



The Territory buffalo industry: Strategies for a healthy future

The buffalo industry is among those being targeted as the NT Government seeks input into its Draft Industry Development Plans for the Pastoral Industry.

The base consultation document, being distributed to producers and industry groups, summarises the present state of the NT cattle, buffalo and camel industries and lists issues and strategies of importance to the future development of each.

The Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development (DBIRD) has written to producers inviting feedback on the draft plans.

The move follows a ministerial commitment in Parliament in May this year to consult widely with industry to draw up industry sectoral development plans that ensure departmental resources are focussed on priority area needs.

The various industry development plans will form a

framework for the future direction of NT primary industries as a whole.

Key issues identified for the buffalo industry include:

- Domesticated herd productivity—Obvious management improvements can be made in many herds, allowing for better quality stock in relation to weight for age, temperament and reproduction rates

- Industry unity—the need for all industry representatives to be NTBIC members to allow a coordinated constant supply to live export markets

- Market diversification—a need to foster other reliable overseas live export and meat markets in case of future problems with the existing Brunei market

- Lack of market growth for the TenderBuff quality product, especially interstate

- The lack of supply of TenderBuff to the market, particularly at peak tourist season times (mid-late dry in Darwin)

- Fostering the development of an Australian dairy buffalo industry

- Availability of land so as to increase the number of NT buffalo famers.

Draft strategies include exploring new overseas and domestic markets, increasing TenderBuff supply to help maintain market diversity, increasing supply of high quality dry season nutrition to TenderBuff stock on producers' properties, and encouraging the use of Riverine buffalo in the dairy industry to broaden product range.

They also include increasing the availability of buffalo farming land by the Government encouraging subdivision of large pastoral or crown leases which could be better developed by increasing the number of viable operations within the industry.

In its 'Buffalo Industry' introduction, the draft development plan comments that the NT industry has doubled its annual export turnover to over 3000 head in the past two years, and that the employment of a full-time industry development officer has been a success.

Buff meat a winner



An 'NT Food Suppliers Networking Night' was held at Darwin's Novotel Atrium hotel in November and, like other participants, NTBIC's Barry Lemcke (right) was pretty impressed with the sumptuous Tenderbuff creations whipped up by Executive Chef Trevor McGill (left). **MORE DETAILS Back Page.**

AGM in Darwin

ABIC will hold its AGM and conference in Darwin from 21-24 February 2003.

Arrangements are yet to be finalised but the program will probably include the AGM on Saturday, an organised tour of Top End buffalo producing properties on Sunday, and networking opportunities.

PLEASE NOTE that all current committee members, except Bob Cook (SA) and John Lloyd (Qld), must re-nominate by 19 December if they wish to continue to represent their regions.

Please confirm your nomination and/or attendance ASAP by advising AGM coordinator Kevin Doyle by email (kev_doyle@bigpond), by phone on 0428 666 856, or by fax on (02) 6687 2769.

Mineral Block Trial Results

The mineral blocks supplied by Livestock Nutrition Technologies (LNT) for the trial were Boost (15kg), Secure (15kg), Phosrite (40kg), Ultraphos (20kg) and Uramol (20kg). One block of each type was placed at each of the six sites chosen, it was unfortunate that only three of the sites had a single watering point in the paddock which guaranteed that the block sites had to be visited by all the animals in the group.

The consumption rates at the various locations varied from nil on all types of blocks to every block gone within a week.

The types of feed available varied greatly from a green swamp, one good body of dry improved pasture (mostly pangola), sparse semi improved pasture to native grasses, hay was being fed on two of the sites.

At the swamp and pangola sites consumption was zero the blocks were kicked and pushed around the flat by the buffalo but there were no signs of licking or chewing over a four week period. The buffalo in these groups had been behind wire and on similar feed either all their life or for at least twelve months.

Two sites were in paddocks with reasonable areas of improved pasture although the body of feed was nearly finished and some hay was being fed out at both places. At one site 103 head of breeders (long term residents) consumed 14.85 gms per hd per day over 24 days with order of preference being Boost (4.5), Uramol (4.05), Ultraphos (4.05), Phosrite and Secure. At the second site 70 head of mostly breeders consumed 16.07 gms/hd/day over 24 days with order of preference being definitely Uramol (11.9), Ultraphos (2.38) and traces of Phosrite, Secure and Boost, this site had a lot of surface

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The devastating drought conditions currently sweeping so much of Australia have highlighted the challenges facing buffalo producers in the southern states.

Southern producers are struggling because of a shortage of feed for their herds and opportunities for agistment until conditions improve, simply don't exist where buffalo are concerned. If cattle producers need to offload herds in the hard times, they can do it. And agistment is no problem in the Top End where conditions for buffalo are ideal. But to get someone to take on your buffalo is almost impossible in southern Australia. The reasons? Public perceptions about buffalo, legislative requirements regarding permits in some states, and the lack of alternative production outlets.

Meat substitution activities in relation to buffalo are also disturbing and are not helping the industry to grow in the south. Many people have pre-conceived ideas about buffalo because of what they have been presented as buffalo meat. I know of restaurant suppliers in Melbourne who have offered genuine buffalo cuts to retailers, only to be told it doesn't match up to the 'buffalo' they have been buying.

One supplier was trying to sell buffalo eye fillets weighing 1.7kg per piece but the retailer knocked them back because, he said, he could get 'buffalo' eye fillets weighing 3 kg per piece. The fact is that buffalo eye fillets don't weigh anywhere near that amount and that sort of meat can only have come from a mature beef bull. You just have to compare the amount of eye fillet being consumed in the southern states with that coming from buffalo being slaughtered to see the vast difference. This sort of unscrupulous activity is certainly not making life easy for producers and something needs to be done about it. It's just one of the hurdles that has to be mastered if the buffalo industry is to develop into a real going concern in southern Australia in the future.

In closing, I extend my best wishes to everyone in our industry for a happy Christmas and a productive New Year.

Milton Stevens

water access and about 20 of the breeders were from a free range herd 15 months ago. One site with about 50 breeders and 230 weaners ranging from 200 to 300 kg with access to 150 hectares of newly established Jarrah grass (well planted, well fertilized but no rain) and about 200 hectares of native grass consumed all of the small blocks and half of the Phosrite within 12 days, the blocks from the swamp site were transferred to here and the Uramol was gone in 5 days and the rest in 9 days. These animals had been mustered in from a big area of native pasture

area 2-3 months earlier and the blocks were on the only watering point.

The last site was on about 500 hectares with a reasonable body of native pasture, there were 175 breeders and 100 weaners all freshly mustered free range animals. There were several watering points in the paddock although the surface water was drying out rapidly. It took 3 or 4 days for the buffalo to start on the blocks then the Boost was finished in a week followed by Phosrite, Secure, Ultraphos with Uramol being the last to be finished.

After the trial blocks were consumed the owner bought some 100 kg Uramol blocks that are being eaten at around 70 kg per week. It would appear from all of this that buffalo with long-term, year-round access to a good body of fertilized pasture do not take to mineral blocks, the reliance on the mineral blocks is greater in paddocks where the standing feed is all but gone by a bit over half way through the dry season and hand feeding is relied on. Animals that were mustered in from free range or large areas of light country seemed to be very deficient in minerals and ate any block that was available.

It will be interesting to observe consumption patterns for the ex free range animals during their second dry season.

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BUFFALO NEWS

We want your input

Buffalo News welcomes input from industry representatives on any development, activity or issue related to their region or to the industry in general. CONTRIBUTIONS can be sent to, or discussed with:

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Trialing three-quarter cross Riverine as TenderBuff

Most of the Riverine cross stock being put through the abattoir in the last year have been 3/4 cross animals. Most of the previous data has been with 1/2 cross animals where growth rate and carcass characteristics have been superior compared with swamp buffalo and where growth rate differences of 40% plus have been recorded. With two years of poor swamp cow reproductive performance and the absence of swamp cows prior to that, there has been very little F1 (1/2) turnout. A group of 2001 F1 progeny will go to slaughter this year.

Over 2000-01, only 36 TenderBuff (6 Riverine-X) were slaughtered, mainly due to a lack of supplies from July to December. This increased to 68 head in 2001-02 financial year with 10 head being 3/4 crosses. Most of these were turned off in the dry season, generally because their higher growth rates and heavier fat cover than swamps makes it easier to turn them off in the dry.

The comparison in carcass measurements for the period of July 2001- June 2002 is shown in the table below:



Buffalo from the crossbreeding research

	Swamp	3/4 River	% Difference between Swamp and 3/4 River
No of Head	58	10	
Mean HSCW (kg)	209.0	216.7	+8.5%
Eye Muscle Area (cm ²)	53.9	60.1	+11.5%
Mean pH	5.61	5.7*	+1.6%
Mean Carcass Length (cm)	103.0	102.4	-0.6%
Mean Grid \$/kg	2.94	2.80*	-4.8%
Mean p8 Fat (mm)	5.81	10.1	+74%
Mean Dressing %	49.5	50.7	+2.4
Mean Price \$	613.21	602.77*	-1.7%

* These figures were adversely affected by two cull-for-temperament bulls which had very high pHs and reduced the mean grid price and mean price received markedly. The means of the remaining 8 head of pH, grid and price were 5.56 (pH) \$3.06 (grid) and \$656.13 (full price) respectively.

Drought hits southern buffalo farms

Buffalo producers in southern Australia are in the grip of the devastating drought that is impacting on properties across the country. Several producers are facing serious feed shortages as the drought drags on.

NSW buffalo producers have reported being in 'survival mode' because of drought conditions. Buffalo Producers NSW President Doug Robertson says the drought enveloping about 99 per cent of NSW means the forced disposal of animals of all descriptions continues steadily. He also says the presentation of quality animals suitable for the TenderBuff trade is not being made any easier by the current climatic conditions.

Victorian producers are also suffering. South Australian based stock transport operator Milton Stevens recently brought a truckload of Victorian buffalo to Darwin for the Brunei market.

He says the Victorian owner is disposing of his herd because he has 'reached the end of his tether'. "The owner was faced with having to pay out more than \$50 000 for hay to keep his herd alive through the drought—and even then he would still have a non-saleable herd at the end of the season," Milton says.

"Some of his stock has gone to Tasmania and about 50 calves have gone to South Australia. Another lot have been dehorned in readiness to be transported north to go to Brunei. And I am aware of at least two other Victorian buffalo producers who are preparing to dehorn and abort their herds and send them into the Brunei market.

The comparison figures are somewhat skewed, as these 3/4 bulls were those types culled for temperament or type, while others of the year group were sold as breeder bulls—better temperament—so that the comparison left out animals that would have possibly produced a better outcome. The conclusion is that the advantages of cross breeding are still carried on to the 3/4 animals but the differences are not as great as with the F1 crosses.

A direct comparison between F1 and 3/4 will be possible this year. The other strategy to improve TenderBuff productivity recently has been to castrate all the bulls. This has a two-fold advantage. The steers have better fat coverage and don't cause fat shortage difficulties in the dry season, like that encountered with bulls. Secondly, we get fewer female pregnancies in mixed sex groups being grown out for TenderBuff.

*Report by Barry Lemcke
Phone 8999 2263*

Buff selling well

Garry Leeson of Ocean Shores Quality Meats in northern NSW has had considerable success with buffalo product since receiving his first carcass four months ago. He is now averaging one carcass per month plus some trim.

STATE *by* STATE

Buffalo news from around the nation

NEW SOUTH WALES

Doug Robertson has been elected president of Buffalo Producers NSW.

Buffalo Producers NSW met with ABIC's Industry Development Specialist for the southern region, Kevin Doyle, recently to discuss possible marketing directions.

Doug says it has become increasingly obvious that the major centres—Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne—will have to be where the marketing effort is concentrated, due to the cost of transport of meat, quartered and boxed.

"Each time product has to be handled during transportation to its final destination, it costs a minimum of 20 cents per kg. At that rate, profitability is rapidly depleted," he says.

Kevin Doyle has located a processor who is willing to trial

a pallet of buffalo meat (boned, bagged and boxed) delivered chilled to Lismore.

Unfortunately, the money offered is only likely to be acceptable in periods of forced destocking (like now during the drought).

The costs of processing and transporting bodies from most of NSW to Lismore will exclude most producers, except for those in the north east of the state.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Neil Ross, NTBIC's Industry Development Officer and Executive Officer, has been appointed as the Northern Territory's second representative on the Australian Buffalo Industry Council.

Darwin will host the 2003 Australian Buffalo industry Council (ABIC) Annual General Meeting in February.

The program will provide plenty of opportunities for participants from around the country to observe buffalo research and production programs being undertaken in the tropical Top End.

VICTORIA

Like their NSW counterparts, Victorian buffalo producers are feeling the full effects of

the drought, and some herds are being disposed of or reduced.

TASMANIA

Tasmania has become the latest Australian state to join the buffalo industry. Buffalo disposed of from a drought-stricken Victorian property were recently shipped out to join a herd being developed by Tasmanian farmer Phillip Oates.

A buffalo feast



The Northern Territory Food Group, attached to the Department of Business, Industry and Development (DBIRD), staged an *NT Food Suppliers' Networking Night* at Darwin's Novotel Atrium hotel in November.

NTBIC got off on the right foot by donating half a carcass of premium buffalo to the Atrium's Executive Chef Trevor McGill and left the creativity up to him. The resulting succulent feast—Thai Meat Balls, Smoked Fillet, Rump in Mustard, Buffalo Curry, Buffalo Stroganoff and more—proved extremely popular with the hospitality industry participants and representatives of diverse local meat, horticultural and other food groups. Trevor said he loved working with the buff meat which was 'extremely versatile', and he encouraged more chefs to use the product. NTBIC now hopes the response to the promotion will result in greater interest from chefs in the Tenderbuff product.

Lick block trial results - from Pg 2

I hope that owners of the animals involved in these trials continue to experiment with mineral blocks and that every body remembers the generosity of LNT and the assistance of Wesfarmers Darwin when buying their supplements. Small mineral blocks only cost around \$20 each so it would be a good idea to buy two or three different types (LNT of course) and let your animals tell you what type they need. Have some blocks available at all times because by the time you notice that the animals have slipped a bit you could have lost a lot of dollars.

Neil Ross
Industry Development & Executive Officer NTBIC

AUSTRALIAN BUFFALO INDUSTRY COUNCIL

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