

# N.T. BUFFALO INDUSTRY COUNCIL INCORPORATED

ABN 34 355 734 719



**Report 3 submitted by the NT Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) as completion of Milestone 4 of the Funding Agreement between the Northern Territory Government and the NTBIC, dated 16 March 2021 and revised 11 May 2022.**

## **Background**

The NT Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) was first incorporated in 1982 and since 2000 has been directly affiliated with the Australian Buffalo Industry Council. This report outlines key stakeholder engagements during 2020-2021.

Most importantly, the NTBIC is committed to supporting the buffalo industry achieve its goals whilst promoting an ethically responsible and sustainable future.

The NTBIC has a Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan, which aligns with the Council's 2019 – 2024 Strategic Plan. The key objectives of the Communication and Engagement Plan are to ensure that all stakeholders:

- Understand and support the NTBIC's purpose to facilitate opportunities to build a viable buffalo industry in the Northern Territory capable of competing in the global meat market.
- Understand the NTBIC's role to lead, advocate, organise and facilitate the growth of the buffalo industry.
- Are aware of the value of a well organised industry, and NTBIC membership.
- Understand the Buffalo Code of Practice and its purpose to inform of legal obligations throughout the supply chain.
- Are consulted about the future development of the industry.
- Understand the role of the NTBIC to foster mutually beneficial partnerships to ensure changes in the government regulatory environment are informed and enable the buffalo industry to make effective and realistic business investment decisions.

## **Consultations with Government**

Despite levels of uncertainty about trade access due to COVID-19 the live export of buffalo increased with a total of 10,833 buffalo exported in 2020.

Representatives of the NTBIC met with NT Government Ministers during 2020-2021 including:

- Minister for Agribusiness and Aquaculture, Hon Nicole Manison
- Minister for Small Business, Minister for Jobs and Training, Hon Paul Kirby
- Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, Hon Eva Lawler
- Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Parks and Rangers, Hon Selena Uibo

The NTBIC also met with Member for Arafura, Mr Lawrence Costa to discuss buffalo issues in his electorate as well as the Member for Solomon, Mr Luke Gosling OAM MP. At the

invitation of NT Farmers, the NTBIC met with Shadow Agriculture Minister, Joel Fitzgibbon MP.

Lobbying efforts were strategically focussed on:

- Management of the Arnhem Land buffalo population and costs associated with mustering and aerial culling.
- Aboriginal Land Rights Act, s 19 land use applications, agreements, payment of buffalo royalties and timelines for consultations and approvals processes by NLC staff.
- Road infrastructure and road access including upgrading the unsealed regional road network to strengthen the supply chain.
- Biosecurity including animal, plant disease and weed management to prevent the spread of Gamba grass and mimosa as well as the risk of African Swine Fever, found in Timor-Leste.
- Federal and NT Government stimulus packages including truck wash facilities to strengthen biosecurity.

The NTBIC worked closely with government representatives to implement COVID-19 Management Plans, provide advice and education on internal and external border restrictions as well as economic recovery priorities.

Discussions with the Department of Primary Industry and Resources (DPIR), now Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (DITT) were initiated to examine the risks to human safety and animal welfare caused by NLIS tagging and dehorning buffalo in temporary yards on Aboriginal owned lands without adequate infrastructure. Existing regulations require buffalo to be NLIS tagged in the field prior to departure from site of offtake. An outcome of the discussions was the inclusion of a priority research project examining engineering solutions for a portable crush to tag and dehorn buffalo in the AgriFutures 5 year RD&E Plan.

NTBIC liaised with the NT Chief Veterinary Officer on various matters for example biosecurity risks, African Swine Fever risks and wild dog management.

During 2019 the NTBIC represented ABIC on the Stakeholder Reference Group advising the Technical Advisory Committee reviewing the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL). Following extensive consultations version 3 of the ASEL was implemented from 01 November 2020. The review process identified an urgent need for scientific evidence on causes of buffalo mortalities on livestock vessels. Reduced stocking densities and additional costs on export buffalo were imposed due to the buffalo industry's lack of evidence based research to demonstrate differences in the onboard management of buffalo and cattle. Investigation of best practice methods to reduce death rates of heavy buffalo (over 500kg) is a high priority project for buffalo research.

NTBIC continued its long standing working relationship with Beatrice Hill Research Station facilitating buffalo sales and providing advice to farm management as well as prospective buyers.

NTBIC was represented at the EvokeAG conference in Melbourne in February 2020 by Board Member, Barry Lemcke.

### **Industry led consultations.**

The NTBIC AGM was held on 15 October 2020 with the appointment of Michael Swart replacing outgoing President, Ian Bradford. At the General Meeting held immediately after the AGM it was reported that consultations with NT Farmers CEO, Paul Burke, working through the details of an arrangement to transfer the day-to-day operations of the NTBIC under the umbrella of NT Farmers, were ongoing. (See Appendix 1.)

To better understand critical issues of mutual concern the NTBIC actively engages with Aboriginal Ranger groups and corporations including:

- Mimal Land Rangers
- Arafura Swamp Rangers
- Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation
- Gundjehme Aboriginal Corporation
- Wardekker Rangers

The NTBIC represents members' interests at meetings and events throughout the year including:

- CRCNA
- Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment
- Office of Northern Australia
- CSIRO

NTBIC signed a sales agreement with the owner of Annaburroo Station to purchase 164 buffalo via a deferred payment plan. Annaburroo Station has medium-term plans to target the TenderBuff® market and the NTBIC will provide market access assistance, as required.

22 buffalo owned by the NTBIC are on agistment at Annaburroo station with the intention that they be sold to offset operational costs incurred by the NTBIC during 2020-2021.

NTBIC liaised closely with Rum Jungle Abattoir and Central AgriGroup personnel throughout the reporting period. Assistance was provided to address workforce and buffalo throughput issues arising. NTBIC shares information regarding the fortnightly pricing grid, demand and facilitates resolution of supply-side constraints, where possible.

NTBIC board members were invited to inspect the Rum Jungle facilities to enhance buffalo processing throughput on three separate occasions during its first year of operations. The abattoir was hampered by Indonesian veterinary specialists being unable to travel to the NT to carry out accreditation inspections at the Rum Jungle facilities due to COVID-19. Vietnamese import protocols for boxed buffalo meat are yet to be completed.

NTBIC liaised with NT Livestock Exporters Association (NTLEA) CEO and directly with exporters on a regular basis to discuss export demand and the impacts of ASEL version 3

on transport of buffalo on livestock vessels. An urgent priority research project is focused on the reduction of mortality in the live export chain. The priority has been recognised by AgriFutures Australia with terms of reference, enabling the tender process, to be drafted in the near future.

### **Consultations with AgriFutures Australia**

The AgriFutures Buffalo Program invests in research, development and extension (RD&E) to foster a sustainable, safe and more profitable Australian buffalo industry. In making its RD&E investment decisions AgriFutures Australia takes a lifecycle approach to ensure the research is useful and adopted by end users. NTBIC representation with AgriFutures Australia is via ABIC. NTBIC is an active member of the ABIC RD&E subcommittee and in 2020 submitted a list of research priorities to the ABIC subcommittee for consideration.

NTBIC actively engaged with the selected consultants throughout the process to draft the Buffalo Strategic RD&E plan 2021-2025. This plan aligns with AgriFutures' vision to grow the long term prosperity of Australian rural industries and identified five critical research priorities.

- Priority 1      Reduction of mortality in the live export chain.
- Priority 2      Free range processing equipment.
- Priority 3      Measurement of feed conversion efficiency.
- Priority 4      Ration formulation for feeding of milking buffalo.
- Priority 5      Market insight study for improved buffalo products.

NTBIC briefed the AgriFutures Board on the nature and composition of the Australian buffalo industry. The industry is divided into the free-range buffalo industry in the NT targeting meat markets, through live export or abattoirs and the dairy buffalo industry.

### **Consultations with NT Farmers**

NT Farmers and the NTBIC have met on:

- 05 December 2019
- 05 February 2020
- 09 July 2020
- 30 October 2020
- 10 November 2020
- 11 February 2021

A draft Member services agreement was circulated to NTBIC members at the General Meeting held on 15 October 2020. The agreement outlines the following activities to be transferred to NT Farmers:

- Corporate governance activities delivered on a fee for service basis.
- Income and expenditure and audit preparation
- NT Farmers' CEO holding the position of CEO of the NTBIC with authority to speak publicly on behalf of the NTBIC.
- Member stakeholder liaison and advice and responding to public enquiries.

- Representation to all levels of government, lobbying and developing strategic partnerships.
- Committee meetings
- Maintaining insurances
- Access to NT Farmers' facilitated events, training, workshops and networking
- Identifying opportunities for external funding

NTBIC Board Members are not united on buffalo industry representation being transferred under the umbrella of NT Farmers and have not, as yet, endorsed the NT Farmers Member Services Agreement.

NTBIC's is committed to the employment of an Industry Development and Code of Practice Compliance Officer to support industry growth and Aboriginal Enterprise development on Aboriginal lands. The preferred option for the sustainability of the Council remains payment of a voluntary contribution per buffalo sold into live export or abattoir.

While the NTBIC will continue to consult with NT Farmers on collaborations of mutual interest a more agreeable services agreement and strategically aligned services agreement has since commenced with NT Livestock Exporters Association.

This agreement reflects the shared objectives of the NTLEA and NTBIC members with regard to supply chain development, market growth and disease risk management.

Coinciding the commencement of this agreement with NTLEA in early 2022, in light of the heightened biosecurity risks facing the NT livestock industries, NTBIC is being more regularly engaged in consulting and advising the NT Government and Commonwealth agencies on wide-ranging activities to help inform and shape biosecurity preparedness.

The pronounced risks associated with potential incursions of bovine diseases has confirmed the need for NTBIC's operational viability, as fundamental priority for buffalo industry stakeholders (including government). Similarly, as production, market and biosecurity risks and opportunities evolve rapidly and dramatically, the suitability of different funding models will continue to be considered.

With this in mind, ongoing engagement regarding future financial structures is progressing.

NT Buffalo Industry Council  
Executive