

WOAH Regional Training for Animal Disease Notification Focal Points (including WAHIS use) in Asia and the Pacific

COOK ISLANDS



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1. Governance and Structure

Who is the Competent Authority?

- Could you outline the organisational structure of your Veterinary Services? Specifically, who is the final decision-maker for declaring a disease outbreak
- Biosecurity Act 2008 Pt 9 (69) mandates “On receiving evidence that a biosecurity emergency has arisen in the whole or any part of the Cook Islands, the Secretary of Agriculture may declare a biosecurity emergency in respect of the whole of or that part of the Cook Islands”.

The Role of Non-Vets:

- Given the geography of the Pacific, what role do para-veterinarians, biosecurity officers, or community animal health workers play in your surveillance network?
- Para-vets – passive/active surveillance, advisory, awareness, reporting
- Biosecurity – passive/active surveillance, diagnostics, identification, monitoring, reporting
- Are these field officers authorised to submit official reports, or must a veterinarian verify them first?
- Reports are checked by the Director before submission to the Secretary
- Verification can be confirmed with overseas Vets

2. Detection and Information Flow

Passive vs. Active Surveillance:

- Is your surveillance system primarily passive (relying on farmers to report sickness) or active (scheduled visits and sampling)?
- Both - we endeavour to conduct surveillance every 2 years on the main Island of Rarotonga

The Journey of a Report:

- Can you describe the step-by-step journey of a disease report? For example, if a pig falls ill on a remote outer island, how does that information reach the central office in the capital? (e.g., phone, WhatsApp, paper forms, digital app?)
- A farmer may contact their Agriculture office on their respective outer island first or ring directly to the main office on Rarotonga;
- The main office seeks further information from the outer island agriculture officers then records the incident and advice given (if any);
- Main office may request for samples if appropriate for further testing and verification

Connectivity:

- What are the main communication challenges you face between the outer islands and the central veterinary office?
- Timeline of symptoms

3. Laboratory and Confirmation

Diagnostic Capacity:

- Do you have internal (or 'in-country') capacity for rapid testing (e.g., rapid kits), or is confirmation entirely dependent on overseas laboratories?
- We have capacity for rapid testing for some diseases (ASF), otherwise dependent on overseas labs
- We work with NZ MPI for access to a lab

Sample Dispatch:

- What is your mechanism for dispatching samples to reference laboratories (e.g., in Australia or New Zealand)?
What are the logistical bottlenecks (e.g., flight schedules, permits)?
- Samples are dispatched using IATA guidelines although our IATA certification has since expired;
- Funding to pay for shipment and testing of samples;
- Require ongoing training in collecting samples, packaging and sending overseas;

4. Data Management

Internal Records:

- How do you store data or information on animal diseases in the country? Do you use a specific database, spreadsheets, or paper archives?
- WAHIS
- We have a spreadsheet system where information is collected from surveillance and results from specimens tested overseas kept in our database and eventually updated in our 6 month reports

Wildlife Interface:

- Does your current surveillance system include wildlife or invasive species (e.g., wild pigs), or is it strictly focused on domestic livestock? What about aquatic animals?
- Strictly domestic livestock
- Aquatic is Ministry of Marine Resources

5. Emergency Response

Early Warning:

- Do you have a formal Early Warning System in place for transboundary diseases (like ASF or FMD)? If a suspicion arises, is there a pre-approved budget for immediate investigation?
- No, but the Ministry will affect the process with support from our partners as required

