



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

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30 May 2008

Mr Dean Lisson  
Chief Executive  
Tasmanian Abalone Council  
Macquarie Wharf No. 1  
Hunter Street  
Hobart Tasmania 7000

Dear Mr Lisson

Thank you for your correspondence of 27 May 2007 to Dr Andy Carroll, Australian Chief Veterinary Officer, regarding the disease abalone viral ganglioneuritis. Dr Carroll is on official business overseas and has asked me to respond on his behalf.

Our department understands that abalone viral ganglioneuritis poses a significant threat to Australia's abalone fisheries and has had major direct impacts on members of the industry in the western and central Victorian abalone zones. We appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from you and your interstate colleagues on 5 May 2008 on how the disease is impacting the abalone industry in Victoria and other states.

As Dr Carroll outlined at the 5 May meeting, Australia's arrangements for managing aquatic animal diseases are cooperative; the Australian Government does not have the legal authority to direct state government management of aquatic animal disease incidents within a state's jurisdiction. The Department's role in such incidents includes national oversight and coordination, provision of technical advice, and management of technical trade issues. This is consistent with our role for management of terrestrial animal diseases.

In accordance with the role described above, the Australian Government's contribution to the disease response has included:

- contributing to the disease response through existing consultative arrangements for aquatic animal health in Australia
- initial research into the disease by CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory (e.g. research on routes of transmission)
- Fisheries Research and Development Corporation funded research for the development of biosecurity protocols and specific diagnostic tools
- the provision of \$100,000 by the department to support research priorities identified by the National Abalone Health Management Advisory and Coordinating Body (NAHMACB)
- driving an initiative that aims to develop an abalone emergency disease response arrangement. This would improve the national management of abalone health by requiring parties to adhere to specific disease management, emergency preparedness and response arrangements. We have provided \$35,000 to support an Aquatic Animal Health Committee working group with operational funds. Michael Tokley is your industry's representative on this group.

- providing \$35,000 by the department to fund the development of an AQUAVETPLAN (the Australia Aquatic Veterinary Emergency Plan) disease strategy manual for abalone viral ganglioneuritis, which will provide a preferred Australian approach to possible future outbreaks of the disease.

The Department will continue to operate according to its normal role in such incidents by seeking the cooperation of governments and industry in the development and implementation of appropriate measures to mitigate the risks that AVG presents. We see such cooperation as an essential prerequisite of any successful national disease response initiative. In this regard, our office is currently pursuing two courses of action (in addition to those described above), including:

1. Assisting the abalone industry to prepare a proposal aimed at strengthening measures to mitigate the risk of disease spread by human activities. As discussed at our meeting on 5 May 2008, it will be essential that any such proposal gains the support of all stakeholders, including the relevant state governments. Our office has commenced arrangements for an initial meeting of stakeholders which we expect will be held in early June. We believe that any such proposal should be in synergy with – and preferably an integral component of – an agreed national approach.
2. Supporting further development and implementation of the draft national abalone health workplan. Our department supports a coordinated national strategic approach to managing AVG and we believe there is considerable merit in supporting further development of the Draft National Abalone Health Plan. You may have noted that the Australian Government's contributions to the disease response (listed above) are either included in the draft workplan or support it. While we congratulate Fisheries Victoria's efforts on this initiative, we do recognise that alternative administrative arrangements may now be required to encourage a higher level of national cooperation. The 18 June 2008 meeting to discuss the workplan will provide an important opportunity for all stakeholders to agree on a revised workplan and on appropriate administrative arrangements for its implementation. Our office has been in contact with stakeholders (government and industry) to discuss their preferred approaches prior to this meeting – we will continue these discussions with the intention of assisting the Victorian Department of Primary Industries and all stakeholders to reach an agreed way forward at this important meeting.

I would like to thank you again for your correspondence to Dr Carroll. I am confident that progress can be made through the initiatives outlined above and that these will assist the abalone industry nationally.

I look forward to working with you and your interstate colleagues to progress these initiatives and I would encourage you to contact me to discuss any of these issues in further detail.

Kind Regards,

Ingo Ernst  
(Ph: 02 6272 5615)

for  
Dr Andy Carroll  
Chief Veterinary Officer