

Major initiative announced to bolster Australia’s wildlife health and help prevent emerging diseases in wildlife, humans and agriculture

- **Currently an estimated 1.7 million undiscovered viruses in mammal and bird hosts.**
- **Many exist in wildlife and feral animal species and are evolving into different variants which pose an unknown level of risk to humans, animals, and our ecosystems.**
- **Australian Government invests \$8.4 million into program to address these potential risks.**

The Minister for Agriculture, David Littleproud, this week announced a significant new initiative aimed at bolstering Australia’s wildlife health and disease surveillance and management capabilities.

Minister Littleproud said the Australian Government would invest \$8.4 million over the next four years towards preventing, detecting, and mitigating the impacts of emerging animal diseases.

“COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the importance of recognising and managing emerging zoonotic disease risks which can originate from wildlife,” Minister Littleproud said.

Today’s announcement includes a significant partnership with Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) which will lead delivery of the program, maximising its already extensive networks across the country to expand investigation and analysis capacity of wildlife disease events.

Nearly all major exotic livestock diseases of potential concern to Australia, including African swine fever and foot-and-mouth disease, will have wildlife and/or feral animals as part of their cause or spread.

WHA’s CEO Dr Rupert Woods said: “Protecting our native wildlife and ecosystems is also critical to pandemic prevention, with increasing potential for diseases to emerge as climate change and changes in land use put pressure on our wildlife and environment.

“Strengthening Australia’s national wildlife health framework, including surveillance at the human-livestock-wildlife interface, is key provide early warning of emerging disease risks in Australia.

“That’s why we are taking a ‘true One Health’ approach, that recognises the interdependence of human, animal, and environmental health, which is essential to preventing future diseases.

“This significant new program will help us to better identify the underlying causes of wildlife health events, determine their relevance to human, animal and/or environmental health and inform immediate or long-term action. The program will also enable WHA to further expand and establish mutually beneficial partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and feral animal disease experts.



The initiative will involve the establishment of a ‘One Health Investigation fund’ to be administered by WHA, which will bolster support for multi-sector collaborative field, laboratory, and epidemiological investigation into selected wildlife disease events.

The new program will also support expert contribution into development and review of human health, conservation, and agricultural guidelines, standards and policies in Australia and overseas to ensure wildlife health and the drivers of disease emergence are considered.

The program will also seek to establish WHA as an official World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Collaborating Centre on Wildlife Health for Australia and the Pacific.

CSIRO’s Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness will be a key partner in delivering the initiative.

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