

Summary: NSW Independent Biosecurity Commissioner Report

Opportunities to Improve the NSW Cattle Tick Program

The NSW Independent Biosecurity Commissioner was tasked by the Minister for Agriculture to provide advice on the State's Cattle Tick Program (the Program).

In preparing the advice, consideration was given to the current status of cattle tick in NSW and feasibility of eradication; alignment to biosecurity legislation; other similar programs; previous evaluations or reviews undertaken; program risks, benefits and beneficiaries, and transitional arrangements that may be necessary for future program options.

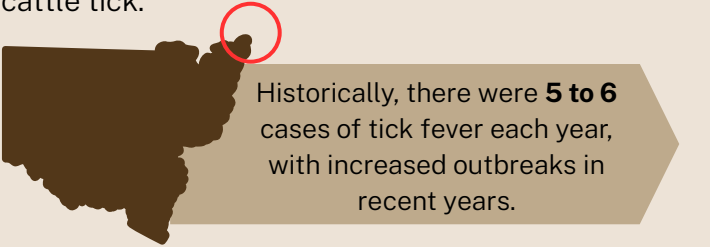
At a glance

Status of cattle tick in NSW

- Infestations are mostly confined to the Northern Rivers region of NSW.
- Over time the overall number of infested properties has been increasing.
- The profile of the North Coast management area includes:
 - Diverse land tenure (traditional agriculture, small scale farming, absentee landholders)
 - High turnover and subdivision, increasing number of properties, with low herd size
 - Diverse topography creating challenges for complete mustering

Infested properties

As of 24 February 2026, there were over **580** properties in NSW known to be infested with cattle tick.



Program costs

In FY 24/25, NSW Government program expenditure was:  **4.66M**

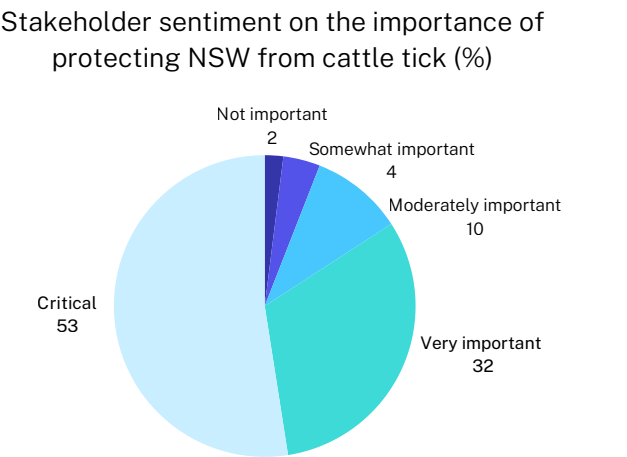
The big picture

Cattle ticks currently occur in **1.1%** of cattle herds across NSW. Over 50% of the NSW cattle herd are in a high or very high risk area.

The Program has played a critical role in restricting cattle tick to a small geographic area of NSW, with climate modelling demonstrating cattle tick establishment is possible across a much larger area of NSW. However, the current peak in infested properties presents a significant challenge for the Program.

Stakeholder feedback

- Maintaining eradication to prevent cattle tick from entering, spreading and establishing in NSW is strongly supported by most stakeholders.
- Feedback themes related to:
 - More on-ground support
 - Neighbour compliance
 - Timely, accurate and consistent communication
 - Border controls and horse movement rules
 - Practical challenges of program requirements
 - Reporting and user-friendly tools
 - Information quality, access and consistency



How the Program is tracking

The report includes 39 findings, summarised below.

Program history and governance



Regular reviews since 1920 identify similar themes and recommendations.



Delivery is led by the DPIRD Compliance Branch, with a need for greater input from teams such as Animal Biosecurity and LLS.



Legislative intent, program governance and on-ground delivery are not aligned, resulting in implementation issues.



The Program is not currently supported by a robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework.

Compliance and enforcement



Compliance activities are primarily focused on straightforward offences with little focus on the broader spectrum of biosecurity risks.

Communications and engagement



IT systems and websites are too complex and hard to use.



Education activities are not targeted or effective to build awareness or compliance, including reporting obligations.

Tick fever



Tick fever cases are low, however impacts are severe and disease prevention and management is limited by inconsistent diagnosis, reporting and communication.

Research and development



A long-term research and innovation plan will support future management options.

National coordination



Cattle tick management would benefit from stronger cross-jurisdictional and national cooperation to address shared challenges and issues.

Alternative approaches



Cattle tick programs interstate successfully use contractor delivery, cost recovery, private sector accreditation and assurance-based schemes to provide a more scalable and resilient delivery model.

Surveillance and tracing



The Program has a need for more risk-based surveillance, including better use of data from the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

On-farm treatment



Activities are dependent on largely fixed resources, limiting surge capacity.



The Owner Treatment Scheme has potential but must be matured in its administration, monitoring and evaluation.

Movement controls



Movement controls are achieving reduced entry of cattle tick into NSW and border monitoring is a program strength.

Resourcing



The Program has increasing financial and operational strain due to reduced availability of resources and increased level of activity.



The Program team has sustained a high volume of work over an extended period.

Dip sites



Information and arrangements for managing legacy cattle tick dip sites are fragmented and outdated, and funding and resourcing are not sufficient to support necessary action.

Beneficiaries and funding arrangements



Justification for high levels of public funding beyond the delivery of core government services is limited.



Benefits largely accrue to the NSW cattle industry and other tick-free jurisdictions.



Costs are unevenly borne, mainly by producers and equine groups in the Northern Rivers region.



Funding should better align costs with industry-wide benefits with a broad-based levy offering a more equitable and sustainable approach.

Future considerations



Feasibility of eradication

Eradication of cattle tick in NSW is feasible, however a low level of infestations is likely to continue to occur in the Northern Rivers region, requiring ongoing management, surveillance and response.

Feasibility is contingent on strengthened resourcing and investment, improved governance, transparent reporting and sustained stakeholder engagement.

Feasibility factors



TECHNICAL: High confidence



ECONOMIC: High confidence



SOCIAL: Moderate confidence

Alternative options

1 Deregulation

- Expected >50% NSW herd impacted
- Large industry cost (\$120-\$158M)

Rating     

2 Containment

- 'Infested Zone' and 'Free Zone' - improbable long term containment
- Escalating costs over time

3 Eradication

- Infested properties reduced to 100-200 at any point in time
- High benefit-cost ratio

Recommended program improvements

1 DPIRD lead the NSW Cattle Tick Program and realign activities for effective delivery.

8 NSW Government ensure resourcing levels are appropriate for program outcomes.

2 DPIRD establish a technical advisory committee, supporting development and review of a NSW Cattle Tick Plan.

9 DPIRD establish interagency agreements with Crown Lands and the NSW EPA for coordinated dip site management.

3 DPIRD, with LLS and the Cattle Tick Consultative Committee (CTCC) develop and publish the Cattle Tick Plan.

10 DPIRD identify and prioritise research needs and pursue partnerships with industry and jurisdictions to advance research.

4 DPIRD establish an interoperable information management framework to support Program activities.

11 NSW Government continue eradication as a feasible long term objective, noting ongoing border controls are required.

5 DPIRD consider most appropriate regulatory tools to support Program compliance, aligned to the Cattle Tick Plan.

12 DPIRD conduct an interim review of the Program after 3 years, followed by a comprehensive review after 6 years.

6 DPIRD review and update stakeholder management and engagement plans, including refresh of the CTCC.

13 DPIRD and LLS investigate funding models including a broad based levy and cost recovery.

7 DPIRD publish information on cattle tick infested and tick fever infested properties.

14 DPIRD advocate for a national approach to cattle tick management.

Further information

For more information on the work of the Commissioner, visit:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/dpi/biosecurity/independent-biosecurity-commissioner>

