

**COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS' MEETING - COMMUNIQUE**

**5 APRIL 2002 – CANBERRA**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) today held its 11th meeting in Canberra. The Council, comprising the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), had wide ranging discussions on important areas of national interest.

This extract covers the agreed outcomes of the foot and mouth disease discussions.

**FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE**

The Council considered a report from its Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Taskforce that had been commissioned in June 2001. The report noted that Australia is free from major exotic animal diseases such as FMD and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or 'mad cow disease') but that, if there was an outbreak of one of these diseases in Australia, there would be a major impact on the agricultural sector, rural and regional Australia and the national economy.

The Council agreed that major animal disease emergencies, and their consequences, must be tackled on a national basis. COAG agreed a national coordination framework to ensure close integration of responsibilities and actions within and across jurisdictions which builds on existing animal disease and emergency management plans. The detailed arrangements would be settled in a Memorandum of Understanding between Heads of Government, by mid 2002.

COAG agreed that further work is required to improve national prevention, preparedness and response capability. This high priority activity is being coordinated through the Primary Industries Ministerial Council.

COAG considers it important for industry to continue to develop and implement as soon as possible industry-wide and farm-level measures which would reduce the likelihood of disease establishment, rate and extent of spread and impact.

A full-scale national simulation will be held in September 2002 to test peak-level arrangements across and within jurisdictions and emergency roles and linkages across all relevant agencies. The simulation will not involve any substantial field operations.

COAG also agreed that a further report be submitted to COAG by December 2002 which draws together the key matters arising from the national simulation, progress on improving prevention, preparedness and response capacity, an assessment by each jurisdiction of its preparedness status against agreed performance criteria, and an assessment of funding implications for each level of government. A report would also be prepared on managing relief and recovery arrangements.