



NABSnet

Newsletter

#63 | 12 October 2026

NABSnet info

Hi all

Kevin Bell has been a part of our NABSnet network since it started in 2018, and virtually everyone had some connection with him in his role as the NABSnet Vet Advisor – a key point of contact for private veterinarians and government stakeholders involved in the program.

Whether it was working through the details of a disease outbreak in an out-of-hours phone call or chatting over an industry issue at a Masterclass it was always a pleasure to talk with him – he was inspirational with his generosity and warmth. And Kevin was the opening column in our newsletter for 58 issues!

So it's a great sadness to say that Kevin passed away last month after a short illness.

The measure of the man is reflected in the many tributes to him. Many colleagues have sent reflections to say how much they appreciated his support and approach, and we'll share some below.

Also in this newsletter:

- The next Masterclass will be held at Malanda FNQ, 5-6 March 2027. You can send an Expression of Interest now.



Bill Tranter
NABSnet Vet Adviser

- A summary of two recent Tick Fever SDIs
- The regular snapshot of regional issues from the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer

Best wishes Bill

Vale Kevin Bell



Ikigai is a little Japanese word for what you really love doing, what you can do, and what someone else needs or wants.

And if you get those together, then you've got a good combination.

Kevin Bell, Jan 2025

From: Agrimaster podcast . [Ep 61: Finding your "Ikigai" in ag with Kevin Bell | Agrimaster](#)

Photo: Paul Bell

After a catch up or phone call with Kevin Bell you always came away both "inspired and grounded".

Whether it was a simple straight forward NABSnet case, a broader veterinary or industry issue, you came away inspired to dig deeper, explore broader but encouraged and supported in that you had the basics covered.

Then there was his life of professional excellence, of serving and going the extra mile in all that he did for others. I always came away from a time with Kevin continuously wondering not only what has the guy not done, but more how and where he has given of himself. Once you got to know Kevin's heart and motivation though, it was no surprise that he was like this as he was simply living out the core conviction of his Christian faith to be "the salt of the earth and a light on a Hill", serving others.

Thanks mate, for a life well lived, for the inspiration to go and do likewise.

Peter Letchford



Kevin listening to words of thanks from Toby Wass at the 2026 Masterclass

Although I had heard of him I only got to know Kevin in the last 10 years when he was working for MLA and Pardoo, studying the efficiency and productivity of the pivots. He would often drop into our office and we'd have a long discussion about those things. During that time I found Kevin to be an unassuming, kind and empathetic man. He was very genuine and a person you could easily warm to. Ego wasn't a factor with Kevin. At the same time he had a sharp, analytical mind that took in all aspects of what he was studying. Although Kevin hadn't had a lot to do with cattle before getting involved with Pardoo he quickly assimilated many of the most important papers on cattle nutrition and became an expert in grass production on pivots.

Many of you may know that Kevin and his wife Jo who were at university together were devout Catholics. For a time they worked as missionaries in Korea where they adopted Peter Bell who became one of WA's famous footballers and was inducted into the Football Hall of Fame. Peter's birth mother spent many years looking for the son she had left at an orphanage and eventually found him in Australia, larger than life as the Docker's captain. I remember watching on TV when he was being inducted into the Hall of Fame and there at the celebration was Kevin and Jo along with Peter's birth mother who by then had developed a friendship with the Bells.

I rang Kevin about 7 weeks ago on a Pardoo related matter and it was during that phone call he stunned me by disclosing he a cricket ball sized tumour in his brain. He was very lucid and matter of fact about it. He said he'd had a good life, regretted nothing and was ready to commit to whatever lay beyond.

Sadly he has left Jo, his children, extended family and all his colleagues bereft at his passing.

Dave Morrell.



Kevin and Jo. Photo Paul Bell

I first met Kevin about 15 years ago whilst he was working for DPIRD in the Northern Beef Futures project and also filling in as the District Veterinary Officer for DPIRD, in the office next door. From gentle sensible advice on managing my rogue sentinel cattle herd, to joining us with his beautiful wife Jo on a road trip adventure to visit said cattle, and then on to become our inaugural and so highly valued NABSnet Vet Adviser, Kevin has always been a steady voice of friendly wisdom. His advice and suggestions in the development of the NABSnet Vet Network were instrumental in what has now become a widely respected and worthy general biosecurity surveillance program across northern Australia.

Although he had very recently stepped back a bit from NABSnet, for the past eight years he has been the calm friendly voice checking in on remote isolated livestock vets across northern Australia. Whilst managing his own caseload as a consultant for Pardoo Wagyu, he took every opportunity to call especially the younger vets and those he hadn't heard from in a while. In his ever warm and collegial manner of sharing advice on cases, & gentle reminders to submit reports, his calls were always welcomed by those receiving them. Recognition of his contribution came earlier this year in the form of a Commendation in the Australian Biosecurity Awards.

It was always lovely seeing Kevin around Broome, even up until he & Jo moved south a couple of years ago I would see him running on 'our' local beach - an amazing energy for an octogenarian, especially combined with all his work and family commitments!! So thank you from me personally Kevin, and on behalf of all those you've helped and listened to in NABSnet, your legacy of integral support for this important program for vets and northern livestock biosecurity lives on.

Cass Wittwer



Marion Seymour, Peter Letchford, Kevin Bell and Cass Wittwer in Perth, March 2026

We were so privileged to have Kevin's knowledge, industry respect and his personable manner during the establishment and expansion of NABSnet. Kevin was an excellent listener and always credited others' ideas while quietly providing his thoughts and sharing his vast knowledge and experience. You always came away wiser and feeling better about yourself after a conversation with Kevin. An enquiring researcher, knowledgeable livestock vet, adaptable communicator and generous gentleman to work with.

Marion Seymour

*RIP Kevin.
I will always remember his calm manner, smile and intelligence.
He had a wonderful manner with people.
Will be missed.*

Graham Mackereth

There's also an interview with Kevin published in our [Nov 2025 NABSnet newsletter \(#58\)](#)

At Kevin's funeral last week his family invited anyone who would like to, to add reminiscences at an online book: [Access here](#)

Masterclass - 5-6 March 2027, Malanda



NABSnet Masterclass 2027

! Need to act now - EOI due 12 Dec! **NABSnet Masterclass 2027 Malanda, QLD**

When: Friday 5th and Saturday 6th of March 2027
(accommodation check-in available from Thursday 4th March)

Where: Malanda, JCU facilities

Who: Large and mixed animal veterinary practitioners in Northern Australia - the NABSnet network

What's on: The 1.5 day NABSnet Masterclass 2027 will be a valuable opportunity to connect with other northern cattle vets to share insights and enhance your disease investigation skills.

Participation at the Masterclass, accommodation, food and air travel will be subsidised by NABSnet for up to two veterinarians from each clinic. Priority for subsidised places will be given to those vets who have not previously attended a NABSnet Masterclass.

Next step: The number of places will be limited. To register your interest, download the form and send to Sarah Brabazon by 12 December 2025 (details on the form).

[Get Expression of Interest form here](#)

SDI summaries - recent Tick Fever cases

Catastrophic babesiosis outbreak in introduced cattle

In April-May 2026 a significant disease outbreak occurred in a group of 57 South Devon cows and heifers from the New England region of NSW recently introduced to a property in Central Queensland. Five days after arrival the cattle were vaccinated with Tick Fever Vaccine (3 Germ Blood) and treated with a pour-on. By 15 days of arrival all the cattle developed acute illness characterised by depression, weakness, and sudden death. Some animals had bloody urine.

Lab testing demonstrated significant *Babesia bovis* parasitaemia in multiple animals, confirming a diagnosis of babesiosis. The combination of being a naive herd, stressors including recent transport, handling and vaccination would have contributed to reduced resilience and assumed contact with 'hot ticks' once reaching CQ increased exposure. No disease was reported in resident cattle on the property.

Ultimately 37 of 57 cattle died, representing a mortality rate of 65%. All surviving pregnant females subsequently aborted their pregnancies. The deaths and abortions together resulted in a massive economic loss.

The producer regularly buys naive cattle from NSW and vaccinates post arrival and has never experienced this issue before but will now re-assess timing of Tick Fever vaccination and movement of susceptible cattle into this endemic region.



L. Recumbent South Devon cow

R. Babesia bovis parasitaemia

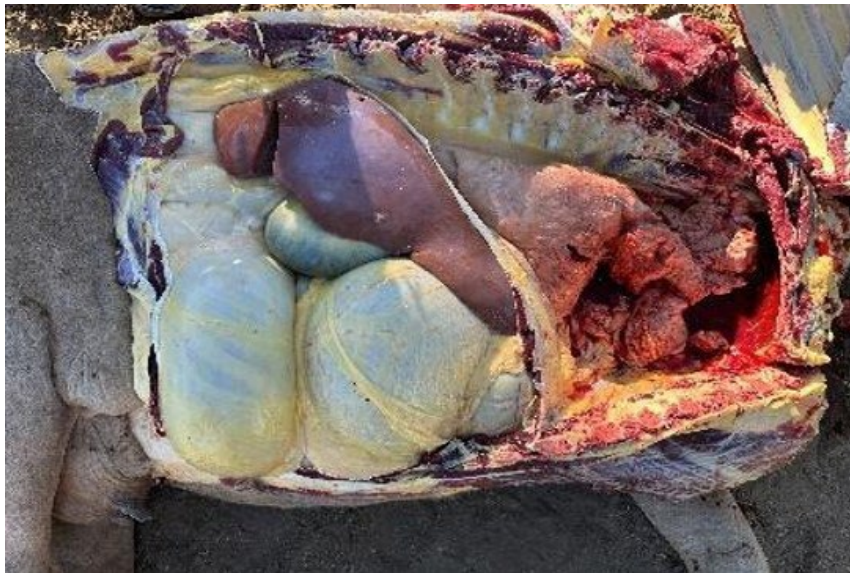
Anaplasmosis outbreak in resident animals

Over three days in August 2026 sudden deaths occurred in four cows in a herd of 170 adult mixed-breed cattle in Central Queensland. Two cows had died in the three weeks previously. Disease was not confined to a particular breed, age group or paddock. Some cattle showed weakness, depression, anorexia and abortion before death. One animal passed red urine.

The cattle were maintained on native pasture and received a supplement of molasses, 8% urea and minerals (M8U). Water was supplied through troughs from a clean artesian water source. This year there had been a heavy cattle tick burden on the property and the herd had been treated with Dectomax approximately two weeks prior to investigation. The last known tick fever outbreak in the area was during the 1980s. A neighbouring property had introduced cattle during the year from areas where cattle ticks and tick fever are more prevalent.

Post-mortem examination was made of a 4 year-old cow that had lost significant condition, was depressed, markedly ataxic, weak, dehydrated and aborting a 4 month-old

foetus. Significant findings indicated severe gastrointestinal stasis, marked jaundice, pericardial effusion and reproductive loss.





L. Swollen, yellow liver R. Pericardial effusion

Laboratory examination of blood and brain smears confirmed significant *Anaplasma marginale* parasitaemia with a regenerative anaemic response.

A major risk factor identified was the high level of cattle tick exposure reported on the property this year. Ticks were present on the animal examined despite the herd having been treated with Dectomax (only works once a tick has latched and already transmitted *Anaplasma marginale*, so further cases may occur after treatment). The long period (over 30 years) without known tick fever on the property would indicate that a significant proportion of the current herd had limited immunity to tick-borne haemoparasites. The herd was not vaccinated against tick fever. The reported movement of cattle from tick-prevalent areas onto a neighbouring property was considered a potential route for this disease.

Effective cattle tick control is being continued, recognising that tick control will not treat established *Anaplasma marginale* infection. A herd-wide tick fever vaccination program is currently being implemented to reduce the risk of further disease.

Tips - Brain smears for Tick Fever

Brain smears are super useful in suspect Tick Fever cases because the erythrocytes containing the parasites tend to 'sludge' in the capillaries of the brain - making them more easily detected.

Brain smears are easy to make. Send multiple smears so that the lab can use more than one type of stain in their diagnostic workup.



Making brain smears

- Place match-head sized piece of grey matter ~2 cm from end of glass slide
- Lay second slide on top of grey matter at right angles to the first
- Drag top glass slide sideways to the far end of the lower slide (gently squashes the material and spreads it thinly)
- Allow to air dry – do not stain, do not apply coverslip

Are you a visual learner? – see a [video demonstration from Uni Qld Veterinary School](#)

OCVO regional disease snapshot - Oct 2026

The top 3 recent regional EAD disease developments

1. Indonesian lumpy skin disease (LSD) response support

Lumpy skin disease (LSD) was reported in Bali, Indonesia, for the first time in January 2026. This represents the closest detection of this disease to Australia to date. Australia is free from LSD and has never had an incursion. Following the detection in Bali, the Australian government announced a package to support the Indonesian government in their response to LSD control in Bali. This included the provision of LSD vaccines and a range of technical support.

From 24 August to 4 September a veterinarian from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) joined colleagues from the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture, Indonesian Quarantine Authority and Bali provincial and district governments, and a project team from the Nossal Institute for Global Health (University of Melbourne) in Bali.

The group visited district government offices, field vets, cattle smallholders, traders, livestock markets, abattoirs and key ports across Bali to understand the cattle value chain and identify control points that could be considered to mitigate the spread of LSD in Bali and to islands closer to Australia. The information gathered will also contribute to a vaccination implementation plan for Bali, with the Australian Government donating LSD vaccines as part of the support package.

2. High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) regional capacity building

HPAI poses a growing threat to Pacific Island countries and territories. Seabird movement across the Pacific – connecting all surrounding continents – is extensive, with overlapping flyways and complex inter-island migratory patterns. The recent emergence of HPAI in Australia and New Zealand further demonstrates the biosecurity risks associated with migratory seabird movements.

Pacific Island nations are particularly susceptible to the impacts of HPAI due to the close interface between wild birds and poultry. HPAI and other emerging zoonotic diseases have the potential to impact human, animal, and environmental health, livelihoods, food security and national stability.

DAFF, through the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (OCVO), is supporting regional HPAI surveillance and preparedness across the Pacific. Working in partnership with the Pacific Community, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wildlife Health Australia, CSIRO's Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness and others, a coordinated approach including leadership engagement, capacity-building and surveillance activities is strengthening HPAI early detection and preparedness arrangements. These activities are addressing regional priorities articulated by the Pacific Heads of Veterinary and Animal Production Services (PHOVAPS) network, the primary mechanism for Pacific-wide coordination and decision-making on animal health and biosecurity.

Wildlife Health Australia's [WOAH Collaborating Centre for Wildlife Health Risk Management](#) is also supporting regional preparedness for HPAI and other health security threats. The Collaborating Centre aims to improve prevention and mitigation capabilities for current health threats and establish and maintain a cadre of professionals able to address the drivers of emerging diseases across the Pacific region. There has been a strong focus on HPAI as part of recent activities.



3. Regional workforce training

Regional engagement and capacity building undertaken by DAFF's OCVO is a core component of Australia's pre-border biosecurity system. The work supports partner countries to reduce the risks of emergency animal diseases and strengthens regional pandemic preparedness. Throughout October, DAFF will deliver capability-building activities in Timor-Leste and Palau to strengthen animal health, veterinary public health and biosecurity outcomes across the region. With funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's [Partnerships for a Healthy Region](#) initiative, this training will support the development of meat inspection and paraveterinary skills, helping to build a skilled workforce capable of supporting surveillance, animal health services, safe food production and broader biosecurity objectives.

Key NABSnet SDI contacts

Key contacts

EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASE WATCH HOTLINE
1800 675 888

Locations: Darwin, Katherine, Broome, Cairns, Townsville, Karratha.

Bill Tranter
NABS Vet Adviser
0417 605 379

Marion Seymour
0427 420 176

Charlotte Watson
0484 616 210

Ben Rhodes
0492 196 392

Cass Wittwer
0417 094 633

Tom De Ridder
0401 877 670

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT
Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Bill Tranter NABSnet Vet Adviser

Contact at: bill@tablelandvet.com.au / 0417 605 379

- QLD **Ben Rhodes** benjamin.rhodes@dpi.qld.gov.au
- NT **Charlotte Watson** Charlotte.Watson2@nt.gov.au
- WA **Marion Seymour** marion.seymour@dpird.wa.gov.au
- **NABSnet admin** NABS@aff.gov.au



Missed earlier NABSnet newsletters? [read them here](#)

To subscribe: [join here](#)

For NABSnet by the team at [Harris Park Group](#)

Let us know any topics you'd like to see covered in future issues.

This email was sent to pauline@harrisparkgroup.com.au

[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

Harris Park Group · PO Box 352 · Seddon, VIC 3011 · Australia