



## Questions and Answers

### ***Mycoplasma bovis* announcement**

#### **What is phased eradication?**

It means we're attempting to completely get rid of *Mycoplasma bovis* from New Zealand's dairy and beef herds. It will mean continuing to trace all potentially affected cattle, and testing and culling those herds with infected animals in them. This will continue until regular surveillance finds no further evidence of the disease. By phased, we mean that it will take place over a number of years. We expect to do most of the eradication work in 1-2 years. It will be done in cooperation with affected farmers to allow flexibility around timing of culling to offset production losses.

#### **Why this decision?**

This is the best decision to protect the national dairy and beef herds. Getting rid of the disease means there won't be on-going impacts including production loss for farmers and animal welfare issues. It gives farmers and their communities certainty for the future. We know it will be painful for many and they will be fully supported. We believe the disease is still limited to one network of farms connected by animal movements, it is not widespread and there is just one strain of the disease out there. This is the decision that both industry and government have reached after intense analysis. If we don't try this now, we won't have another chance.

#### **How many animals will be slaughtered?**

It is anticipated some 126,000 cattle will need to be culled - most in 1-2 years - and in addition to the cull of some 26,000 underway currently. These will be animals from known and future infected farms and also highly suspect farms – those under Restricted Place Notices.

For context, about 4.2 million cattle are slaughtered annually in New Zealand. This includes 1 million dairy cattle, 1.4 million beef cattle and 1.8 million calves.

#### **Why are you killing whole herds, even the apparently health animals?**

The disease is very difficult to test for and can't be reliably identified at an individual animal level. It spreads to a high proportion of animals in infected herds rapidly. Seemingly healthy animals can still carry the infection and infect others. Clinical signs only appear when an animal is under stress of some sort. We work on a whole-herd basis – if one animal is infected, it is highly likely others are too, and for disease control the whole herd must be culled.

#### **Some of the animals you're culling are pregnant – is this not against animal welfare standards?**

We will not contravene the Animal Welfare Act which allows that pregnant cows can be humanely slaughtered up to one month before they are due to deliver. No animals will be culled beyond this time. The disease itself can cause late-term miscarriage in dairy cattle and we do not want to expose our national herd to this. We are making this decision to protect our national herd.

#### **Can the meat processors handle it?**

Given some 4.2 million cattle are processed annually already, we are confident they can. This is largely a scheduling issue at processing plants.

**Will animals be buried on farms?**

In some instances, where animals are culled for animal welfare reasons and cannot be processed in the processing plants, they may be slaughtered and disposed of on-farm or in an approved landfill. This is likely to be a very small proportion of the stock culled.

**Is milk and meat safe?**

There is absolutely no food safety concern with this disease. Both meat and dairy products are safe to consume. The disease is present in nearly all other meat and milk producing countries in the world where animal products are safely consumed.

**How many farms will be affected?**

Our modelling predicts that in year one 142 farms will need to be depopulated, and 192 properties in total over 10 years. This is out of the more than 20,000 beef and dairy farms across the country.

**How long is this going to take?**

We expect to do most of the eradication work in the first 1-2 years.

**Why are we doing this when all other countries live with it and farm through it?**

*Mycoplasma bovis* is endemic in other countries. However, we have a chance to eradicate it and we should take that chance while we can. Eradication will prevent serious impacts on our national herd, including production losses and on-going animal welfare issues.

Dairy farming in New Zealand is characterised by large herds and open farming systems with lots of movement between farms. We know from overseas experience that larger herds can be more seriously impacted. Our herds are naive – they have had no exposure or immunity to the disease – meaning the production losses and animal welfare issues could be higher initially than other countries are experiencing.

**Is MPI resourced for this?**

This is a large and complex response and there will be an immediate increase in MPI staffing, with 25 new field case managers being trained today in Christchurch. These numbers will continue to increase to provide the best possible support to affected farmers. Support from sector partners, including personnel on the ground, is a crucial part of this.

**What's the chance of success?**

The decision has been taken based on scientific information and disease modelling, plus with input from international experts on *Mycoplasma bovis* and animal disease control. This information indicates that eradication remains feasible while the disease remains confined to a network of farms connected by traceable animal movements. While it will be challenging and require coordination, we need to take the chance while we can.

**Is there a point where you'd give up on eradication?**

There is a risk that a time could come when we may have to concede that living with it and managing it within our herds is the most sensible way forward. We are not there now. We will do a further

round of national bulk milk surveillance testing in spring and will assess the direction of the operation on receipt of those results and other information, in early 2019.

### **What did it take to get to this decision?**

Over the past 10 months we have been steadily building a sufficiently detailed picture of the disease distribution and its impacts, the likely progression of it and the likelihood of success to enable us to make the right decision. We needed as full a picture as possible, while still recognising that we needed to end the uncertainty.

### **What's the difference between phased eradication and long-term management?**

The aim of phased eradication is to get rid of the disease. Long term management would effectively be living with it.

In the case of phased eradication, depopulation is ongoing and includes any new infected properties found over time. The aim is to completely remove *Mycoplasma bovis* from New Zealand. We will continue to run an active surveillance programme to track the disease down.

Under long-term management, depopulation is limited to only those infected properties currently known. Testing would continue on properties currently under movement controls and infected farms found through this would also be culled. However, MPI would stop active surveillance (tracking, tracing, intensive testing) to find new infected properties. Any future infected properties found would not be placed under regulatory movement controls or depopulated at the direction of MPI. Instead future infected properties would be managed by the individual farmer and the farmer's own advisors such as their veterinarian. Long term management does not achieve eradication.

## **Farmer welfare and compensation:**

### **On what basis are farmers compensated?**

Farmers that are directed to have animals culled or their farm operations restricted under movement controls will be eligible for compensation.

The compensation claim process has been sped up. MPI advise a substantial part of a farmer's compensation claim for culled cows should now take 4-10 days, with a fully verified claim taking 2-3 weeks.

Compensation is available for anyone who sustains verifiable losses as a result of directions they are given by MPI under the Biosecurity Act to manage an organism – in this case *Mycoplasma bovis*.

We need to ensure compensation claims are properly assessed. Some claims can be complex and take a lot of working through and, in some instances, farmers have found it hard to find the necessary paper work to verify their losses. Claims that are supported with good documentation are able to be processed quickly – within weeks. Partial payments can also be made to help with business continuity. MPI has recognised that some of its processes are slow and has scaled up its compensation team as the response has progressed to ensure claims are processed as quickly as possible. We have also brought on board a team of 10 from DairyNZ to help farmers prepare their claims.

### **How much is compensation going to cost?**

The compensation cost for phased eradication is expected to be around \$180 million for year one (2018/19), and \$241 million over 10 years.

### **How are you supporting farmers?**

We are supporting affected farmers through their own assigned case manager, the Rural Support Trust and where appropriate, acute recovery managers. We're also calling on rural communities to look after one another. If you or someone you know or care about is struggling – contact a GP or your other community support services.

### **If farmers want to speak to someone directly, who can they call?**

Affected farmers should talk to their industry group representatives, their individual response case manager, or Rural Support Trust. For information from MPI, call the Ministry directly on 0800 00 83 33 – there is a team of people on board to answer *Mycoplasma bovis* questions.

## **Costs:**

### **What will this cost and who's paying?**

The full cost of eradication over 10 years is projected at \$886 million. Of this, \$16 million is loss of production and is borne by farmers and \$870 million is the cost of the response (including compensation to farmers). Government will meet 68 percent of this cost and DairyNZ and Beef+Lamb New Zealand will pick up 32 percent.

The Government will pay the upfront costs. DairyNZ and Beef+Lamb New Zealand will manage the industry contribution reimbursement.

Most of the cost of phased eradication will fall in the first two years, due to the upfront culling of herds, with costs winding down over future years as the response moves to a surveillance exercise.

Confirmed allocations for the up-front costs will be finalised in the coming weeks. Given the evolving nature of the situation, Cabinet has today allocated the first two years' of funding, and further decisions are likely to also be made in two-year blocks.

### **How much did the other option, long-term management, cost?**

The other key option on the table was long-term management. That was costed at \$1.2 billion over 10 years, of which \$698 million is the estimated production loss to industry.

### **Why should taxpayers pay?**

The success of the dairy and beef industries is crucial to the prosperity of all New Zealanders.

### **Why should farmers pay?**

While it is important that all New Zealanders support the country's producers that contribute so significantly to the country's economy, it is also important that farmers themselves, as beneficiaries of the operation, take some responsibility for funding it.

## **Farm operations:**

### **Will you go ahead with Moving Day?**

Yes. Farmers should have confidence in dealing with farms that are not under regulatory controls, so long as they have sensible precautions in place. These include NAIT compliance, understanding herd

health history, and using good on-farm biosecurity measures. If you're unsure, talk to your vet or refer to the MPI website or your sector group website for information.

### **Won't it result in new infections?**

If farmers follow sensible precautions this risk can be greatly minimised. Preventing animals from moving during Moving Day would likely result in very challenging animal welfare problems for many herds prevented from moving through lack of feed and degradation of pasture over winter.

### **Can goats and/or sheep spread the disease?**

It is technically possible for *Mycoplasma bovis* to be transferred to sheep and goats. However, it is extremely rare because it can only be spread to them by feeding them raw milk from an infected cow – a very unlikely scenario. No transmission of the disease back to cattle has ever been recorded. Other hosts are considered to be a dead end infection and are not important in the ongoing spread of disease.

### **How will *Mycoplasma bovis* change the farming sector and how it operates?**

The farming system currently relies on moving large numbers of cattle. This is fine in a disease free environment. What we may now see are fewer animal movements and a move towards more closed herds which is what has been seen internationally. This can give farmers greater certainty in their herd health and resilience against biosecurity threats.

## **Entry of the disease:**

### **Where did it come from?**

There are several potential entry pathways and they continue to be investigated.

### **Where is the investigation at?**

In March, warranted officers from the Ministry for Primary Industries' compliance investigations team ran simultaneous searches at three locations as part of an investigation associated with the *Mycoplasma bovis* response. These searches related to potential breaches of legislation related to response. The outcome of the investigations will be communicated to farmers as soon as information can be provided.

### **Will you review the response?**

Yes there will be review, as there is with all biosecurity responses, and there will undoubtedly be lessons learned for all involved.