



# Buffalo News

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Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council

## New Zealand shipment latest as offshore interest in Aussie milking buff grows



ABOVE: New Zealand-bound buffalo ready for loading  
BELOW: All aboard and ready for the long road trip south



**Significant exports of milking buffalo are now being coordinated through Australian producers.**

The sales to buyers in the non-traditional live export markets, is an exciting development for the nation's buffalo sector.

Two shipments of heifers were recently shipped to South Africa and Chile from Roger Haldane's Yambuk property in Victoria.

And as this newsletter was being printed, a third group, destined for New Zealand, was heading south by truck for export testing in a quarantine facility in Melbourne.

This group of 18 head come from Northern Territory producer Bill Lane's Mabuhay Farm and the government-operated Beatrice Hill Farm on the Adelaide River floodplains.

The group is destined for Auckland.

*Cont Back Page*

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

# Award-winning milk and cheese partnership takes national media spotlight

**Australia's fledgling buffalo milking industry emerged into the national spotlight in November when ABC Television's *Landline* program picked up on a recent *Buffalo News* story about the winning partnership between Queensland's Vannella Cheese Factory and Australian Dairy Buffalo Company.**

The *Landline* film crew flew north to capture vision and record interviews on the first Australian commercial joint venture between a buffalo dairy producer and a specialist cheese maker.

The program interviewed people including Queensland buffalo dairy farmer Mitch Humphries, Vannella's Vito and Anarita Manoia, Top End buffalo researcher Barry Lemcke and ABIC President Phillip Oates as part of the story.

It highlighted the successful combination of the Cairns-based Vannella company and Mitch Humphries' Atherton Tablelands buffalo dairy, which has resulted in superior local buffalo cheeses toppling the best of imported lines at a recent cheese show in Brisbane.

The Minoia family had their own cheese factory in Italy before moving to Australia in search of new opportunities in 2000. After struggling to find a site for a factory in Sydney, they decided to set up in Cairns and now see a strong future for buffalo cheese in Australia.

In what *Landline* titled a 'win-win solution', the family lined up with Mitch Humphries to start making cheese from his buffalo milk. It meant the dairy had a market for its milk and the cheese-maker had the raw material he needed

to make a high quality product, along with a lot of patience.

Mitch Humphries started searching for opportunities to value-add back in the early 2000s. He read about the popularity of buffalo dairy products overseas and took steps that have led his venture where it is today. Mitch runs 150 buffalo including a milking herd of 40. He bought his original stock from the Territory, hoping they would easily adapt to Queensland conditions.

"Like most Australians, I'd never heard of people milking buffalo before," Mitch said. "It's been about three years since I started milking them. I think things have settled down now and people have accepted it in the area as an alternative.

"We got a line of heifers from a Northern Territory research station (ie Beatrice Hill near Adelaide River). They had brought in some dairy breeds to cross with the Australian buffalo for beef reasons, and we were lucky enough, that they had a line of heifers, from dairy background, and

we purchased them in the later part of 2002."

Researcher Barry Lemcke told the program the Australian buffalo dairy industry was presently small with three dairies involved, including one in Victoria and two in Queensland. "We have supplied some of our animals to the two Queensland dairies," he said.

*Landline* also focussed on the buffalo industry's spread throughout Australia, with animals now being farmed as far south as Tasmania. ABIC President Phillip Oates runs Oyster Cove Buffalo Farm just outside Hobart. "The buffalo industry is still in its infancy, even though it's been running in the Territory for some years," Phillip told the program. "We're trying to get a lot more people involved because we can't supply a big market.

People in all the different states are supplying their local niche markets, but we've still got a lot of people that actually want so many animals per week and, at this stage, we still can't supply them."

## 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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## SEASON'S GREETINGS

to all in the Australian buffalo industry. We wish you a wonderful Christmas - and may 2007 be a safe and productive year

# Revamped arrangements set fresh direction for NT buffalo industry

Under the terms of a new MOU signed this month, the NT Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) will provide executive support and administrative services to the NT Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) and the wider buffalo industry.

The revamped arrangement will see the NTCA work closely with local buffalo producers, exporters, researchers and other stakeholders to identify ways to enhance the

industry and build new markets for both live animals and the premium TenderBuff product.

The NT Government-backed move is designed to 'unify' and coordinate all Territory buffalo industry operations and strengthen future trade opportunities for their products.

The NTCA has appointed rural consultant Les Reif to its Darwin staff, to focus specifically on buffalo industry issues. Mr Reif has

prepared a comprehensive report that sets priorities for advancing the industry. The report's recommendations were given the 'thumbs up' by NTBIC members at the association's AGM in Darwin on 7 December.

Priority tasks to be undertaken by the NTCA include a review and update of the *NTBIC Strategic Plan 2003-2006* by April 2007. An operational plan for July 2006-June 2008 will also be developed and presented by April 2007.

The NTCA's executive support will include liaising with government and lobbying on behalf of members.

Issues identified as critical to future growth include a unified approach by all buffalo industry players, ongoing reliable access to large numbers of high quality buffalo for live export markets, and adequate abattoir facilities to ensure a sustained supply of TenderBuff.

## LIVE EXPORT UPDATE

Australia's live buffalo export figures for 2006 tallied 7531 head by the end of November.

With still a month of the year to go, the figures are dramatically better than those for the whole of 2005, when only 1902 buffalo were exported to overseas markets.

A total of 576 buffalo were shipped out of Darwin in November to destinations including West Malaysia (347 head), Brunei (141), Indonesia (50) and Sabah (38).

For the year to date, West Malaysia has been the stand-out top market for Australian buffalo, taking 5777 head.

Indonesia has imported 724 head so far in 2006, with 659 going to Sabah and 371 to Brunei.

## Buff begin new life in Aceh rice paddies

Australia's first shipment of trained water buffalo set sail for Indonesia on 19 September to play a special part in efforts to re-establish crops wiped out by the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami.

The seven buffalo will work in the rice paddies of Indonesia's Aceh province.

The six cows and one bull were mustered from Tortilla Flats near Adelaide River, south of Darwin, and tamed and trained by Queenslander Graham Heffernan. Speaking on the ABC's *Northern Territory Country Hour*, the so-called 'buffalo whisperer' said the buffalo were initially scared but were now 'almost genuinely affectionate'.

Graham said the farmers would be able to lead them round the rice paddies without them running off. "It usually takes a couple of weeks to get them so they won't tear you apart! They are intelligent and they learn pretty quickly," he said.

He said the training and shipment had been a goodwill gesture on the part of a lot of people. "This is to prove it can be done and if we could do it in larger numbers it would be more cost effective," he said. "It may cost up to \$2000 to train one animal but they will work for up to 30 years."

Graham is now training more buffalo and will also train Aceh farmers in different buffalo handling methods.

## AUSTRALIAN BUFFALO INDUSTRY COUNCIL (ABIC)

### AGM and Annual Conference 2006

Darwin NT - 3 February 2006



# Buffalo News & Views ... from around the country

## VicBIC moves to accelerate Victorian riverine breeding

A group of Victorian buffalo breeders is getting together to accelerate their state's riverine breeding plan.

It is felt in Victoria, that not only are the milking qualities of the riverine superior, but the resulting meat, in particular F1, is more tender and palatable. Anyone interested in joining the program should contact one of VicBIC's Committee (SEE committee member contact details on the ABIC website: [www.buffaloaustralia.org](http://www.buffaloaustralia.org))

Victoria is still waiting for a reply in relation to their application to RIRDC for funding for a research project to determine the milking qualities of riverine cross cows. A response was due in November 2006.

*Athel Smith - VicBIC*



## Tassie buffalo rugged up against the winter chills

This winter has seen low rainfall and very low temperatures in Tasmania's Oyster Cove district, especially at night. Phillip and Denise Oates report that their buffalo (some pictured above) spent a lot of time in the shed during winter. "However, after considerable thought we decided to trial using horse rugs on our buffalo," Phillip says. "On the whole, the trial was successful. Despite some buffalo performing houdini acts and removing their coats, the majority kept their warm covers on.

We noted they came through winter in better condition than comparative years with less weight loss - a point that would be of interest to some who suggested the idea was a waste of time."

Tasmania's buffalo continue to attract keen interest among locals and visitors, especially during the 'show season'. The Oates attended two local shows at Brighton and Ranelagh, and received many queries regarding buffalo milk and comments about the story on buffalo milk screened recently on the ABC's *Landline* program. (See story Page 2)

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## AUSSIE MILKERS TO CROSS THE TASMAN

*Continued from front page*

The consignment includes one bull and the balance of 7/8th and three-quarter heifers.

The New Zealand buyer plans to milk the new charges and produce cheese for the lucrative North Island farmers' markets, located close to Auckland.

The buffalo left Darwin by truck on the first leg of their journey on 15 December.

They will be kept at the Melbourne quarantine premises for two months before their final air flight to Auckland. We wish the new owners every success in their new venture.