NABSnet Newsletter

#61 | 12 June 2026

NABSnet info

Hi all in our network

In this newsletter:

- Details of an SDI that is on-going at the moment - mature cows dead with massive haemorrhages
- Results of the cattle skin survey so far - and encouragement to keep submitting. And an update on Screw Worm Fly awareness
- Some notes from the Masterclass on writing up SDI reports
- Important DAFF 'pre-border' work along the PNG coastline

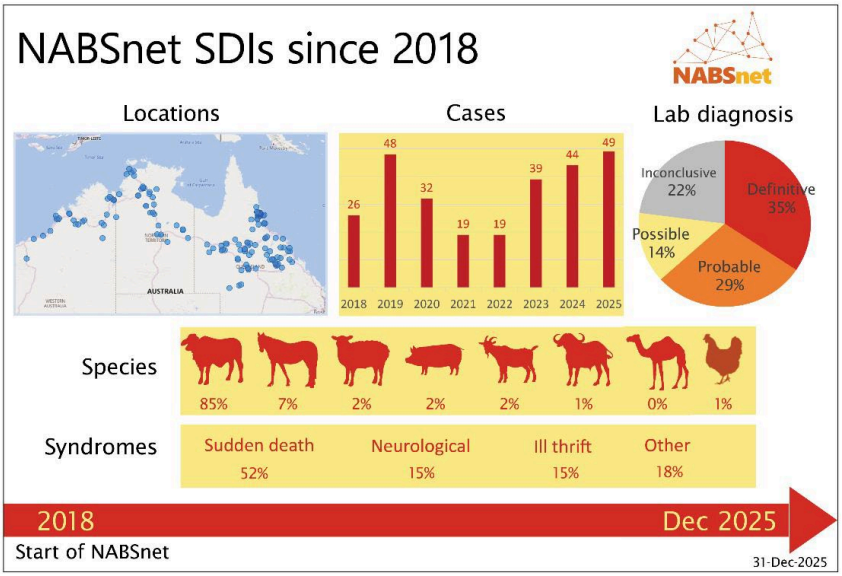
Bill Tranter
NABSnet Vet Adviser

And also, to let you know that recently Nina Kung has stepped down as the Queensland Dept representative on the NABSnet program and Ben Rhodes has taken up the reins.

Thanks so much Nina for being a driver behind NABSnet ever since its inception – we have always appreciated your dedication to making it work and look forward to your continuing involvement. Welcome to you Ben, and good to hear a bit more about your veterinary journey (so far) down below.

REMINDER: SDI REPORTS - MUST NOW BE SUBMITTED WITHIN 3 MONTHS OF THE FINAL PATH REPORT

Cheers Bill



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
Jun 25	QLD	cattle	neurological, sudden death	1 / 8 / 70	Hepatopathy, PA toxicosis	definitive	none
Jun 25	QLD	cattle	ill thrift, diarrhoea, moribund	324 / 2 / 1373	Coccidiosis (Eimeria zuernii)	definitive	none
Jul 25	WA	cattle	respiratory signs	8 / 15 / 600	BRD - bacterial pneumonia (pasteurella multocida, Mannheimia haemolytica, Histophilus somni)	definitive	none
Jul 25	NT	cattle	ill thrift	2 / 0 / 15	pneumonia + coccidiosis	inconclusive	none
Jul 25	QLD	cattle	lethargy, disorientation, recumbency then death	20 / 50 /550	Lantana camara psg	definitive	none
Jul 25	QLD	cattle	weak/recumbent, dead in 24hrs	? / 20 / ?	probably botulism, can't rule out BEF	probable	none
Jul 25	QLD	cattle	sudden death in weaners after eating rotten rice from ruptured silo	0 / 25 / ?	mycotoxicosis	probable	none
Jul 25	QLD	cattle	neurological, profuse watery scour, losing condition	80 / 80 / 800	Yersinia pseudotuberculosis	definitive	none
Jul 25	QLD	cattle	reproductive, approx 23% abortion rate over 12 months	60 / 0 / 265	Neospora caninum	probable	consider Brucella abortus

check out the list of SDIs in the last 12 months

Sudden death in 6 dairy cows – diffuse haemorrhages – cause not yet unidentified

In May 2026 in FNQ three mature, mixed-breed dairy cows presented with ataxia prior to afternoon milking. They were each given a flopak subcutaneously but died overnight. Next morning five others had health alerts on the herd computer system via the individual cow monitoring collars and were off feed. On clinical examination they showed red inflamed third eyelids and dark coloured urine. Post mortem examinations were done on the dead animals. One more cow died five days later; the other cows recovered.

Timeline: point epidemic pattern suggests common exposure to an agent (e.g. to a toxin).

Clinical pathology: bloods from three sick cows showed elevated GGT, GLDH, AST and bilirubin indicating cholestasis and hepatic pathology.

Gross PM findings: haemorrhages were seen spread throughout the carcasses – multifocal to coalescing.

Multifocal, irregularly defined haemorrhage throughout the mesentery and serosa of the forestomachs (L) and spleen (R)

Congested liver (L) and dilated gall bladder (R)

Multifocal to coalescing haemorrhages on the epicardium (L) and diffuse haemorrhage in lungs (R)

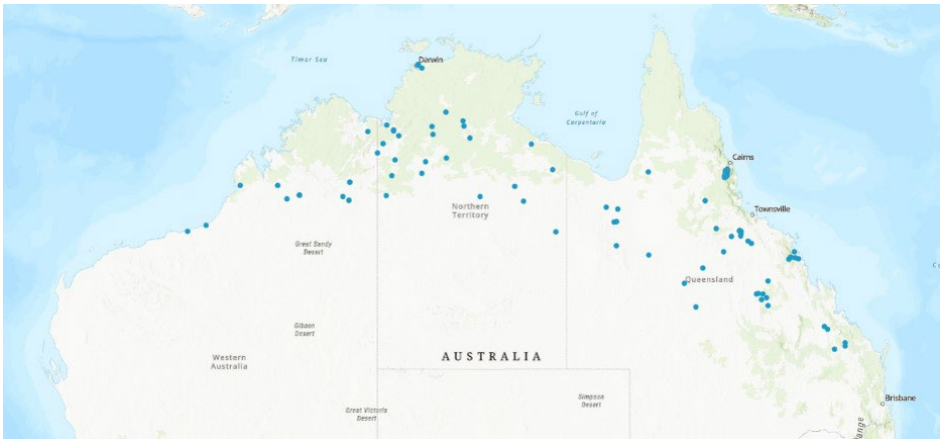
Histopathology: massive hepatocyte necrosis with blood pooling in sinusoids and haemorrhages in multiple organs. No flukes were seen (+ faecal exam negative for fluke).
Differential diagnoses: Liver lesions consistent with toxic plant poisoning, but none of the likely plants (e.g. green cestrum, poison peach, Noogoora burr, Bathurst burr) are known to occur on the property. Other possible hepatotoxins include: cyanobacteria, Amanita mushrooms, some flowering plants (e.g. Myoporum, Eremophila, Wedelia) and leaves or seeds of cycads.
Animal factors: all cows were mature; four were empty and four due to calve in September; all were 7-in-1 vaccinated.
Management: the cows were located in pasture and milked twice daily. Their diet was grazed tropical pasture and commercial grain pellets; one cow was brought in from a different area in the previous week but otherwise no recent changes to location, feed, husbandry or staff had occurred.
Recommendations:
Immediate action was to remove the herd from the paddocks where the deaths occurred. Follow-up actions – close environmental scan failed to find obvious source of toxin. Lab examination of pasture and pellet samples showed no signs of fungal growth.

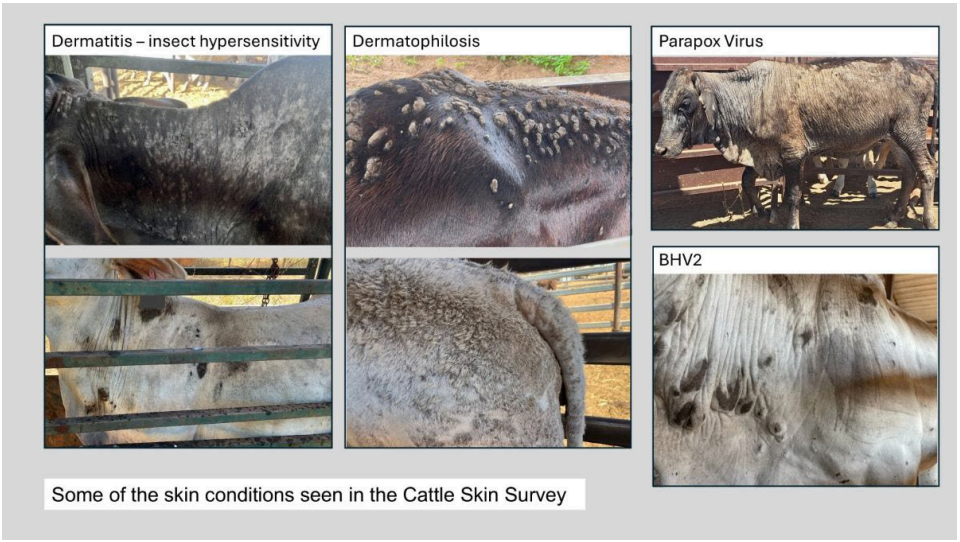
Samples from the Cattle Skin Survey

Samples from cattle skin conditions seen as 'incidental lesions' by vets during routine work across the north are:

- Supporting trade market access - by contributing to proof-of-freedom data for LSD
- Building the laboratory confirmed database on endemic skin conditions in northern Australia, with clear, accurate photos of lesions

To date (May 2023 to Feb 2026): 218 cattle sampled right across the north

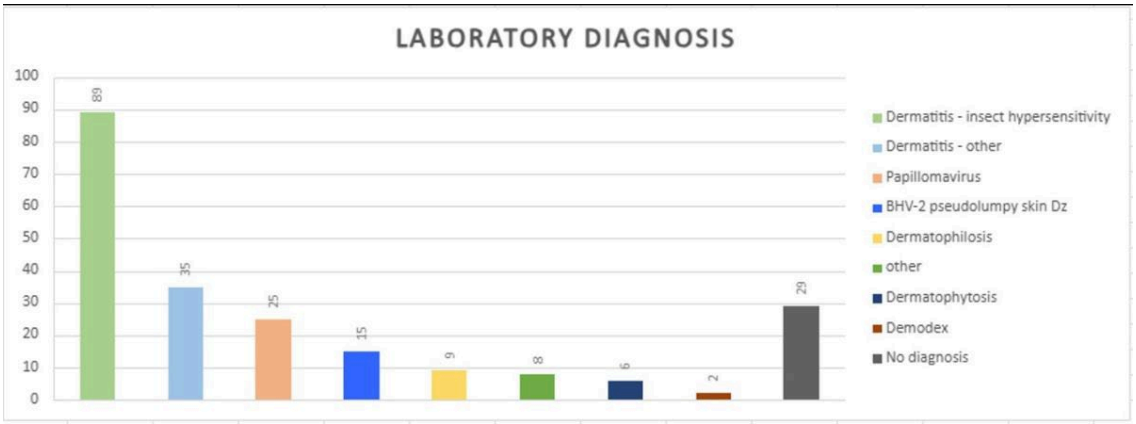




Some of the skin conditions seen in the Cattle Skin Survey

We don’t have the Capripox virus that causes LSD but we do have lumps on cattle in Australia from plenty of other causes!

All LSD virus negative (thankfully!)
57% = Dermatitis – insect hypersensitivity or other cause
12% = Papillomavirus
7% = BHV-2 pseudo-LSD



The NABSnet Cattle Skin Survey process is easy and there is a subsidy payment, so keep up the good work (or join in if you haven't already).

download instructions and submission form here

Screwworm fly – have kits on hand

In light of New World screwworm fly recently reported in Texas after being absent from the USA for 50 years, it seems prudent to write about the more relevant risk to Australia – Old World screwworm fly (SWF).

Both New World and Old World screwworm fly cause significant losses in livestock &

wildlife, with the larval maggot stages infesting any open wound and eating healthy flesh. Our extensive pastoral systems where young cattle are marked then turned out to reunite with their dams and recover could mean that SWF would go unnoticed for weeks or longer.

Old World screwworm fly is present in all our northern neighbouring countries. It is a big fly, so unlikely to survive the north-westerly monsoonal winds that bring other smaller insects to the Australian mainland. All returning livestock vessels have active insect surveillance and are treated to reduce the risk of bringing back hitchhiker insects including flies. Live animals on unregulated maritime arrivals (MUA) including illegal foreign fishing vessels harbouring maggots in infested wounds that then pupate and hatch into flies along our coastline is another well-recognised potential pathway. Operation Lunar is the whole-of-government approach to managing risks associated with MUA, including animal biosecurity concerns, and there is active monitoring for this pathway.

So an unlikely incursion, but with massive consequences.

Distribution of Chrysomya bezziana
From: A Manual for the Identification of Screw-worm Fly (5th edn), 2025
Animal Health Australia

We have an extensive network of third parties that are tasked with collecting maggots from wounds on live animals (& humans!), and we'd like to remind NABSnet vets that should you come across any myiasis that you join in to add to Australia's proof-of-freedom from SWF, or potentially detect an early case to enable a successful and efficient response.

There is an easy-to-use kit with clear Instructions, and everything provided for you.

Please contact NABSnet admin (NABS@aff.gov.au) if you want maggot collection kits sent to your clinic - the kits are great to have on hand.

see info on collecting SWF maggots

Smashing out SDI reports

Bill Tranter shares his wealth of knowledge on disease investigations with tips on how to write them up painlessly (and a tiny poetic tip too)

Every NABSnet SDI contributes to our understanding of livestock diseases in the north – what's here (and what's not) – and how we can assist producers to stop or prevent losses from disease. The SDI report is key to sharing this info, so it is an integral part of the SDI process. It is also a really helpful in clarifying your thoughts about the case. Disease investigation is a really rewarding part of veterinary life.

There is a template on the NABSnet website for writing a short, punchy, painless SDI report. Here are some tips:

Using this approach gives you…

- A reminder of steps that may be helpful when conducting an investigation – important concepts for your toolbag
- A checklist of useful headings - to help you smash out a report soon after lab results are available – **within 3 months**
- Useful information that will be recorded in the NABSnet SDI data base
- A document that can be quickly edited (if required) for the client

Checklist…

1. **Short informative title**

2. **Brief engaging summary** - location / date of the outbreak, scale, clinical syndrome

3. **Case description / definition**

- Presenting signs
- Morbidity / mortality rates
- Pattern of disease – time/ place / animal characteristics

4. **Investigation**

- Clinical signs –– photos if possible
- Gross postmortem findings – clear labelled photos if possible
- Paddock and environmental examination
- Differential diagnoses – any EAD exclusions?
- Summary of laboratory results

5. **Interpretation** – your assessment:

- Which management, environmental and animal (MEA) factors have possibly:
    - reduced the resistance of the animals involved?
    - increased exposure to a potential pathogen?

6. **Discussion** – any limitations in the investigation or samples taken or other points

7. **Recommendations to producer -** how to prevent more cases! Strategies to i**ncrease** resistance and **reduce** exposure

- May not have to fix everything to prevent more cases
- May not even have to get a diagnosis to prevent more cases

Email to... The NABSnet Vet Adviser – Bill Tranter (bill@tablelandvet.com.au).
Attach report / photos / final lab report - **HIT SEND**

And enjoy the process…

- Prior planning prevents ……!!
- Focus and determination are often required
- Disease events are puzzles to be solved
- Someone may already have the answer
- Can be stressful – but also very rewarding
- Don't undersell negative findings

I keep six honest serving men
(They taught me all I knew)
Their names are What and Why and When,
And How, and Where and Who?

Rudyard Kipling

outline template for SDI reports

Early warning for Australia's northern biosecurity frontier: insights from the Papua New Guinea Treaty Village survey

Tidal Coastline along South Fly District.
Image credit: INLOC Group.

Pre-border biosecurity programs are a critical component of animal biosecurity in northern Australia. Reducing the risk of exotic diseases in neighbouring countries through international partnerships, surveillance and targeted interventions provides a cost-effective first line of defence to prevent emergency animal disease (EAD) incursions into Australia. This is particularly important given the remoteness, low human population density and inaccessibility of some areas in northern Australia, particularly in the wet season, which impact surveillance and could delay detection in the event of an incursion. Importantly, Australia's efforts to reduce exotic disease risks in neighbouring countries also delivers biosecurity benefits to our partner countries in the region.

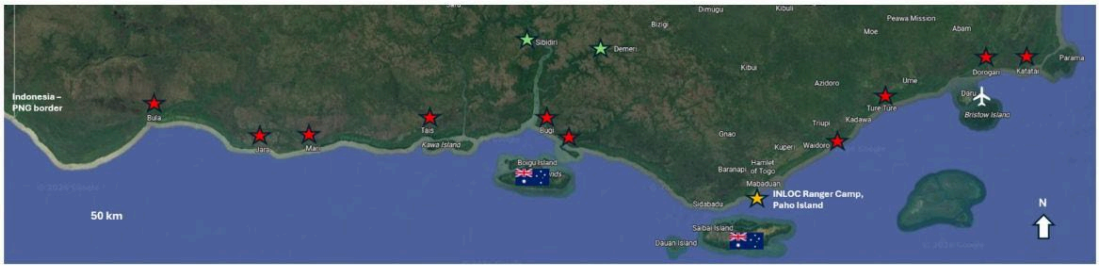
In March 2026, joint animal health surveillance in Papua New Guinea's (PNG's) South Fly District demonstrated the value of offshore partnerships as a practical and effective component of early warning for animal diseases of concern to both PNG and Australia.

A survey was conducted collaboratively by the Papua New Guinea Biosecurity Authority (PNGBA) and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) as part of an ongoing program of animal health surveys in Treaty Villages along

PNG's southern coastline. The survey team visited ten Treaty Villages and two nearby communities over nine days, with fieldwork focused on animal health surveillance, biosecurity officer training and community awareness of target animal diseases.

Survey team travelling by boat between Treaty villages along PNG's southern coastline in the South Fly District.

Image credit: Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, DAFF.



Location of PNG Treaty and non-Treaty villages and neighbouring communities along the South Fly coastline, PNG, within the Torres Strait region. Twelve villages visited: ten Treaty villages (red), two non-Treaty villages (green), and the INLOC Paho Island Ranger Camp (yellow).

Image credit: Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, DAFF.

A strategically important survey area

The PNG Treaty Villages border the Torres Strait Protected Zone in close proximity to Australia's most northerly islands. These coastal villages sit within a complex social and environmental landscape shaped by traditional movement, small-scale trade, subsistence livelihoods and maritime connections.

Travel between villages was undertaken by boat along a tidal coastline characterised by mangroves, wetlands and river systems. These same environmental features also support substantial wild bird populations, including migratory species that use the coastline as part of the broader Australasian flyway.

Cross-border crab trading boat transporting dogs

Image credit: Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, DAFF.

What the survey focused on

Field activities combined sampling of poultry and pigs and targeted observations of domestic animal populations with structured discussions with community members about animal health, husbandry practices and reporting of unusual illness or deaths. Awareness efforts prioritised EADs recognised as key regional risks, including:

- **dog-mediated rabies**, due to the widespread presence of free-roaming dogs, regional spread in southeast Asia, and public health significance;
- **avian influenza**, given the mix of local and introduced poultry and the presence of migratory birds; and

- **African swine fever (ASF)**, in the context of wild pig populations and small-scale pig keeping.

The survey outcomes include risk characterisation, field observations and sampling for baseline surveillance data and strengthening local biosecurity capacity and community awareness.

Sampling results are expected to contribute to PNGBA's understanding of EAD distribution and biosecurity risks in this remote region of PNG, thereby enhancing both countries' preparedness and response efforts. Across all villages, communities expressed strong interest in practical animal health and husbandry information linked to food security and livelihoods.

Pig keeping and containment
Image credit: Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, DAFF.

The role of partnerships

A critical enabler of the survey was collaboration beyond traditional biosecurity counterparts. Locally based partners, including the INLOC group and its ranger network, supported safe travel, community access and engagement across a challenging coastal environment. INLOC's established presence and long-standing relationships within Treaty Villages facilitated respectful and effective community discussions. Ranger involvement enhanced trust, improved communication and strengthened the delivery of animal health awareness activities in remote locations that are difficult to access through conventional

means, allowing the survey team to operate effectively within local cultural norms.

This collaborative model highlights how biosecurity surveillance in remote settings is strengthened when it leverages existing community and maritime networks rather than operating in isolation.

Why this work matters

Diseases such as rabies, avian influenza and ASF carry serious consequences for the health of animals and communities.

Continued collaboration along the South Fly coastline enhances shared biosecurity situational awareness between Australia and PNG while supporting early detection and information sharing that provide critical preparation time for both countries' veterinary services, particularly given the region's remoteness and access challenges.

As climate change, population movement and regional development continue to shape the regions directly to Australia's north and the biosecurity issues they face, activities such as the PNG Treaty Village survey demonstrate that effective biosecurity depends as much on partnerships as it does on borders.

The Torres Strait Treaty defines the border between Australia and Papua New Guinea and provides a framework for the management of the common border area.

As well as defining the maritime boundaries between Papua New Guinea and Australia, the Treaty protects the ways of life of traditional inhabitants in the Torres Strait Protected Zone. The Treaty is recognised as one of the most creative solutions in international law to a boundary problem touching on the lives of traditional inhabitants.

The main reason for the Protected Zone is so that Torres Strait Islanders and the coastal people of Papua New Guinea can carry on their traditional way of life. For example, traditional people from both countries may move freely (without passports or visas) for traditional activities in the Protected Zone.

Welcome Ben Rhodes

Many of us met Ben Rhodes at the Townsville Masterclass in 2025 or know him from his time in private practice in the north. Now as Acting Manager Veterinary Operations in the Animal Biosecurity and Welfare section of Biosecurity Queensland he's the key Dept connect for NABSnet. We caught up to find out a bit more about his veterinary journey.

Where did it all begin Ben?
I graduated from JCU in 2016. I had a family connection in dairying on the Tablelands and I spent time there as a student. I met Bill and Sam Rowe and Tom De Ridder while I was there, and like so many youngsters was inspired by their dedication to veterinary science and the livestock industries. And not just their professional standards of practice, but their personalities – kind people who were conscientious communicators – I really liked the way they operated.

So when I graduated I looked for a job in dairy practice and went to Warragul in Gippsland. But after 6 months a spot came up at Tablelands and I moved back up north. Then two years later my partner Kate, who is a vet nurse, and I did the 'Young Australian Vet Thing' – travelled around Aus and to New Zealand locuming. Finally we circled back to Warragul and I did two more very busy years in practice there.

After 6 years in large animal practice we returned to FNQ to Cairns to help my family and I had a crack at Small Animals for 12 months. Then an opportunity came up to work with the livestock industry again through a role in the Dept. That was with Northern Australia Coordination Network (NACN), and when that project finished I was able to move to veterinary operations – and here I am.

So what are the challenges for you now?
Very similar in many ways to practice – making sure that I can return a benefit to the investment in me being here.

Right now there is a priority focus for uplifting the capacity and capability of Biosecurity Queensland's veterinary operations, and just being in the right place at the right time, being able to be part of the leadership team that's doing that, that's fantastic.

One difference from practice is that I know in government you have to play a longer game to effect the changes that need to happen, for us to be able to support industry and the private sector better.

Initiatives like NABSnet are really vital to build the relationships and get a clear understanding between the private sector and the department.

The veterinary profession is a great community, the large animal vets are very genuine. It doesn't matter whether you've got a government role, or a commercial role, or a private role, there are lines of communication that you can make. For example I've got a connection to Brendan Brieffies from our time at uni, and I just think there would be no barrier if we ever had to call each other for management of something significant. NABSnet really helps build those links for everyone involved.

Another core value for me is increasing linkages to primary producers. Having understanding of their businesses is really important if you work in this space, to realise the magnitude of the decisions that are made and the outcomes and how it affects people's lives.

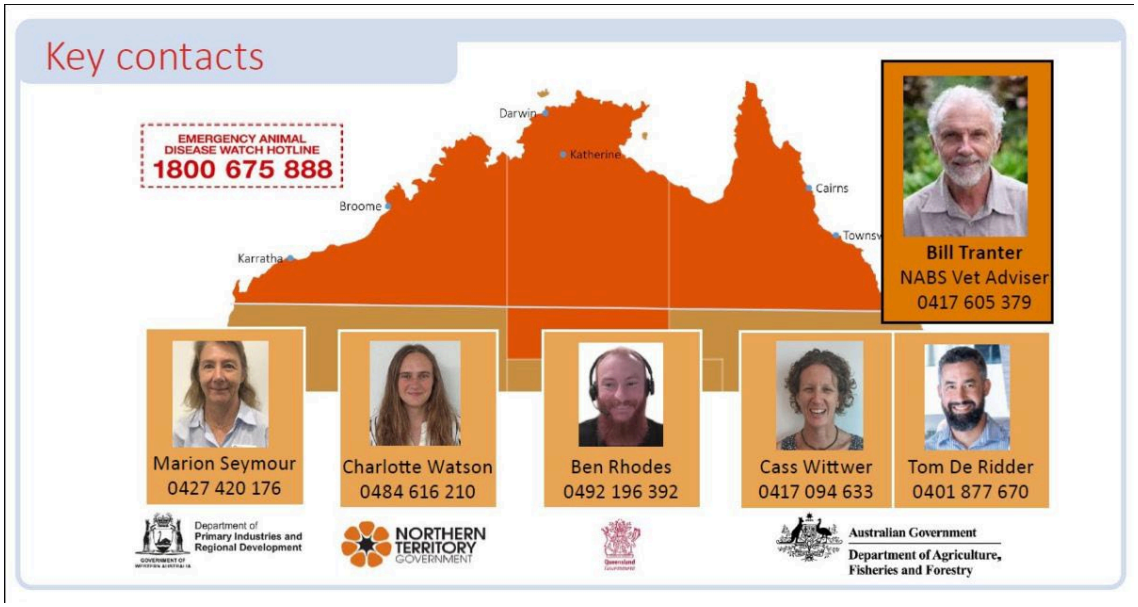
I place high value on strong governance and authentic decision-making, so I try and carry that forward in what I do especially interaction from a government role with the public.

And outside veterinary life?
We have a two-year old and are enjoying being parents and showing her the world. We live an adventurous and outdoors lifestyle, so my main hobbies are spearfishing and water sports. Cairns is a great place to live if you're a water sports person. Well actually I'm keen on any sport – I follow as much as I can locally and on the national stage too – I'd describe myself as a great sports enthusiast.

Ben ready for an extreme sports challenge – the Cairns Ironman in 2023

Image The Cairns Post

Key NABSnet SDI contacts



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For NABSnet by the team at Harris Park Group

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