

Veterinarian warns of post-flooding botulism risk for northern QLD

In the wake of Queensland's recent flooding, a leading vet has flagged the heightened risk of botulism for northern cattle producers. Botulism thrives in decaying animal and plant matter. With producers having faced the loss of many cattle, there's likely to be an increased presence of the lethal toxin, both now and for many years to come, says Dr Matt Ball, Veterinarian and Technical Services Manager at Virbac Australia. The number of animal carcasses made conditions ideal for the proliferation of the disease. Latest estimates were half a million cattle dead, and with many cattle in recovery mode, survivors will be driven to chew bones to obtain vital nutrients. The number one method to combat this problem is an effective vaccination program. Dr Ball has spent three years researching the immune response of northern Australian cattle to botulism. His research confirmed the challenges of successfully vaccinating cattle in northern Australia due to nutritional and other factors, with the choice of vaccine found to have a major affect on protection levels. Recent field research conducted by Virbac and the Department of Primary Industry & Resources has shown that even after vaccination, only 70-80% of cattle may be protected. A range of issues can affect success – from missed mustering in often challenging environments to difficulty in handling animal health products, as well as compromised immunity on vaccination day. As Dr Ball explains, now that the risk is so much higher, a booster will pick up the 20% of animals that may still be vulnerable. It's also important to remember that botulism is a 'challenge-based' disease – so in much the same way as shatterproof glass can still be broken by a big enough rock, a previously vaccinated animal can still die if given a high enough dose of the toxin. "Even if you've vaccinated prior to the floods, you'll likely want to talk to an animal health advisor about the possibility of a booster, as this will give the highest possible level of antibodies to meet the increased levels of toxins currently present," says Dr Ball. There are differences in the available botulism vaccines in Australia. SingVac, available as a One Year or Three Year product and containing an innovative 'water in oil in water' formulation, was found in local research to be capable of producing a higher level of antibodies when compared to other vaccines on the market. It is an ideal vaccine to protect cattle through this high-risk period. In the face of the widespread risk caused by the huge number of livestock mortalities in the recent floods, vaccination is the best form of defense to help minimise the threat from this deadly disease. A botulism management plan is vital for successful post-flood farm recovery. Farmers are invited to find out more about SingVac at au.virbac.com Media Enquiries: Kate Munsie - C7EVEN COMMUNICATIONS (02) 6766 4513 kate.munsie@c7even.com.au Photo captions: Dr Matt Ball, Veterinarian and Technical Services Manager at Virbac Australia Northern QLD Brahman Cattle

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