



# NABSnet

# Newsletter

#60 | 22 April 2026

## NABSnet info

Hi all

**The NABSnet SDI Skills+ workshop is a great opportunity for private vets in our network to participate in hands-on training. Details below, and applications close soon, so act now if you want to be in the mix.**

It was great to see many of you at the Masterclass in Perth in March. Another terrific event with lots of opportunities to learn, meet people and earn 13 VetEd CPD points! Thanks to all, especially Tom Clune at DPIRD who did so much of the organisational heavy-lifting.

We will feature some of the content from the Masterclass topics in NABSnet newsletters and on the website – starting this month with tips from Rick Last on how to best collect and submit brain samples.

### **SDI REPORTS - MUST NOW BE SUBMITTED WITHIN 3 MONTHS OF THE DATE OF THE FINAL PATH REPORT**

Your reports are key to us getting value from the SDIs - both to share with the network and to underpin biosecurity surveillance - but they have to be timely to do this. To receive the subsidy all SDI reports will now need to come to me within 3 months of the date of the final path report.

So... write the report... leave it overnight, read it again... and hit 'send'.

Cheers Bill



Bill Tranter  
NABSnet Vet Adviser

## In-person NABSnet SDI Skills+ workshops

**\*\*\*\*APPLY NOW - CLOSING SOON\*\*\*\***

These small-group 3-day field workshops with Tristan Jubb will be run at his location in Bendigo, VIC.

Participants will gain hands-on experience in the field with the learning objectives covering:

- Refinement of practical skills in field autopsy and specimen collection.
- Strengthened understanding of disease investigation frameworks.
- Practice of humane euthanasia using captive bolts, jabsticks, and other methods.
- Improved efficiency and safety in equipment use, including knife sharpening.
- Building confidence in packaging and dispatching diagnostic samples.
- Building competence in mentoring others in these skills.

**NABSnet has funding for 8 private practitioners - to cover all training costs and provide a \$2200 travel subsidy. Choose Sept, Oct or Nov 2026.**

**Applications close Friday 8 May.**

Enquiries to Tom De Ridder e: [NABS@aff.gov.au](mailto:NABS@aff.gov.au) m: 0401 877 670



**[more info and application form here](#)**

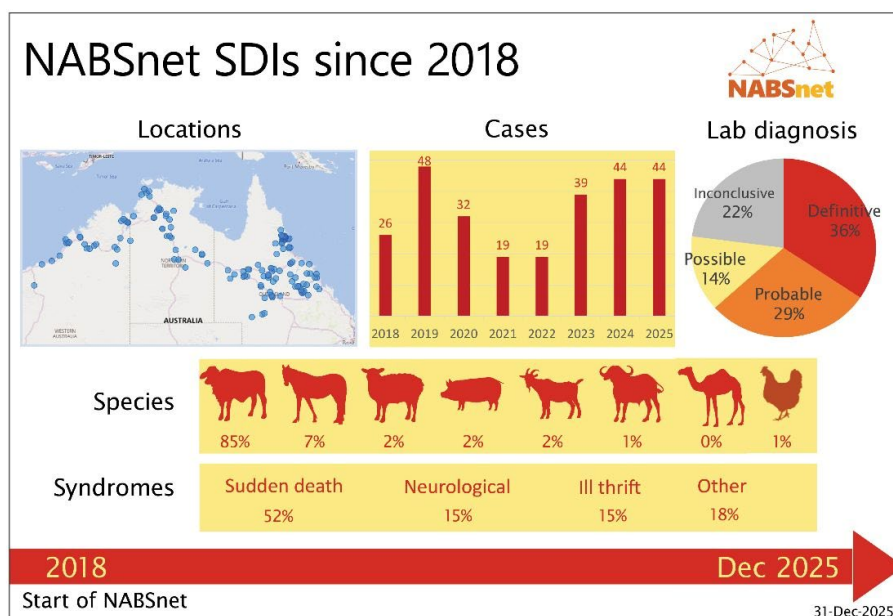
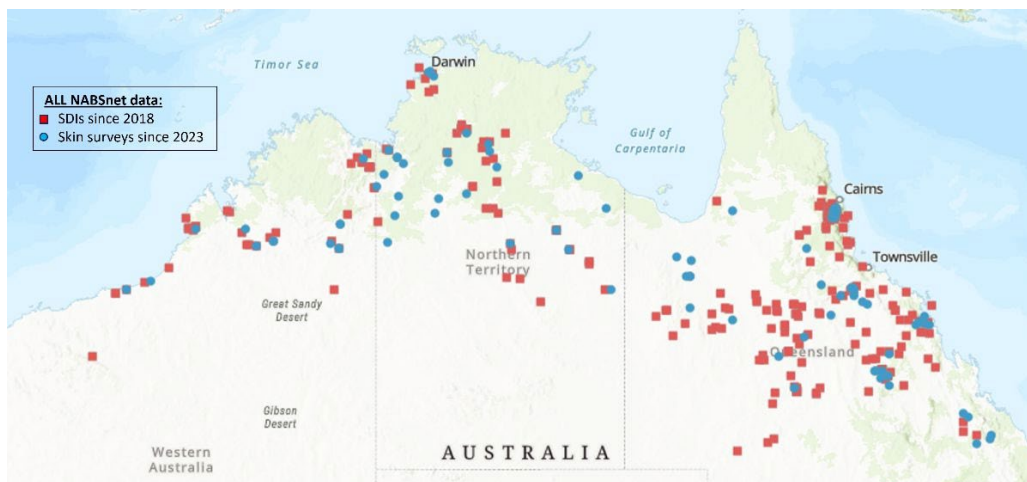
## NABSnet SDIs (since 2018), skin surveys (since 2023)

NABSnet increases general surveillance in northern Australia by supporting private veterinary practitioners to complete investigations of significant disease events.

Since it began in 2018 the network has increased the number and quality of significant disease investigations (SDIs) completed with laboratory input and expanded biosecurity coverage across the north.

SDIs provide feedback to producers about endemic diseases on their properties, and each investigation represents an opportunity to generate an evidence-base of test negative samples in support of Australia's animal health status. The skin survey also contributes to our evidence of absence of Lumpy skin disease.

The map and dashboard show the locations and results of SDIs.



On the website there is also a list that summarises key features of the SDIs over the last 12 months - worth looking through to check what diseases others are have been seeing.

The cases from this time last year are shown below.

Date	State	Animals	Presentation	Numbers [sick/dead/at risk]	Diagnosis with lab findings	Dx confidence	NND exclusions
Apr 25	WA	horses	sudden and severe distress leading to euthanasia	0 / 3 / 16	likely toxic plant (ironwood)	possible	Hendra virus, JEV, ABLV, MVE, WNV, EEV group, Equine herpesvirus
Apr 25	QLD	cattle	lethargy, disorientation, recumbency then death	? / 20 / ?	BEF	definitive	none
Apr 25	QLD	horses	neurological signs, icterus	2 / 5 / ?	pyrrolizidine alkaloid toxicosis	definitive	Hendra virus, Equine Infectious
May 25	WA	cattle	skin lesions	50 / 0 / 200	hypersensitivity dermatitis	probable	Lumpy skin disease virus
May 25	NT	cattle	respiratory signs	8 / 6 / 400	BRD - bacterial pneumonia (pasteurella multocida, Mannheimia haemolytica, Histophilus somni)	definitive	none



**[check out the list of SDIs in the last 12 months](#)**

**'one of the best programs – fantastic enthusiasm'**



## **NABSnet Masterclass, WA March 2026:**

- 32 private vets representing 25 businesses across WA, NT and QLD
- 11 government vets, including speakers, pathologists (from WA and QLD)
- 9 others - production animal vets from Murdoch Uni, botanists and Murdoch Uni vet students who are recipients of the 2026 NABS student subsidies

Highlights included:

- SDI presentations by private practitioners – sharing experiences and tips.
- Guest speakers covering approaches to investigations where nutritional issues or plant toxicities are suspected
- Pathologists' advice on ways to enhance the usefulness of samples submitted.
- Global updates on EADs from Australia's acting Chief Veterinary Officer, WA's Chief Veterinary Officer, veterinary epidemiologist and pathologists, including the contribution that NABSnet SDIs and skin survey results make to our surveillance
- A tour of DPIRD's molecular laboratory that showed the processes, requirements and timeframes for EAD screening and exclusion testing.



## Tips on brains - best results (and 😊 pathologists)

At the Masterclass pathologist Rick Last gave a shout out for the brain – the value of good samples in disease investigations, and tips on achieving them.

**Gross post-mortem examination of the brain does have significant limitations** – can only see congestion, oedema, haemorrhage, abscessation, large areas of necrosis (encephalomalacia) and cavitation (porencephaly, hydranencephaly, hydrocephalus), malformations and tapeworm cysts.

**Histopathology has high diagnostic specificity** allowing for the identification of:

- Inflammation - meningitis/myelitis (bacterial, fungal), encephalitis (viral), meningoencephalitis (protozoal).
- Degenerative changes (hypoxic, metabolic, nutritional, toxic, viral) includes axonopathies / myelopathies / neuronopathies (toxic, dystrophy, nutritional, metabolic), spongiform encephalomyelopathies (prion diseases, storage diseases, hepatic/renal encephalopathy).
- Necrotic changes - encephalomalacia/polio-encephalomalacia (hypoxic, metabolic, nutritional, toxic, bacterial, fungal, viral).
- Neoplastic conditions.

When these pathologies are linked to the anatomical distribution within the central nervous system, they often provide diagnostically specific information.

Sending good brain samples is well worth the effort.

## Sampling brains



- ✓ Remove the whole brain
- ✓ Collect a sterile wedge of dorsal cerebellum and spinal cord for culture and possible advanced molecular techniques. Place in a sterile container.
- ✓ Immerse the remaining whole brain in formalin.

Tips from Rick Last (pathologist DPIRD)

## Fixing brains



- ✓ Use sufficient 10% neutral buffered formalin in a sufficiently large pot (2L adult bovine) so **the entire brain 'floats'**. Should be 10x the volume of the samples.
- ✓ **Position the cerebrum down** – so that the caudal brainstem is not bent or twisted.

Tips from Rick Last (pathologist DPIRD)

## Fixing brains

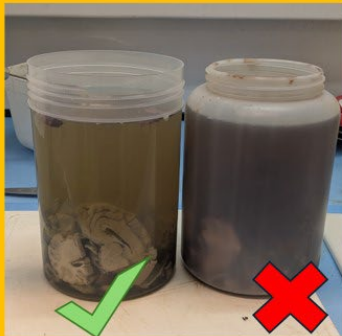


- ✓ For large brains fix in neutral buffered formalin at room temperature **for at least 3 days** (replenish formalin daily).

Don't put the formalin pots in the fridge (slow incomplete fixation) or freezer (freezing artefacts).

Tips from Rick Last (pathologist DPIRD)

## Sending brains

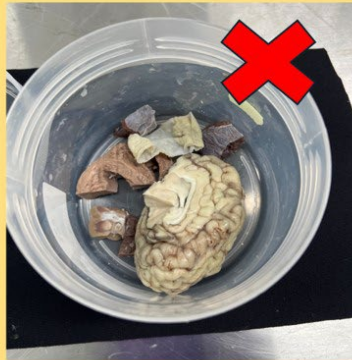


- ✓ **Use wide-necked formalin jars** – easy to remove brain, no handling mutilation.

Narrow necked jars – brain swells with formalin fixation and difficult to remove from the pot without damaging tissue.

Tips from Rick Last (pathologist DPIRD)

## Fixing tissues



**NEVER** place tissues in an empty formalin pot first then add formalin later.

Samples stick to one another and the side of the pot creating significant poor fixation issues.

**ALWAYS** ensure formalin pots are filled with 10% neutral buffered **before** commencing the necropsy.

Tips from Rick Last (pathologist DPIRD)

## Fixing tissues



**Use commercial premixed neutral buffered formalin**

- ✓ Reduces handling of formalin (mixing of stock solutions) – formalin is carcinogenic.
- ✓ Avoids inadequate fixation of tissues (understrength solutions).
- ✓ Avoids excessive shrinkage and pigment deposits (overstrength solutions).

Tips from Rick Last (pathologist DPIRD)

[more info on removing and sending brains](#)

## Boehringer announcement on EAD study support

Boehringer Ingelheim are proud to continue a program to support veterinarians in their efforts to develop their knowledge and practical experience in the field of emergency animal disease (EAD).

As a world leader in vaccines to manage the risk and impact of infectious diseases, Boehringer Ingelheim understand and recognise the critical role of veterinarians in EAD surveillance and response preparedness.

The Program aims to provide a financial contribution to veterinarians to support their travel costs associated with visiting to relevant countries to gain firsthand experience of EAD diagnosis and management, or participate in other activities proposed to enhance their skills and knowledge in the field of EAD. Boehringer Ingelheim will support up to 4 Proposals each year for the next 2 – 3 years.

### **Who can apply?**

All private practitioners (veterinarians) registered in Australia are able to apply for funding support.

### **How to apply?**

Submit a description of the proposed activity to Boehringer Ingelheim. Boehringer Ingelheim will review applications on a Quarterly basis in collaboration with the NABSnet committee.

Successful candidates will be expected to share their learnings with the NABSnet network of veterinarians.

### **What to include in a proposal?**

Your proposal could make reference to the following criteria to assist the review committee:

- Your general interest and experience in EAD
- Nature of the activity you propose (high level)
- Relevance of your proposal to Australia's Northern Australia biosecurity network
- Proposal to share the learnings / outcomes with peers

### **Where to apply:**

[Techvets.au@boehringer-ingelheim.com](mailto:Techvets.au@boehringer-ingelheim.com)

### **What will Boehringer Ingelheim contribute?**

Boehringer Ingelheim will provide support (via re-imbusement) up to 75% for total travel expenses up to \$10,000

## Cattle Skin Survey - routine skin conditions

**NABSnet Cattle Skin Survey. The process is now easier for busy vets in the field and for collation of the results.**

NOW you send the photos and submission forms by email (not text message), dispatch the samples, and then send the invoice. You no longer need to send in the results – they will be collated from the lab.

BUT for the samples to be eligible for the subsidy, we must receive images and the additional Cattle Skin Survey submission form by email to [NABS@aff.gov.au](mailto:NABS@aff.gov.au)

### How to participate

1. Take photos of the lesions
2. Get punch biopsies (fresh + fixed)
3. Collect serum and EDTA bloods (if possible, not critical).
4. Fill in the Lab submission form **AND** the Cattle Skin Survey submission form. Both forms are necessary so we can analyse the data.
5. Email photos and both submission forms to the state lab (email addresses below) **AND** to [NABS@aff.gov.au](mailto:NABS@aff.gov.au)
6. Pack and freight samples and submission forms to your relevant state lab, to arrive the next day.



7. Send an invoice for \$600+GST  
to [NABS@aff.gov.au](mailto:NABS@aff.gov.au)

Email photos and submission forms to:

NT: [BVL.DITT@nt.gov.au](mailto:BVL.DITT@nt.gov.au) or

QLD: [bslclo@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:bslclo@daf.qld.gov.au) or

WA: [DDLS@dpird.wa.gov.au](mailto:DDLS@dpird.wa.gov.au)

AND [NABS@aff.gov.au](mailto:NABS@aff.gov.au)

[download instructions and submission form here](#)

**Key contacts**

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Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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