, states and AHA or if the work undertaken addresses DAFF's own priorities. While we can appreciate the significant amount of effort that DAFF commits in supporting these activities, our limited scope (where the performance of AHA has not been assessed) means that we are not able to comment on the 'quality' of this work, or on how it addresses DAFF's own priorities. This is because it is difficult to separate clearly DAFF's own contribution from those of the other stakeholders. This has implications in an environment where government agencies are being held more accountable for their funding and are being asked to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness, in the delivery of their programs.

Area for further consideration 1

The department should continue to develop and implement sustainable mechanisms to monitor and measure AUSVETPLAN workload, resourcing and performance, in line with DAFF's priorities.

4.4 AUSVETPLAN Resourcing

AHA is a not-for-profit organisation established by the Australian and state/territory governments and national livestock industry organisations. AHA maintains its own budget for managing AUSVETPLAN including costs of scientific editing, contract writers, meetings of the TRG and publication costs.

DAFF makes various resourcing contributions in meeting its obligations under AUSVETPLAN:

- DAFF provides funding to AHA based on a pre-agreed formula applicable to all AHA members
- As part of the TRG processes DAFF provides technical and drafting input. This equates to approximately two full time equivalent staff per annum to participate in expert writing groups. This contribution is difficult to estimate given the changeable level of contribution dependent on the needs of the TRG from time to time.

DAFF provides additional support over and above its mandated responsibilities to AHA in engaging a consultant to assist in AUSVETPLAN projects.

AHA has indicated concerns about the potential risks resulting from DAFF reducing this additional support. We see that the additional support, regardless of its source, is valued by AHA and other AUSVETPLAN stakeholders in assisting to efficiently maintain and update AUSVETPLAN. It is important to note that DAFF is not obliged, nor responsible for providing this funding.

While we were not required to concentrate on AUSVETPLAN resourcing issues, this theme was frequently raised as we consulted with Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and AHA. We understand that DAFF is not responsible for the management of AUSVETPLAN, for which AHA is accountable and separately funded by government and industry. We therefore have no comment on AHA resourcing requirements, but have noted its concerns if DAFF decides to reduce the current level of additional financial support. We also note that the ANAO has recommended that both DAFF and AHA review the resources and processes applied to the maintenance of AUSVETPLAN³.

Key finding: DAFF is meeting its resourcing responsibilities under AUSVETPLAN. However DAFF is also providing additional resources, outside its mandated responsibilities, to AHA for AUSVETPLAN maintenance and development. This additional funding, regardless of its source, is seen as valuable in maintaining AUSVETPLAN; however the department is under no obligation to continue providing this support.

4.5 Additional improvement opportunities

Clarity over roles, responsibilities, stakeholder management and reporting

The nature of DAFF's contribution to the update and maintenance of the AUSVETPLAN requires effective engagement with a diverse range of Australian Government stakeholders. Given the significant business transformation within DAFF, additional mechanisms will be required to ensure a more coordinated and pre-agreed response containing a single whole of government and/or departmental point of view.

³ ANAO Audit Report No. 6 2007-08 Australia's Preparedness for a Human Influenza Pandemic (c/f Recommendation No. 1).

The department employs many staff who could be considered to be expert in their field. If there is not adequate consultation across DAFF functions, there is a risk that the full intellectual capacity of the agency is not being brought to bear on the management of an important issue, or where there is some internal disagreement at external forums.

It is possible that the Commonwealth will be held responsible for failures of policy and procedure, because leadership is sought from DAFF after a nationwide animal health emergency. In this way DAFF would not be seeking to discharge its legislated responsibility, but to protect its reputation based on a perceived leading role.

We note that the DAFF AUSVETPLAN Discussion Paper found a level of uncertainty about the custody, development, maintenance and overall management of AUSVETPLAN. The paper found role definition to be 'ambiguous' and concluded that this leads to inefficiencies in decision making, consultation and the update of documents. It was recommended that the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, in particular that of the Animal Health Committee and industry groups need to be more clearly articulated for both policy and process matters. DAFF as a key member of AHA, has an interest in ensuring all parties have clearly defined sense of role and responsibility.

In assessing DAFF's performance in relation to the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN, we expected to find a more defined framework in place to coordinate effort and to manage performance and quality. Aside from the reliance on key people to do the right thing, there is no defined or structured framework to facilitate DAFF presenting a single point of view on the issues, or how it strategically manages risks relating to performance, timeliness and quality.

We have noted that DAFF has produced a discussion paper pursuant to an internal review of AUSVETPLAN, that has highlighted a number of improvement opportunities in the areas of governance, maintenance and review, structure and content, timeliness, and resourcing. Although, this assignment touches on issues broader than those that are within the scope of this project, the conclusions are consistent with our observations about the need for a more defined and structured approach.

Therefore, while we did not identify any instances of DAFF not meeting its obligations, the lack of a more defined framework could potentially impact on the sustainability of current processes to support the maintenance and update of AUSVETPLAN.

We suggest that a more strategic approach to delivering AUSVETPLAN services will allow DAFF to demonstrate productivity and value for money in achieving recognition for its contribution as well as reduce reliance on the knowledge and engagement of key individuals. This will require:

- improved project management, quality management and reporting;
- more clarity over roles, responsibilities, stakeholder management and planning;
- improvements to work force planning; and
- resolution of resourcing in line with DAFF priorities.

Area for further consideration 2

DAFF should continue to strengthen its approach to the coordination of AUSVETPLAN output to ensure that DAFF presents a single whole of government or departmental point of view.

Project management and reporting

While our work did not identify any instances of DAFF not meeting its responsibilities on maintaining and updating AUSVETPLAN, due to limitations in definitions of requirements, tasks and timing, we were not able to see with sufficient precision whether these activities were being performed in a timely and efficient manner. This presents risks and lost opportunities where DAFF is unable to demonstrate that it is delivering efficient and effective services, particularly in an environment where these are regularly tested. It should be noted that the work orders arising out of the TRG do not have strongly defined timeframes for completion, and these timeframes are not rigidly enforced.

We note that the discussion paper referred to above indicated that there were significant concerns over the timeliness of producing new manuals. There was also concern over a general inability to keep pace with policy and technical advances, resulting in unacceptable delays in publishing new updates. While much of this may lie outside DAFF's accountability and control, there is merit in examining whether the work in progress is efficient, effective and valuable to the department. This would assist DAFF in evidencing the timeliness and completeness of its contributions to AHA and the stakeholders.

Without a more systematic approach there is a risk that DAFF's priorities may not align with the priorities at the TRG, and DAFF may not be aware of this gap which limits its ability to influence AHA performance.

Area for further consideration 3

That DAFF strengthen its project management mechanisms so it may more clearly identify and monitor its own AUSVETPLAN work in progress.

Workforce planning

We observed that AUSVETPLAN maintenance and update activities are managed by highly qualified and experienced staff at senior levels, as appropriate to emergency planning.

These activities are mostly generated through DAFF's role on the TRG, and it is difficult to separate clearly work in progress commissioned from this group from the broader engagement, coordination and consultation roles that DAFF staff have at these levels. The work is of an on-going and highly technical nature that requires a deep understanding of local and international practices in a dynamic and global environment. The DAFF AUSVETPLAN Discussion Paper noted the risk that the need to update AUSVETPLAN manuals is moving at a greater pace than the resources available.

The DAFF AUSVETPLAN Discussion Paper also recognised the importance of strong leadership in an environment where the plans are to provide a focused reference tool, rather than as a resource to meet a multitude of needs. Further, without such leadership there is a risk that deadlines are also not met and that delays can result in AUSVETPLAN documents not accurately reflecting current policy and technical requirements. The Australian National Audit Office has noted that it can take up to ten years for the AUSVETPLAN update cycle to be completed.

We noted that at present, projects are managed within the Animal Health Programs Branch that supports the Chief Veterinary Officer in his role of providing input to AUSVETPLAN on behalf of DAFF and the Australian Government. There is currently a high dependency on key staff to provide the maintenance and update services. We also note that a key staff member has recently retired, and the work redistributed, which reinforces the need to ensure that sufficient workforce planning exists to provide sustainability of operations and to mitigate risk.

Highly qualified and experienced staff are not likely to be easily replaced, and while it is difficult to not over rely on existing staff, this needs to be balanced by additional strategies to retain knowledge and through succession planning. This could also be managed by spreading some of the work, more broadly across other BSG Animal functions. This would be part of a broader response to meeting AUSVETPLAN resourcing requirements, than that achieved by the current reliance on a single group to perform this function. Since our fieldwork we note that the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer has established key points of contact in the three key BSG Animal sections to further internal consultation and deliberation.

Area for further consideration 4

DAFF should strengthen its workforce planning arrangements across BSG to ensure adequate succession planning and the retention of knowledge and skills in relation to AUSVETPLAN.