

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE)

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) is an incurable central nervous system illness that has been detected in a number of species, including livestock and humans. The major TSE that affects cattle is Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), while in sheep it is Scrapie.

Australia has strict quarantine measures and surveillance programs in place to meet international standards for the detection of TSE. Australia has a recognised TSE-free status and is considered a 'negligible risk' BSE country (the highest status attainable).

In 1997 Australia introduced legislation prohibiting the use of meat and bone meal as a ruminant feed which has been linked to the transmission of TSE in animals.

Australia's TSE status was further enhanced by the implementation of the National Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy Surveillance Program (NTSESP) in 1998 which is nationally coordinated by Animal Health Australia (AHA). This was developed to meet the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) International Animal Health Code for the surveillance of BSE in cattle and Scrapie in sheep.

NTSESP is an integrated national program which involves identifying and testing cattle and sheep for clinical symptoms that could be mistaken for TSE.

The Australian red meat industry recognises that it is vital to undertake monitoring and surveillance measures in order to protect Australia's TSE status. These measures ensure that Australia's international customers continue to be confident about Australia's TSE-free status.

As a result of these programs and strict quarantine measures, Australia is recognised by the OIE as a 'negligible risk' BSE country. This is the highest status under the OIE system and Australia was one of the first countries in the world to receive this status.

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) affects cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. While the disease is not life threatening, it is highly contagious and severely affects an animal's productivity. Exporting countries that are found to have FMD generally immediately lose access to major trading partners.

Australia's stringent quarantine measures and geographical isolation have assisted in retaining its FMD-free status.

Individual farmers are responsible for monitoring their livestock and reporting any unusual signs of disease to a veterinary officer.

Australia is well prepared should FMD enter its shores. AUSVETPLAN, adopted at a federal level but implemented on a state basis, contains contingency measures in the event that FMD or another threatening animal disease is detected in Australia. With respect to FMD, AUSVETPLAN's policy involves eradicating the disease within the shortest time possible, while limiting economic impact. It includes a combination of strategies:

- Eradication measures
- Quarantine and movement controls
- Decontamination of facilities
- Tracing and surveillance
- Zoning
- Public awareness campaign

Vaccination is not a preferred option for FMD control due to its potential to extend market disruption, however as a precaution Australia has arrangements in place to source FMD vaccines should they be required.