

### **The role of the veterinary profession in quarantine**

Outbreaks of cholera and foot-and-mouth disease in early colonial days led to recognition of the need for quarantine to exclude disease from Australia. Ships were required to wait for 30 days before disembarking passengers.

In the 1870s, before the federation of Australia, States enacted quarantine laws. Under the Australian constitution at federation in 1901, quarantine became a Commonwealth responsibility, which was exercised under the *Quarantine Act* 1908. The Chief Veterinary Officers of the States and Territories were appointed federal Chief Quarantine Officers (Animals). They conducted field quarantine at seaports, airports and quarantine stations, and surveillance in northern Australia until 1994. The States provided many veterinary field and laboratory facilities, while veterinarians and stock inspectors in remote areas were used as required.

In 1926, WAN Robertson, who directed eradication of the outbreak of rinderpest in Western Australia in 1923, was appointed Director of Veterinary Hygiene, Commonwealth Department of Health, to control animal quarantine at the national level. From 1926 until 1994, only six veterinarians occupied this position, giving great stability with veterinary input enhanced by the arrangements with the States. The six directors over those 68 years were: WAN Robertson and RN Wardle (1924-1960), KS McIntosh (1960-1970), RW Gee (1970-1973), ID Cameron-Stephen (1973-1976) and KA Doyle (1977-1994).

In 1994, the Commonwealth resumed responsibility for quarantine, and policy and operations were separated.

Consultation with the States and the Australian Veterinary Association provides access to the best available veterinary expertise, making the process of quarantine successful in excluding major exotic diseases and in the detection and eradication of diseases. Conservative quarantine policies, which comply with the rules of the World Trade Organisation, embody assessment of epidemiological risk and procedures that address animals and their products, biologicals and microorganisms that may introduce and cause disease.

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