



Top End ABIC meeting appoints new-look national committee

The Australian Buffalo Industry Council now has producer representatives in every corner of the country, with Tasmania formally joining the team during the council's recent AGM in Darwin.

New buffalo farmer Phillip Oates, from Oyster Cove south of Hobart, was elected to represent Tasmania on the ABIC Committee.

Millaa Millaa buffalo dairy farmer Mitch Humphries was also elected as

Queensland's second representative, joining John Lloyd on the Committee.

2003 Office Bearers

The meeting also elected South Australia's Bob Cook

to take over as President, from fellow South Australian Milton Stevens who did not renominate for another term.

Michael Swart (NT) was re-elected Vice-President and Athel Smith (Victoria) was re-elected Treasurer/Public Officer.

Research

The meeting agreed to the need for research focussing on AI and meat analysis comparisons between Swamp and various Riverine cross buffalo. Funding will be made available through the RIRDC Buffalo Account. The aim of the AI research will be to identify practical methods that can be used successfully by buffalo farmers operating anywhere around Australia.

ABIC members also voted to:

- reduce the NRS levy to \$1.00 for the next three years (See Page 3)
- retain the ABIC fees at the current level for 2003
- retain the ABIC industry development position for 2003
- hold the next ABIC AGM and conference at Millaa Millaa, north Qld in February 2004.



ABIC Committee members (l-r) Doug Robertson (NSW), Athel Smith (Vic), Phillip Oates (Tas) and newly elected President Bob Cook (SA) inspect the live buffalo export carrier, MV Camira, at Rooney's Wharf during a field trip as part of the recent Darwin AGM and Conference agenda.

ABATTOIR DETAILS NEEDED

ABIC is conducting an audit of levy funds and is seeking the names and locations of any abattoirs which have slaughtered buffalo in the past few years. The information will help the industry to analyse the use of levy funds.

**Details should be sent to Neil Ross
by Fax on (08) 8947 1822
or by mail at
PO Box 36828, Winnellie, NT 0821**

INTRODUCING THE NEW PRESIDENT

New ABIC President Bob Cook is one of the more successful buffalo producers operating in southern Australia.

Bob and wife Christine became buffalo farmers seven years ago after moving south from Jabiru in the NT where Bob was a mechanic for nine years. They now run 155 buffalo on their property at Warnertown in South Australia. The herd includes both Swamp and Riverine animals.

Bob and Christine have so far focussed on producing prime quality meat for local restaurants - and receive excellent feedback from their customers because their product is so tender and light in colour. Most of their sales are in

meat cryovac packaged after processing through a local abattoir. Bob believes gentle handling to keep his buffalo stress free prior to slaughter is the reason why their meat is so tender. "The no-stress keeps the PH levels low and the meat is tender and light in colour," he says.

The Cooks hope to develop export outlets for their meat in the near future. They have also sold small quantities of live buffalo to people starting out in the industry in southern Australia. Bob would like to see more intensive marketing and promotion to advance the industry in his home state. He made the following comments in his recent annual report to ABIC.

"We need to get farmers interested in farming buffalo, because of the good

prospects to sell their produce. Involvement with the SA Government for research and marketing purposes would be beneficial. Set up expos, shows, displays and provide information to generate interest. If more farmers moved into the industry, markets would be easier to establish, as continuity of product would be easier to maintain."

He suggested that perhaps RIRDC could also assist farmers to promote the buffalo industry at field days and shows. "Customers still need to be convinced to eat buffalo meat." Bob says. "They need to be educated on the low fat and cholesterol levels and that buffalo is a very healthy alternative to beef."



BUFFALO NEWS

We need your contributions

Buffalo News welcomes input for readers on any developments, activities or issues related to your region or to the Australian buffalo industry in general.

CONTRIBUTIONS can be sent to, or discussed with

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The faces of ABIC

Pictured taking a well-earned breather between deliberations at ABIC's Annual General Meeting in Darwin in February were: BACK ROW L-R: Michael Swart (NT), Peter McInnes (RIRDC), Bob Cook (SA), Neil Ross (NTBIC), Geoff Eddy (Vic), Milton Stevens (SA) and Neroli Eddy (Vic). FRONT ROW L-R: John Lloyd (Qld), Barry Lemcke (NT), Doug Robertson (NSW), Phillip Oates (Tas), Kevin Doyle (ABIC Industry Development Specialist - NSW) and Athel Smith (Vic).

ABIC delegates tour Top End farms

The most popular event on the agenda for the ABIC annual general meetings and conferences is usually the field trip to check out what's happening in the local area.

The Sunday field trip as part of the Darwin meetings in February proved no exception.

State representatives from all over Australia got an early start on their bus tour of Top End buffalo farms and facilities.

The tour started with a visit to Rooney's Wharf at Darwin's East Arm Port Precinct to inspect facilities aboard the live buffalo and cattle carrier, MV Camira.

The tour continued out to Berry Springs, about 50 km south of Darwin, to check out the successful buffalo farming venture set up by Ernie Schlupe. Ernie's property looked magnificent in the wake of good wet

season rains that have produced ample green pasture for his large buffalo herd.

The lush Top End conditions had the visiting southern region producers green with envy. All have been battling the devastating drought conditions and have been hand-feeding their animals for many months to keep them alive.

The next stop was for lunch at the famous Humpty Doo Hotel, conveniently located between Berry Springs and the final destination for the tour, the NT Government-run Beatrice Hill buffalo research facility at Middle Point on the Adelaide River



ABOVE: ABIC representatives take in the lush Top End greenery while discussing buffalo production with Berry Springs farmer Ernie Schlupe (third from left). BELOW: Christine and Bob Cook discuss local buffalo work with Beatrice Hill's Eric Cox.

floodplain. The visit allowed ABIC reps to inspect local facilities, herds and breeding methods, to discuss technology with local researchers including Barry Lemcke, and to see the results of their buffalo work 'in the flesh'.



NT Buffalo industry gathers momentum

The NT buffalo industry reported increased live exports and domestic killings for 2002. Live buffalo export sales rose by nearly 15% to 3655 head last year.

The NT Buffalo Industry Council is confident that annual increases of 15% can be achieved over the next three to five years, with known and controlled supply being the key to maintaining sales at this level.

Domestic abattoirs processed around 1500 head of buffalo last season, with 110 of these going through the new Kununurra abattoir. Total numbers killed were higher than normal and resulted from TB destocking by some producers.

Sales of the prime TenderBuff meat product are also steadily improving, with 72 animals sold under the stringent TenderBuff requirements during 2002. This represented a 21% increase on 2001 sales. Despite the increase, TenderBuff sales are still well below what the industry would like to achieve.

"We will be placing a major emphasis on promoting domestic sales of TenderBuff meat this year," NT Buffalo Industry Council Executive Officer Neil Ross said. "We are keen to build up customers by promoting the health benefits of choosing buffalo meat, which is low in cholesterol and high in iron and zinc.

"We see the Northern Territory industry's future lying with small to medium herd farmers producing premium quality animals for the restaurant trade, particularly in the Top End," he said.

He also commented that several people were now buying a couple of buffalo at a time to reduce the fire hazard on their rural properties. "They can buy from the producers in November and sell them back in May so they don't have to hand-feed in the dry season. It saves them the effort of having to slash to reduce the fire hazard."

ABIC ratifies levy decision

The ABIC committee has ratified an agreement by AFFA to reduce the NRS buffalo excise levy from \$5.00 per buff slaughtered to \$1.00 per head for the next three years. The outcome will be an extra \$6000 over three years (ie \$2000 per year) being available for R&D activities. At the same time, the R&D buffalo excise levy will increase from \$4.60 per buffalo at slaughter to \$8.60 per head for the three years.



STATE *by* STATE

Buffalo news from around the nation

QUEENSLAND

In a milestone year, Queensland has seen Mitch Humphries' new buffalo dairy operation get underway, and he's reported some great breeding successes as well. Mitch has had nine calves born from three purebred Riverines, five three-quarter cross animals and one half cross animal. And just as Murphy's Law would have it, seven of the nine offspring are bulls. Just what a dairy operator needs!

NORTHERN TERRITORY

TenderBuff won popular acclaim again during a recent Darwin promotion to encourage restaurants and catering outlets

to use more Territory foods on their menus. The promotion was staged by the NT Food Group attached to the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development. The Northern Territory University's student chefs prepared six different buffalo meat dishes and these were all well received by participants.

"Events like this are really valuable for helping the buffalo industry," NT Buffalo Industry Council Executive Officer Neil Ross said. "NTBIC has been actively encouraging the Territory's student chefs to focus on TenderBuff in creating menus once they have graduated. We recently donated half a buffalo each to the NT University and Centralian

College, and also handed over Meat Cut books, Agnotes and other information to help the students understand the product they're dealing with. "We're targetting the chefs while their young in the hope that they'll use buffalo in their post-uni careers," Neil said.

VICTORIA

BIC Victoria is looking forward to a year of strong growth after two tough years for the industry. One challenge for 2003 will be to expand membership to keep abreast of the growing demand for buffalo product. BIC Victoria is planning a promotional show to encourage people to buy buffalo in 'viable areas', ie those close to abattoirs etc. At this stage, the Victorian industry has compacted into a tight supply chain with only Eddys and Alloway showing strong operations.

NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW producers are also hoping for more positive outcomes this year after 12 difficult months dominated by a severe lack of rain. BPNSW says producers have been pre-occupied with survival, herds (particularly breeders) have been heavily culled and the ability to produce buffalo has been severely limited. There has been limited interest from potential new buffalo breeders, with the drought putting new herd establishment on hold. On a positive note, a potential Japanese export market has been identified and BPNSW is actively pursuing this prospect.

TASMANIA

The Tasmania industry is still very much in its infancy but

Oyster Cove producers Phillip and Denise Oates aim to work towards getting a sustainable local market on line, with supplies to outlets including local butchers and hoteliers. Phillip reports that some people, including meat distributors, are showing interest in buying Tasmanian buffalo for major State events such as the *Taste of Huon*, *AGFEST* and *Taste of Tasmania*.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Local producers Bob and Christine Cook promote 'gentle handling' as the catch phrase for good herd management. "Buffalo are easy to manage if handled frequently to get them familiar with people and noise," Bob says. "I can walk among our herd, talking and touching the animals. This helps to keep them calm when you work with them or load them. Bad temperament animals are culled for meat or mince." The Cooks say the gentle approach is the reason why their meat is so tender and light. They take extra special care to avoid stress while the animals are being transported from the farm to the abattoir.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The WA industry reports little confidence in future prospects for buffalo in that region at the moment and does not see this changing in the short term. However, there could be some positive future outcomes in the area of value-adding processing which is now being investigated by RIRDC for the deer industry in support of Bilby International. At an appropriate time, Bilby could use the same technology to value-add to buffalo products. WA currently has four buffalo herds.

AUSTRALIAN BUFFALO INDUSTRY COUNCIL

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