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Cattle tick control in NSW

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Controlling and eradicating cattle ticks is extremely important for the viability of the cattle industry in north-eastern NSW. Cattle ticks are the most serious external parasite of cattle in Australia. The tick can carry the disease 'tick fever', which can kill cattle and has the potential to cause significant economic damage to the beef cattle and dairy industries of NSW. (See [Primefact 80 Tick fever](#).)

Introduction and spread of cattle tick

Cattle ticks were introduced into Australia at Darwin in 1872 when cattle were imported from South-East Asia. By 1906 cattle tick had spread across Queensland and down the coast to NSW. It has been estimated that some three million cattle died. In those days, there were no effective treatments and the transmission of tick fever wasn't understood.

Cattle Tick Program

The Cattle Tick Program is managed by the Minister's Cattle Tick Advisory Committee, who advises the Minister for Primary Industries. Industry & Investment NSW carries out the regulatory function under the *Stock Diseases Act 1923*.

At one time in the decades since 1920, there were some 700 people employed in the Government's Cattle Tick Program. These staff patrolled and maintained the Queensland border fences, carried out inspections and treatments on properties and regulated stock movements across the border and into and out of the NSW Tick Quarantine Area (TQA).

This TQA has grown and shrunk over the years depending on the spread of cattle ticks in NSW. At its largest in 1933 it extended from the Queensland border to Macksville in the south and to Legume in the west. More recently the TQA was renamed the Cattle Tick Protected Area (CTPA) and was reduced to a small zone in the north-east corner of the state before it was ceased in 2004. Even today, Industry & Investment NSW spends about \$4 million a year on the Cattle Tick Program.

Objectives

The current program objective is to eradicate cattle tick from NSW, in particular:

- to prevent outbreaks of cattle tick and tick fever in NSW as a result of livestock movements from Queensland;
- to develop and implement strategies for cattle tick eradication in NSW compatible with health, safety and environmental demands;
- to make recommendations to government regarding cattle tick eradication;
- to investigate new methods of tick control to reduce chemical use;
- to continue to update industry with developments in cattle tick control and eradication strategies;
- to facilitate livestock trade and to protect markets by:
 - controlling stock movements from cattle tick risk areas;
 - minimising meat residues from regulatory treatments of livestock.

Without the Cattle Tick Program, ticks and tick fever would have continued to spread far down the east coast of NSW, causing significant economic damage.

Cattle tick dip sites

The traditional method of treating cattle for ticks has been, and still is, dipping. When cattle are dipped they jump through a bath containing a solution which kills the cattle tick.

More than 1600 cattle tick dip yards were built earlier this century under the government-controlled program, most of them on land leased from stock owners. Arsenic was used in dips up until 1955 but the ticks became resistant to it. DDT was then used until 1962 when it too became ineffective. Since 1962 other, much less persistent tickicides have been used to dip cattle.

Industry & Investment NSW has a strategy to manage contaminated land at cattle tick dip sites. Action is being taken to reduce health and environmental risks at dips in each of the following three categories:

- Priority sites that require clean-up.
- Sites that are no longer needed by the Cattle Tick Program and are on the list for decommissioning.
- Active sites that are still required by the Cattle Tick Program or stock owners.

Further information

For further information contact the Cattle Tick Program headquarters at Wollongbar on (02) 6626 1201.

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