



## WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA – ANIMAL HEALTH AUSTRALIA

### WORKSHOP SUMMARY: White-nose Syndrome Response Guidelines

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Photo: Terry Reardon, southern bent-wing bat

- Wildlife Health Australia and Animal Health Australia ran a workshop in October 2016 to discuss response options for a possible incursion of the exotic disease white-nose syndrome into bats in Australia.
- White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a recently recognised fungal disease of insectivorous bats that has caused massive mortalities - estimated at over 5.7 million animals - and collapse of numerous bat populations in North America.
- Transmission of WNS is by direct contact between bats, but humans have been implicated in the spread of the disease by transferring fungal spores between caves on boots and equipment.
- WNS has not been identified in Australia, but could be introduced into Australia by humans.
- A workshop was held as part of a project coordinated by Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) and funded by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to better prepare Australia for an incursion of the exotic disease WNS. The first stage of the project was to conduct a disease risk assessment for WNS in bats in Australia, to identify possible avenues of introduction and likely consequences, and to identify potential Australian host species and geographic areas of risk.
- The workshop brought together key stakeholders and response agencies, to:
  - Consider the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government agencies in a response to WNS affecting bats in Australia

- Document the options for responding to WNS in bats in Australia
- Test the response options in a range of scenarios
- Develop a list of preferred management options for inclusion in response guidelines
- Participants included representatives from:
  - Commonwealth agriculture and environment agencies
  - State agriculture and environment agencies including WHA Coordinators, Environment contacts and biosecurity emergency management experts from South Australia, Victoria and NSW (the states identified as highest risk for WNS)
  - Australasian Bat Society - bat ecology experts
  - Universities - wildlife disease experts and epidemiologists
  - Animal Health Australia
  - Wildlife Health Australia
- A range of response options were presented and discussed. The preferred options will depend on the situation, but may include a combination of:
  - Activities to prevent further WNS transmission by humans and bats
  - Surveillance to detect the extent of the disease
  - Stakeholder identification and engagement to inform and facilitate response activities
  - Communication and education to assist with early detection and prevention of spread
  - Support for infected bats e.g. conservation activities and environmental modification
- WHA will use the outcomes of the workshop to prepare draft response guidelines for consideration by key stakeholders.
- It was recognised at the workshop that further research is required, to provide additional information to assist with decision making.
- The workshop was an excellent opportunity for a discussion across a range of roles, expertise and jurisdictions on the response to an exotic wildlife disease incursion, and was a good model for future preparedness activities for wildlife diseases in Australia.