



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

PRIVATE VETERINARIANS ENGAGED IN AN EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASE RESPONSE

1. Why was the Private Practitioner engagement working group established?

The Department of Agriculture (the Department) and Animal Health Committee established the Private Practitioner engagement working group to consider a number of outstanding issues involving the engagement of private vets in an emergency animal disease response. Based on previous experiences, it was considered very important to have nationally consistent arrangements and remuneration in place so that when there is an emergency disease response, private veterinarians can be engaged efficiently and effectively.

2. Am I obliged as a veterinarian to assist in an emergency animal disease response?

There is no obligation to be directly involved. However veterinarians eligible for registration in an Australian jurisdiction are encouraged to make themselves available if possible. Further, all veterinarians have a legal obligation to report signs of a possible emergency animal disease to the appropriate animal health jurisdiction.

Participation in an emergency animal disease response can be a very satisfying experience, with outcomes critical to our primary industries, community, profession and the economy. For many it can be a life changing experience, or at the very least a career highlight. The prospect may appear daunting at first, but you will do industry, affected communities and your nation a service.

3. How will I be engaged in an emergency animal disease response?

If you choose to be involved in an emergency animal disease response, you will either be directly engaged as a temporary or casual government employee or as a contractor to provide specific services by the responding jurisdiction. Engagement is usually organised through a local control centre¹. As a contractor you can enter into a contract as an individual or a practice. However to be eligible to work as a contractor you **MUST** be covered by appropriate Professional Indemnity, Public Liability and Personal Accident insurance cover - see below.

¹ A Local Control Centre is responsible for operations (eradication and control) in one or more defined areas where the outbreak is.

4. Will I have a choice of how I am engaged?

Depending on the specific role in which you are engaged in an emergency animal disease response, you may have a choice in terms of how you will be engaged. You will need to negotiate a mutually acceptable engagement option with the responding state or territory jurisdiction. However, as a general rule, veterinarians who are employed within local or state disease control centres will normally be engaged as employees. Contractor arrangements will most likely be applicable to veterinarians working semi-independently in field based roles such as active disease surveillance and vaccination.

5. What roles are there for veterinary practitioners in an emergency animal disease outbreak?

With the appropriate training and skills private practitioners can undertake any of a range of roles in an emergency animal disease response, ranging from field-based roles through to control centre positions. However, the roles that require the largest numbers of appropriately skilled private practitioners in an emergency animal disease response may involve functions such as field surveillance and vaccination.

6. How will the Commonwealth be involved?

The Commonwealth will provide support to the responding jurisdiction(s) for cross-jurisdictional resource deployment, secondments and the management of international emergency veterinary reserves².

7. What information is available to help me?

A package of three documents is available to provide guidance to private veterinarians and to assist with the application of consistent arrangements across all jurisdictions:

- i. A national guidance document for government and private veterinarians;
- ii. A standard contract elements document for jurisdictions to use when developing a contract template; and:
- iii. An outline of employment conditions for private veterinarians engaged as government employees

² Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America have an agreement to provide assistance to each other when required during an emergency animal disease outbreak.

8. What are the salary rates for veterinarians engaged as an employee and how was the salary rate decided? What is included?

There are three (3) primary levels of remuneration. Jurisdictions have agreed to use Commonwealth pay rates as the benchmark to pay private veterinarians engaged as employees during an EAD response. Vets will be paid a salary rate that is close to the following levels in line with the applicable jurisdictional industrial agreement:

Level	Eligibility	Department of Agriculture Salary November 2013
NGV1	Practitioner with less than 5 years relevant experience since graduation	\$86,247 (APS6.04)
NGV2	Practitioner with more than 5 years relevant experience since graduation or has appropriate area(s) of expertise	\$92,404 (APS6.06)
NGV3	Practitioner with more than 5 years relevant experience since graduation, plus completion of additional training for roles in an Local Control Centre or State Control Centre such as coordinator of tracing, coordinator of surveillance, infected property operations etc.	\$109,584 (APS6.08)

As an employee you would not need your own insurance as you will be covered by government insurance arrangements.

Personal protective equipment, consumables, accommodation, meal allowances will be provided. A motor vehicle will generally be supplied if required, although mileage rates will be paid for if use of private vehicles is required.

If you are employed on a full-time or part-time basis you will be entitled to superannuation, overtime, workers compensation, recreation and sick leave in addition to the relevant salary.

If you are employed on a 'casual' basis (this method of employment is generally used where the hours are variable) employees are not eligible for benefits such as recreation and sick leave or public holidays. Hence a loading (generally between 15 and 25 percent) is normally applied to the base salary level. The actual details will vary between jurisdictions.

9. What is the contractor hourly rate and how was the rate decided? What is included?

Contractors will receive an hourly rate of \$180 (excluding GST) or a daily rate of \$1800 (based on a 10 hour day). The contractor rate is all-inclusive, with no additional employee entitlements, apart from out-of pocket expenses (see below).

Private veterinarians' and government jurisdiction's views on an acceptable pay rate were taken into consideration. This was determined by using the hourly rate for work undertaken by a government employee (\$60) and a multiplier of 3 to cover for issues such as contractor overheads and market forces.

Mileage at the Australian Taxation Office rate and accommodation costs will also be paid by the jurisdiction. Supply of equipment such as personal protective equipment and basic consumables will be the responsibility of the contractor. However equipment may be supplied by the control centre and paid for by the veterinarian to ensure efficiency, biosecurity and consistency. Major response consumables, for example vaccine, will be paid for and supplied by the control centre.

Further guidance on the responsibilities of contractors can be found at:

http://www.ato.gov.au/Business/Employee-or-contractor/How-to-determine-if-workers-are-employees-or-contractors/Difference-between-employees-and-contractors/?anchor=P49_4674#P49_4674

10. My practice charges \$220/hour or more for current services I provide within my practice, why is the contractor hourly rate less for an emergency animal disease response?

As a contractor engaged in an emergency animal disease response you are likely to be contracted for a continuous period (weeks or months) to undertake the work required, with an average billable working day of 8-10 hours of professional fees at the height of an EAD response. In general veterinary practice it is unusual for vets to be able to consistently charge out this amount of billable hours day after day for weeks on end. Consequently normal practice hourly rates are higher than the emergency animal disease contractor rate to take fixed and variable overheads and this extra down-time etc into account.

11. Will my practice staff be employed?

In the event of an emergency animal disease incident the responding jurisdiction need staff who know the area and local industries. For those practices within the affected area there may be opportunities for staff other than veterinarians to be involved. For example, tasks such as reception, clerical, data entry, mapping, industry liaison all need to be staffed in

control centres whilst field teams (surveillance and vaccinating teams) may require assistants. Preference may be given to employing people in industries adversely affected by the disease outbreak.

12. In the event of an emergency animal disease outbreak in my area how will my practice be affected?

It will depend on the disease, the control measures employed and the extent of the outbreak. For highly infectious livestock diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, movements onto farms in the restricted area³ will be tightly controlled. Veterinary visits to farms may be significantly affected. Small animal work will continue but clients from livestock farms may be less likely to visit veterinarians. Hence those practices in restricted areas who service livestock farms are likely to suffer a drastic reduction in work. This may be offset in part by practices undertaking work on the outbreak by allowing employees to participate in the response and work as temporary jurisdictional employees in control centres or as contractors undertaking field activities.

13. I am a veterinary student; can I assist in an emergency animal disease response and what rate will I be paid?

There are a range of roles that will need to be filled during a response and veterinary students are likely to be utilised if available. This will provide very useful training and experience. Students will be paid according to the salary rates being paid to non-professional, temporary response staff.

14. Will the salary and contractor rates be reviewed?

These rates will be reviewed and updated annually by the Department of Agriculture and Animal Health Committee.

15. I don't have insurance. Can I still assist in an emergency animal disease response?

Contractors must carry their own Professional Indemnity, Professional Liability and Personal Accident insurance. If you do not have insurance then you can be engaged as a jurisdictional employee and thus covered under government insurance arrangements.

If you are an employed veterinarian working in a practice that is supplying contract veterinary services to a jurisdiction during an emergency animal disease response, the Professional Indemnity and Professional Liability insurance that is held by your employer should cover you to perform this contract work as part of your normal employment conditions. If you are an employed vet and you are in any doubt as to your insurance cover, you should clarify this with your employer or speak to an insurance adviser.

³ A relatively small declared area around an infected premises that is subject to intense surveillance and movement controls.

16. What level of insurance must I have to be involved in an emergency animal disease response?

An insurance company, Guild Insurance has been consulted during this process and is currently working on developing a suitable package for contractors.

17. What training will I receive?

All vets must be aware of emergency disease threats, and encourage their veterinary staff to attend practitioner workshops on emergency diseases. Training and briefings on employment will be provided by control centre staff once you are engaged.

18. What guarantee do I have that you will employ me for more than a day?

As a contractor, the allocation of work is at the discretion of the control centre. The jurisdiction will attempt to provide you with an estimate of the duration of engagement. However during a significant response there will generally be no shortage of work to be undertaken.

As an employee of a jurisdiction you will be appointed full-time or part-time for a fixed term during the emergency animal disease response, or on a casual basis. The jurisdiction will also attempt to provide you with an estimate of the duration of engagement.

19. If one of my staff assists in an emergency animal disease response, will I have to pay them?

If directly engaged by the jurisdiction to work on the response, your staff member will be paid by the responding jurisdiction for the term of their engagement. The person will need to negotiate with you about leave for that term.

20. How can I provide feedback on the engagement process?

You are encouraged to provide feedback through the AVA or directly to the state or territory government that engages you.

21. Do I need to be registered in the state of the response to assist in an emergency animal disease response?

Yes. National Recognition of Veterinary Registration (NRVR) is being implemented in all States. However currently it is only in place in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania, which means that if you are in another state or territory, you can work in those states without having to re-register. For all other states (ie. SA, QLD, WA, NT and ACT) you will need to register and pay secondary registration fees until the relevant legislation has been amended. All states and territories will expedite secondary registration arrangements during a response. The

state or territory may agree to reimburse you for this cost. Veterinarians are urged to seek clarification from the jurisdiction prior to engagement.

22. What if I don't agree with the way the response is being conducted?

The philosophy of an emergency animal disease response management is very much around "command and control". Discipline to carry out functions as specified in the response plan and as directed by supervisors is essential. To ensure participants understand their obligations, a good induction process is required, as well as use of Standard Operating Procedures.

Despite the above, there may be times when a private veterinarian working in a response has concerns with particular aspects of the response or how it is being managed. It is important that these views are heard and, if necessary, addressed. However, this must occur through the appropriate internal mechanisms that will be in place. You will be advised on the appropriate process for this to occur. A veterinary liaison position will be located in the control centre and this person should be consulted if concerns are not addressed via the team leader in the first instance. It is not appropriate to voice concerns or adverse opinions publically, as this may lead to a loss of public confidence in the overall response.

Contact:

For further queries contact the Department of Agriculture.