**Foot and Mouth Disease… what’s the big deal?**

By Megan Harrod

*Regional Officer for Western Australia*

Livestock Biosecurity Network Pty Ltd

0488 100 426 [mharrod@lbn.org.au](mailto:mharrod@lbn.org.au)

[www.lbn.org.au](http://www.lbn.org.au)

29/01/2014

I often get asked “*why should I concern myself with FMD when diseases such as footrot or OJD are closer to home?”* Firstly it’s a very valid and logical question and given it’s been about 140 years since FMD was seen in Australia it’s easy to understand how a degree of apathy that has crept in.

A report by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) release in October 2013 drove home just how catastrophic the economic and social impacts of FMD could potentially be. The report found that an FMD outbreak in Australia whether limited or widespread would be likely to impose significant economic and social costs. A previous study from 2010 estimated costs to livestock producers where a one year trade ban is imposed to be between $465 million and $765 million. The most recent study estimates revenue losses over a 10 year period for a multistate outbreak could add up to $52 billion.

It is also worth remembering that it could take decades for Australia to regain its place in certain international markets as once the presence of FMD is confirmed in a country most other countries will immediately ban the importation of FMD susceptible livestock and by-products. For Australia – which exports 70 per cent of production value from FMD susceptible livestock, there is no doubt that this would be an economic disaster.

For a real life example of the impacts of a large scale FMD outbreak we can refer to the 2001 outbreak that originated in the United Kingdom (UK). By the time the outbreak was even reported (19th February 2001) it’s estimated that over 50 properties had already been infected with the disease. By the time the disease was eradicated in September 2001 more than six million animals had been slaughtered. Over 2,000 premises were declared infected and during the height of the disease more than 10,000 vets, soldiers, field support staff and contractors were involved in fighting the disease. Up to 100,000 animals were slaughtered and disposed of per day. It wasn’t until 5th February 2002 that the European Commission lifted remaining meat and animal export restrictions.

In light of the above information there is no doubt that FMD is an exotic disease of great significance and it is obvious that prevention is better than the cure. Remember the work of a lifetime can be lost in a matter of days so it pays to set aside some time to learn about FMD and what it looks like. It also helps to maintain sound farm biosecurity, be vigilant for signs of disease and the importance of reporting signs of livestock disease early cannot be overstated.