



Buffalo producers urged to prepare records now for new identification register



DOING THEIR BIT FOR SCIENCE - This robust group of pure bred buffalo are among those being tested at Beatrice Hill Farm near Darwin as part of the current RIRDC AI research project. **SEE PAGE 3 FOR A PROGRAM UPDATE**

ABIC reps head for the 'Apple Isle'

Tasmania's buffalo industry will be in the spotlight later this month when ABIC state and territory representatives arrive from around the nation for the council's AGM and conference. This year's program will be held on the weekend of 26-27 February with the Saturday dedicated to the election of new office bearers and discussions on a range of industry issues, and the Sunday spent on a field trip to observe local buffalo sector activities, included those at property of the island's pioneering buffalo farmers, Phillip and Denise Oates at Oyster Cove, south of the capital. We'll report on the outcomes from the AGM in the next edition of *Buffalo News*.

All buffalo breeders around Australia should now be preparing their pedigree records in readiness for a quick response once the industry's new buffalo register is introduced.

That's the advice of buffalo researcher and register coordinator Barry Lemcke who says such preparation well ahead of time will enable the register to be set up efficiently and provide a valuable resource for producers.

"The best means of achieving this is through individual animal IDs which will probably be compulsory in most states in the near future," Barry advises.

"This can be done by plastic ear tag or the electronic tag which will be good for larger properties where the costs can be spread over a larger number of animals.

"At Beatrice Hill Farm we have been trialling the electronic tagging and it certainly reduces processing time in the yards.

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▲ Some of the 100 Marrakai Station buffalo in the AustAsia feedlot



▲ Discussing progress: Darmawan Prasada (L) and Petrus Budihargo (R) of AustAsia PT Santosa Agrindo with Neil Ross of NTBIC



▲ Swim Creek Station's Norman Fisher shows the results of a few days 'tailing out' on farm bred buffalo. The Indonesian feedlotters showed keen interest in NTBIC photos of these animals.

First post-protocol buff doing well

NTBIC's Industry Development and Executive Officer Neil Ross recently visited the AustAsia / PT Santosa Agrindo operated feedlot at Jabung near Lampung in Indonesia and inspected the buffalo that made up the first shipment from Australia under the new import protocol.

He reports that the buffalo have settled in nicely and look to be performing very well on the current ration.

"During discussions with the feedlot management it was suggested that the ration could be modified to an even cheaper mix containing more roughage," Neil said.

"The possibility of more buffalo shipments is very good as the 'finished' cattle market is fully supplied at present, creating strong competition, whereas 'finished' buffalo are easily sold.

"The cheaper purchase price and lower daily feed costs of buffalo are sure to attract interest from other feedlot operators.

Neil said the Indonesian importers were aware that because of their past exposure to electric fences, water troughs, and regular contact with man and machinery, farmed buffalo were more likely to settle into

a feedlot situation and start gaining weight sooner than recently captured free range animals.

"What the importers, exporters and some DPIFM staff need to understand is that if the people who have invested in infrastructure to produce farmed buffalo cannot get a reasonable price for their young mixed sex animals, the next abattoir to open in the Northern Territory will be processing the current domesticated breeding herds and the opportunity to "average out" cattle shipments on a year round basis will be lost forever."

Buffalo register

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"No mistakes occur because of misread tags and the reader can be downloaded onto computer packages without any hassles.

"Capital costs should come down with time, as with all things electronic. The loss rate of the electronic tags appears less than with conventional number tags, probably because of their compactness. This means they are less likely to be pulled out by other animals or caught on barbed wire and other things.

Barry says details of how to enter and the costs of registration will be available within two months.

"It will be the most efficient means of keeping track of all buffalo in Australia and having a reliable record of their breeding in the long term. And it will never be any easier to do than now while the industry is still small."

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Beatrice Hill buffalo a bit slow on the AI uptake

The ultrasound testing of the 17 head of buffalo artificially inseminated at the Territory's Beatrice Hill Farm in November has not been encouraging.

The testing is part of the ongoing RIRDC-funded AI buffalo research project.

Only three were confirmed pregnant, including two cows from six and only one heifer from eleven.

"We are using DNA to try and determine the timing of the insemination as we have used different sires on the am

and pm inseminations," Researcher Barry Lemcke says.

"This is now the fifth attempt and 21 calves from 87 is the end result so far, which is disappointing.

"We need to be able to double this success rate before we are happy with the results.

The study will continue with further research and consultation planned with overseas experts over the next two months.



Vet Gehan Jayawardhana inseminating a buff at Beatrice Hill

NTBIC 'in it for the long haul'

The NT Buffalo Industry Council has been forced to forgo market development plans and go into maintenance mode because of a significant shortfall in requested government funding for this financial year.

A major effect is that NTBIC has closed its Winnellie shopfront office in Darwin in a bid to cut administrative costs. Executive Officer Neil Ross now works from his car.

NTBIC has traditionally operated on a funding split of 40% covered by its 20 members and 60% covered by the Northern Territory Government. The council applied for \$138,000 in government funding for this financial year, including an allocation for a concerted TenderBuff marketing campaign. However, only \$68,000 was received.

NTBIC President Michael Swart says he fears for the Territory's future status as a buffalo exporter. He says the funding is considerably less than in previous years and does not auger well for the future. He is concerned about the potential impact on the council's abilities to further develop the potentially lucrative Indonesian market.

"We are also worried about the work done to date in developing markets into three other Asian countries which are interested in importing our product," he said.

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A change of testing scene

Buffalo at the other end of Australia will soon be tested as part of the RIRDC program. Twenty heifers are due to be inseminated in a cooperative arrangement with Roger Haldane at Shaw River Dairy in Victoria at the beginning of March. "We will be using a local experienced AI technician to carry out the work," Barry says.

BUFFALO News

Contributions on any matter of interest to Australia's buffalo industry are most welcome and can be sent to, or discussed with:

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STATE *by* STATE

Buffalo news from around the nation

VICTORIA

VicBIC President Athel Smith reports that the state's producers are still having problems finding abattoirs to kill their buffalo.

"The Minister for Agriculture Mr Bill Cameron has responded to our letter over this matter. He considers us a valuable Industry to Victoria," Athel says. "Buffalo can be killed anywhere that cattle can be killed. But Primesafe, the governing body responsible for abattoirs, is not prepared to meet with us and has advised VicBIC to contact each abattoir individually.

"Primesafe claims the decision to kill buffalo is commercially based, and nothing to do with paper and subsequent inspection of the facilities which is required, whether or not the abattoir kills cattle.

VicBIC has sent another letter to the Minister, in-

quiring about subsidies which may assist with transport or higher processing charges.

QUEENSLAND

The buffalo at Mitch Humphries' Milla Milla dairy are continuing to do their owner and the Australian cheese industry proud.

Boutique cheeses produced from the herd have recently taken out more excellence awards, this time at the Fromage du Monde 2005 Cheese Awards in Sydney. Gold medals went to the Australian Dairy Buffalo Company for its fresh curd textured Ambrose Buffalo Feta, and to Mungalli Creek Dairy for its fresh curd Herb and Paprika Quark.

The prestigious cheese awards, coupled with premium wine tasting event was staged on behalf of Jones the Grocer and Sydney City Organics.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Nine feral buffalo, caught at the Territory's Tortilla Flats area south of Darwin in 2004, have become part of a goodwill mission to help farmers in Indonesia's Aceh province rebuild in the

wake of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. The wild buff were taken to the Gold Coast property of Graham Hefferman who trained them to pull ploughs and loaded carts before their recent shipment to Indonesia. Aceh farmers lost many thousands of working buffalo in the tsunami.

NTBIC 'in for the long haul'

"The loser here is the Territory as a whole because investment in the NTBIC yields good returns to the community. When NTBIC had the Brunei job humming it meant a full additional boat per year leaving Darwin with livestock. The benefits were widespread, including among cattle producers who shared these boats.

"We are in this for the long haul. The Indonesian protocol took a long time to develop and these processes need to happen before we can expect a return. It would not be unreasonable to be exporting 10,000 head of buffalo per annum within a short time, but this won't happen without resources and commitment.

"Government funding is critical for us as we try to develop our live export industry and continue to support contract buffalo musterers, pet meat suppliers and breeders throughout the Top End and Katherine region. We've been struggling to make ends meet on the amount we received this year, but at the moment, we just have to sit tight and maintain our functions by whatever means we can. We are not about to roll over and give up on this industry."

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