



# Buffalo News

VOLUME 9 No 2 - FEB 2010

Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council (ABIC)

## 2010 EXECUTIVE

ABIC state and territory representatives elected a new executive at their February AGM. Northern Territory buffalo producer and former vice-president Michael Swart accepted the president's role. Queensland buffalo dairy farmer Mitch Humphries was voted in as vice-president and Jana Kahabka, who also operates a Queensland buffalo venture, retained the role of secretary/treasurer.

## Buffalo industry council revamp broadens membership scope

The Australian Buffalo Industry Council (ABIC) has voted to change the body's name and broaden the scope of its membership. The change will open the way for stakeholders from New Zealand and other Asia Pacific countries to join up and participate.

ABIC state representatives, attending their annual general meeting in Darwin this month, voted to adopt the proposal that the body now become officially named the Australasian Buffalo Industry Association.

West Australian producer and state representative Andrew Stewart proposed the changes to reflect a growing offshore regional interest in the buffalo industry, particularly in New Zealand where a number of stakeholders have imported Australian buffalo to develop their own herds.

Members also spent considerable time discussing a new draft constitution to guide the industry into its future development phase. The finer details will be ironed out over coming months.

The Darwin program included a field trip to Beatrice Hill Farm to let interstate visitors check out the latest developments in the NT's buffalo research work.

It also included a farewell dinner for Dr Peter McInnes, who will finish in his RIRDC buffalo research management role in June this year after 15 years in the job. Outgoing ABIC President Marg Thompson presented Peter with a certificate of thanks and members unanimously applauded him for his unstinting support of buffalo R&D projects in his time with RIRDC. Former horticultural extension officer and one-time head of the government's Katherine district horticulture unit, Julie Bird, will take over Peter's role from July.



ABOVE & RIGHT: ABIC visitors go offroad to check out buffalo at Beatrice Hill Farm. BELOW: Some of the farm's robust research herd



ABIC Website - [www.buffaloaustralia.org](http://www.buffaloaustralia.org)

# Eric Cox honored for 35 years service to the buffalo industry

## TRADING POST ADVERTISING

ABIC members and industry stakeholders are encouraged to make good use of the council's online 'Trading Post' facility for advertising buffalo, buffalo products or other related goods and services.

Trading Post is accessed through the industry website - [www.buffaloaustralia.org](http://www.buffaloaustralia.org)

The site continues to generate a significant number of inquiries from throughout Australia and other parts of the world. It will undergo further upgrading in 2010.

### Advertising Rates

- **ABIC Members**  
\$30 for 3 mths or  
\$50 for 12 mths
- **Non-ABIC Members**  
\$50 for 3 mths

Eric Cox came to the NT's Beatrice Hill Research Farm to work with buffalo in 1974 and, apart from a three-year posting to the VRD's Kidman Springs to help with a cattle research program, he has been there ever since.

Katherine-born Eric, senior technical officer and second-in-charge at the farm, received an Order of Australia Medal in January for this enduring commitment to Top End livestock research, his hands-on extension role with rural schools and his voluntary work with Sydney University's Middle Point/Fogg Dam research team. Eric worked in the Beatrice Hill Buffalo/Brahman Comparison Unit with Brian Ford from 1974 till 1980 when he moved to Kidman Springs to help on a cattle breeding project. When he came back in 1983, he



*Eric talks to ABIC reps at Beatrice Hill*

worked on a single sire buffalo mating groups program. "We put one bull each with groups of 35 cows so we could work out which bulls were performing," Eric says. "We also ran a program where we mothered up buffalo cows with newborn calves to check performance. We'd pull the calves in the back of the vehicle and tattoo an ear, weigh them and record their date of birth."

Eric has been heavily involved in Beatrice Hill's cross-breeding of imported Riverine bulls with swamp cows, started in 1994. "We were very happy to find that the resulting first cross Riverine calves recorded a roughly 40% better growth rate," he says.

He was also involved in the start of the TenderBuff program and, more recently, in the AI project that's introduced imported Italian Riverine bloodlines to produce Australian milking buffalo.

Eric is planning to retire with wife Jan to South Australia in another 12-18 months. He will leave huge boots to fill out at the farm.

## Buffalo News

*We welcome contributions on any issue or activity relating to Australia's buffalo industry.*

*Stories and/or photos can be sent to, or discussed with:*

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*Buffalo News is funded by*



## Constant work needed to keep buff products on the 'consumer radar'

ABIC Queensland state representative and buffalo dairy farmer Mitch Humphries has urged his Australian counterparts to seek out whatever media and other public exposure they can get in their efforts to carve out a niche market for buffalo products.

"We need to continually apply our efforts in making buffalo products register on the consumer radar," Mitch said in his 2009 annual report. "The other major trick is to try and 'nut out' successful and efficient supply chains, which often involve us farmers trying to get interested people further down the supply chain, who must also see a buck in it for their efforts. This can often cause us grief, especially as product volumes are initially often small and need time to grow while people's patience and bank balances are put to the test."

Mitch added that, as is the case with other Australian livestock industries, the buffalo sector could face challenges in dealing with environmental issues - like managing riparian zones. "These can be more of an issue in light of the fact that our domesticated dairy buffalo are still regarded as 'wildlife' by our own current state governing body, the Queensland Environment Protection Authority.

"But all that said, there can still be no doubt that the Australian buffalo industry has made very solid steps over recent years."

He noted that Queenslanders had played a significant part in getting the Australia-wide buffalo industry to where it is today.



# RIRDC BUFFALO RESEARCH: 2009 in review

*A wrap-up of Buffalo R&D Advisory Committee activities in 2009*

## Forum and Review

On 3-4 March, advisory committee chairman Doug Robertson and member Mike Swart attended a Canberra RIRDC New and Emerging Industries Forum convened to discuss and review the R, D & E process as currently overseen by the corporation.

After the forum, L.E.K Consulting, overseen by an industry, government and RIRDC steering committee, reviewed the objectives, strategies and operations of the New Rural Industries portfolio. The review was completed in 2009 and a summary of its discussions and recommendations is available through the chairman.

## September RIRDC forum

On 15 September, the chairman attended the 2009 RIRDC-sponsored forum in Canberra. This annual event brings together RIRDC's key research partners, R&D advisory committee chairs, industry representatives and the RIRDC board to discuss R, D and E issues, problems and priorities. A summary of this meeting is also available from the chairman.

The future of these forums must be in some doubt with the Federal Government's cuts to RIRDC funding. Participants will find attending future such forums difficult if their costs cannot be covered.

## New research proposals

The Buffalo R&D Advisory Committee held two teleconferences during the year. One on 12 May gave final approval

for VicBIC's dairy buffalo upgrading project, which is now underway.

On 29 October, another teleconference considered four new preliminary research proposals, three from Victorian tertiary institutions and one from the NT Government's Primary Industry department. A Melbourne University proposal, which aims to characterize the properties of buffalo milk, cheese and yoghurt, was considered suitable for further evaluation and a full proposal has been requested from researcher, Dr Sally Gras.

The other three proposals were deemed to be premature at this stage or beyond RIRDC's present funding resources.

## Peter's last meeting

Peter McInnes attended his last meeting as the buffalo research manager in February.

He has been involved with the buffalo industry since it came under the management of RIRDC in the mid 1990s (*See Story below*).

The committee welcomes Julie Bird to this small but select portfolio. Fortunately, Julie is no stranger to the north and I am sure her increasing understanding of this industry will be of benefit to all of us.

Julie has a hard act to follow in replacing Peter and with the current negative view towards R&D from those that make the big decisions, we have a challenging task in front of us. Let us make the most of it!

*Doug Robertson*

## Accolades for RIRDC's Dr Peter McInnes

Long-term champion of Australia's buffalo industry, Dr Peter McInnes, will retire in June after nearly 20 years in his role as external research manager with RIRDC. Peter joined RIRDC in 1991 and took over management of New Animal Products in 1995. He became involved with the buffalo industry at that time as RIRDC took over administering the buffalo R&D program and \$100,000 in levy funds from the

Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation (AMLC). As part of his job, Peter met with members of VicBIC in 1995, attended an early meeting of Buffalo Producers NSW (BPNSW) in Cowra in 1996, and also met with NTBIC, to outline the processes involved in applying for research and development funds.

Doug Robertson, who has worked closely with him from day one, says Peter was instrumental in bringing about the formation of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council. "He impressed upon the states and territories that a united national body would carry more weight when applying for funding assistance," Doug says. "A meeting was held in Darwin in November 1999 with representatives from Victoria, NSW, South Australia and the NT and, for several days, Peter

guided them through the process of creating ABIC and drafting an inaugural constitution. Peter has attended every ABIC annual meeting since, going four times to Darwin and twice to Melbourne and once each to Port Lincoln, Hobart, Perth, Maleny and Malanda. With input from ABIC, he drafted the R&D Plan for the Buffalo Program 2005-2010.

"Peter has always done his utmost to help the buffalo industry in any way that he was able and his initiative and valued opinion will be missed."

Peter says highlights of his time with RIRDC have included the major buffalo AI research program and buffalo breeding to introduce new bloodlines.

"It's also been very satisfying to have been able to work closely with a lot of very good people who've put an enormous effort in developing Australia's buffalo industry over the years.

Peter reckons, that come retirement day, he's got plenty to keep himself occupied and happy back home on his cattle farm at McLaren Vale in South Australia. *All the best, Peter.*

**PHOTOS:** Top - Peter McInnes in Darwin in February. Left - ABIC state reps and guests at Peter's Darwin farewell dinner.

## NT BUFFALO EXPORTS DROP IN 2009

Last year's live buffalo export numbers were well down on anticipated production for 2009 and fell against the 2008 tally, NTBIC President Michael Swart said in his annual report.

"We still suffer from having only one major live export market for our buffalo," he said.

"We have to develop further markets to return better prices to producers. We have a capacity to turn off in excess of 10,000 head of buffalo and this figure is rising with the natural increase in free-range herds."

### Export figures

The export trade in 2009 saw 3777 buffalo shipped out through the Port of Darwin. This was significantly less than the 4637 exported in 2008.

### 2009 tallies included

- 3274 to Indonesia (3815 in 2008)
- 327 to Brunei (306 in 2008)
- 176 to Sabah (236 in 2008)
- Nil to West Malaysia (280 in 2008).



# Buffalo News & Views . . .

*from around the country*

## New South Wales

■ NSW buffalo producers received a number of enquiries from people interested in accessing meat and dairy products or dairy animals in 2009.

■ Two full blood Riverine cows with progeny were trucked in from the NT to form the base of a future dairy in the state.

■ The Registry of Co-operatives and Associations, attached to the Dept of Fair Trading (DOFT), has sought an update from BPNSW on its financial status as an incorporated body. It was decided that, due to a near non-existent membership, the incorporated body be cancelled and any remaining assets be transferred to an approved body.

## Highlights from 2009 ABIC State/Territory reports

■ Past and present BPNSW members thanked Dr Peter McInnes for his valuable guidance and support for the buffalo industry during his time with RIRDC.

## Victoria

■ After the devastating February 2009 bushfires, the weather situation improved in the state, reducing the stress on most buffalo breeders.

■ VicBIC was successful in having RIRDC funding approved for a research project aimed at upgrading dairy buffalo. The Bulgarian Murrah semen is expected

to arrive in time for mid-March impregnation, following final donor buffalo testing required by AQIS for blue tongue.

■ Members are buoyed by Robyn and Chris Richmond's achievement this year in milking their first buffalo and now having about 10 animals ready to be milked.

■ Two requests for dairy buffalo included one from a former member wanting purebred animals to start a model dairy on the Mornington Peninsula.

## Queensland

■ Buffalo milk and meat production continued at a steady pace in Queensland in 2009. Herd numbers increased slightly for the state's two commercial dairies and for the emerging meat grower/processor, Cape York Buffalo Company.

■ Marg and Mal Thompson bought in more stock directly from the NT to help fulfil their aim to be milking about 30 head a year. Calves are expected on the ground soon. Marg will take up her Churchill Fellowship in April, travelling to the World Buffalo Congress in Argentina and with stopovers in the US, Bulgaria and Italy.

■ Cape York Buffalo Company took out three bronze medals in the hotly-contested 2009

National Gourmet Pie Competition. Vannella Cheese in Cairns and Maleny Cheese also won cheese awards.

## Northern Territory

■ NTBIC's use of an executive officer and administrative services through the NT Cattlemen's Association will wind up soon. This parting of ways has been caused by the NT Government's decision not to provide NTBIC with operational or administrative funding for 2010. NTBIC will regroup separately after its upcoming AGM.

■ A lack of available abattoir facilities saw local meat promotions moth-balled last year and no buffalo entry in the annual Culinary Challenge. Local outlet, Quality Meats, is sourcing buffalo from southern states. Producers are investigating other processing options.

■ NTBIC fielded overseas inquiries last year about accessing live milking buffalo and meat. South Africa shows continued interest in prices and availability of milking animals.

■ Free-ranging Top End buffalo numbers are increasing, with most on Aboriginal land. NTBIC is fielding many inquiries from communities interested in turning off buffalo and wanting to know what markets are available. NTBIC sees a need to provide market opportunities for these animals.

**(See more reports - next edition)**

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## Postcard from Malaysia



*Daughter Hayley Manvell rides a buffalo on Malaysia's Langkawi Island*

"We've had a trip to match last year's buffalo fact-finding trip to Borneo. 'Fantastic' was the only way to describe it. Their handling techniques are well past down. Managed to taste many buff items while there, including yoghurt, Mozzarella, milk, ricotta etc. The hospitality was amazing and the flavors were great. We also went to a rice festival and tried the local buff curry.

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