



Saving our beef and bacon

extraction through bores,' Brennan says. 'Studies suggest groundwater levels will not recover if this pumping trend continues.'

CSIRO's report, *An economic and environmental evaluation of the benefits and risks from using recycled water for irrigated crop production on the Darling Downs*, will be used by the Darling Downs Vision 2000 association to inform local, state and federal governments.

'This will be important from a south-east Queensland perspective,' McVeigh says. 'But for the Darling Downs itself, we'll ask CSIRO to develop management regimes, which may include land and water management plans for some catchments and individual farms.'

A successful scheme would reduce water shortage problems on the Darling Downs. But there is one bridge yet to cross.

'There's broad support for this project at various levels of government,' McVeigh says. 'But the sticking point will be the cost of infrastructure to pipe the water from Brisbane to the Darling Downs. It's a very big hill to pump water over.'

APSRU is a collaborative venture between CSIRO, the University of Queensland and the Queensland Departments of Primary Industries and Natural Resources and Mines.

Contact: Lisa Brennan, (07) 3214 2375, lisa.brennan@csiro.au.

Wendy Pyper

Australia's capacity to cope with a major outbreak of livestock disease is being enhanced with the installation of a robotic sample handling and information management system at the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL).

The system, funded by Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia, will better equip AAHL to deal with the high throughput of samples required for disease surveillance, enabling about 5000 sera to be tested per eight-hour shift.

The need for high-capacity sampling was highlighted late last year during a simulated foot-and-mouth disease outbreak exercise that tested Australia's preparedness, and its response and recovery capabilities.

The week-long exercise replicated issues ranging from immediate disease control, trade management, and communication between governments and industry, to longer-term impacts such as depression in affected communities.

More than 1000 government and industry participants had to deal with the simulated outbreak, which spread from a farm near Beaudesert, in south-east Queensland, to northern New South Wales, and transported into Victoria.

The exercise began with confirmation of the outbreak on days one and two. It then progressed to the end of the first week of

the outbreak on day three, and to three months into the epidemic on day four.

At the end of the simulation, there were 454 infected properties and 822 504 animals slaughtered. It was concluded that an outbreak of this magnitude would have significantly tested Australia's planning, resources and response capability, and a report on the lessons learned has been prepared for the Council of Australian Governments.

Experience in the United Kingdom has shown that if foot-and-mouth disease occurred in Australia, large numbers of samples might have to be tested. The UK epidemic ran from February to September 2001 and more than three million samples were processed.

Foot-and-mouth is a highly contagious viral disease of cloven-hoofed animals such as pigs, cattle, sheep, goats and deer. It does not pose a threat to human health. The disease is spread rapidly via contact with animals, transmission via people or transport vehicles, or through the air. Australia has been free of the disease since 1872.

Contact: CSIRO Livestock Industries, (07) 3214 2200, li-enquiries@csiro.au. A Livestock Industries newsletter is available at: www.csiro.au/index.asp?type=faq&id=Taking-Stock&stylesheet=divisionFaq