

N.T. BUFFALO INDUSTRY COUNCIL INCORPORATED



ABN 34 355 734 719

Report 2 submitted by the NT Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) as completion of Milestone 3 of the Funding Agreement between the Northern Territory Government and the NTBIC.

Background

The Australian buffalo industry is divided into two distinctly different enterprises - Swamp buffalo harvested for meat either through live export or domestic abattoirs, and buffalo dairy based on the Riverine breed. The NT Buffalo Industry Council services both of these parts of the industry.

The NT is the only Australian jurisdiction with significant numbers of Swamp buffalo. The majority of these are in Arnhem Land in an uncontrolled state. The current population estimate is at least 160,000 and growing at 27,000 pa. The buffalo population behind wire on stations is estimated at between 20,000 and 30,000. Export numbers have been static at about 10,000 pa for the last 3 years. Although this is a good figure compared to the period before 2014 when the trade had almost ceased, it is clear that there would be a market for at least three times that number if supply chain issues could be sorted out. Lack of a domestic abattoir has also plagued the industry, but the Rum Jungle abattoir, which reopened in December 2019 processed 7,000 buffalo for the period to 31st December 2020 and appears to be a reliable outlet for buffalo that do not meet the specifications of the higher priced export market.

Although the NT no longer has a buffalo dairy, the breeding of Riverine buffalo is still an important enterprise for many producers. There are now 12 buffalo dairies around Australia (covering every state) with approximately 3,000 buffalo, derived from NT Riverine buffalo. The last few months have seen a great increase in the number of enquiries to purchase Riverine dairy stock including a new dairy starting up in WA and a potential major export order.

The buffalo industry has a strategic importance which goes beyond the simple numbers of buffalo sold. Buffalo thrive and outperform cattle on marginal land in the humid tropics, such as in Arnhem Land, and provide employment and income in areas where there are few alternative options. In large numbers, including some parts of Arnhem Land currently, buffalo are having a detrimental effect on sensitive ecosystems. An increased sustainable harvest will therefore be required to keep numbers in balance.

Buffalo are also a sensitive issue in the export trade. This is an issue that requires an increased research effort. AgriFutures Australia invests in research, development and extension (RD&E) and engaged with industry to ensure the five year research priorities meet industry needs. The first priority outlined in the Buffalo Program Strategic RD&E Plan 2021-2025 is to reduce mortality and improve health and welfare of buffalo within the live export supply chain.

The NTBIC works with all sides of politics to advocate for the best interests of our members and the industry.

(a) Membership benefits

Membership of the NTBIC has the following practical benefits:

- The NTBIC acts as the main channel of communication between Governments and the buffalo industry, and also between the buffalo industry and other industry stakeholders, such as exporters, the NLC, Aboriginal Ranger groups and Rum Jungle Abattoir. A good example is the NTBIC's input into government regulations for buffalo harvest, transport, export preparation and shipping, which are markedly different from cattle regulations as they deal with quite different issues.
- The NTBIC provides market development and information, such as overseas trade delegations, filling of export orders, and negotiation with abattoirs. A good example is the NTBIC's work in designing facilities at the abattoirs to adapt loading ramps and stunning equipment to manage buffalo. 50 countries are accessible for Australian boxed buffalo meat however import protocols are still to be drafted for Australian buffalo meat into Vietnam.
- The NTBIC collaborates in research and helps to guide research priorities. In the last few years, the NTBIC has been working with CSIRO to study ways of humane stunning that would be acceptable for Halal slaughter. This project is now complete. The NTBIC is actively engaged with AgriFutures to develop the 2021-2025 Strategic RD&E plan for buffalo. The NTBIC's main research priority is reducing mortalities in the live export chain and the development of mobile processing facilities for improved WHS, traceability and biosecurity outcomes in the field.
- The NTBIC works to safeguard the industry's social licence to operate. Social licence has historically been defined as the acceptance granted to an organisation, or industry, by the community, closely aligned with meeting community expectations and trust. The main recent example is the NTBIC's Code of Practice, which is gradually becoming the standard operating procedure that the market insists on. The Code of Practice provides a quality assurance framework for the industry.
- The NTBIC actively works with industry and government groups committed to improving Industry Safety and Training and works closely with other business groups, such as NT Road Transport Association, NT Cattleman's Association and NT Live Export Association on relevant safety and training issues.
 - The NTBIC has a strategic plan aimed at increasing the size of the industry. The market complications, which brought the buffalo industry below a viable scale in the 1990s and 2000s arose from BTEC. This has started to turn round in the last five years, but growing the industry is essential to the industry's future prosperity. The limitation is not the market nor the stock numbers in Arnhem Land, but the supply chain between the two. The NTBIC is planning a Round table to bring all stakeholders together to specifically focus on supply chain issues.
- The NTBIC provides information to the media and public to enhance the image of the industry and in response to events or issues arising.
- The NTBIC in conjunction with the Australian Buffalo Industry Council writes and distributes a quarterly newsletter to a wide distribution readership.
- The NTBIC role has increased as the NT Government's scientific capacity in buffalo

has declined, and this is likely to further increase with reductions in buffalo numbers at Beatrice Hill.

- The NTBIC provides help when it's needed. During the border lockdowns members benefitted from the NTBIC's assistance to develop and implement COVID-19 Management Plans, address training requirements, manage PPE supplies and deal with internal and external border restrictions whilst continuing to meet demand for supply. The NTBIC presented a consistent and coherent voice to Government and key stakeholders on the impacts of COVID-19 decisions on the buffalo industry.

(b) Assessment of membership and membership structure

- As the peak industry body for buffalo producers the NTBIC has in recent years played a key role in advancing the development of standards and best practices through the development of the Buffalo Industry Code of Practice.
- Membership benefits include providing a collective industry voice to all tiers of government, the public and media with significant efficiencies derived from a whole of-industry approach.
- Membership participation allows members to improve their business performance through timely access to relevant information and legislative changes affecting their businesses.
- Two membership categories are outlined in the Constitution. Full member includes buffalo producers, mustering contractors
- New membership applications are assessed by the NTBIC Board.

(c) Assessment of membership subscription, fees and levies

- Individual membership fees are set at \$100 per annum (+GST). The NTBIC has no wish to alter this fee at present, believing that it would be counterproductive to raise fees at a time when the priority is to attract members.
- The NTBIC has a proposal to implement a voluntary transaction payment of \$5 per head of buffalo sold to provide the necessary resources to support the industry's development. This was endorsed by a special general meeting of the NTBIC. Advice is being sourced to make the necessary arrangements for collection of the monies from exporters and the Rum Jungle abattoir in the NT.

(d) Other Memberships

The NTBIC holds the following memberships:

- Australian Buffalo Industry Council
- NT Business Council
- CRC Northern Australia
- Territory NRM

The NTBIC has strong relationships with other business groups including:

- NT Livestock Exporters Association
- NT Farmers
- NT Cattleman's Association.



Louise Bilato
Executive Officer