



# Buffalo News

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Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council (ABIC)

## Abattoir development critical to national buff meat sector growth

### Dodging flooded rivers to get the meat through

The Beatrice Hill research team got 10 buffalo steers out to the newly-opened Gunbalanya Meatworks in December - and delivered the carcasses back to Darwin just one day before the East Alligator River flooded, cutting freight access.

"The abattoir can now hang full sides rather than quarters, which is a great improvement," researcher Barry Lemcke says. "However, TenderBuff can't be processed and branded yet because there is still no electrical stimulation equipment installed. This means an automatic 10% reduction in the agreed price to the producer.

The carcasses were needed so meat samples could be individually vacuum packed and frozen after one month and then ship them to the Uni of New England's Meat Science Department for tenderness analysis.

"We had hoped to send out 20 steers but the flooded river beat us," Barry says. Another load may be possible after the Wet.

While a lack of suitable meatworks continues to hamper Australian buffalo producers, new and prospective Top End developments could soon see a resurgence in the meat sector. Local producers have been buoyed by the November opening of the revamped Gunbalanya Meatworks in southwest Arnhem Land. The buff meat industry could also benefit from the proposed re-opening of the Meneling Abattoir near Batchelor in the coming dry season - and producers are keeping a keen eye on AACo's proposed major abattoir development near Darwin over the next two years. The Gunbalanya Meatworks opening has resulted from a \$3.1 million economic development initiative supported by the Australian

Government's Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC). The ILC will work in partnership with the Gunbalanya community over the next 15 years to expand the meatworks business and also build up the community's floodplain grazing enterprise. The project's key purpose is to create new jobs for Indigenous people and improve the supply of fresh, affordable meat to west Arnhem Land communities. Buffalo have already been processed there, in part for meat quality assessment, since the official opening. The operators are now geared to kill buffalo regularly and part of their plan is to supply buffalo and beef products to community stores servicing 11,000 people across Arnhem Land and island communities

east and northeast of Darwin. Meanwhile, Victorian producers still face frustrating hurdles in getting their buffalo processed. "The abattoirs remain the biggest problem and as a consequence we sometimes pay enormous transport costs," VicBIC president Athel Smith reports. "If we do find new abattoirs they may need our assistance to establish correct procedure for the killing of buffalo. We still receive a lot of requests to supply meat throughout Australia and overseas but cannot meet them." Athel says one buyer's proposal to provide a permanent processing market for local surplus male buffalo was yet to come to fruition. He added that halal market prospects were limitless if an appropriate abattoir could be found.



*Buffalo at the re-developed Gunbalanya Meatworks which opened in November*

ABIC Website - [www.buffaloaustralia.org](http://www.buffaloaustralia.org)



Ricotta



Yoghurt



Beer Cheese

# Riverine buffalo the mainstay of the NT's only dairy enterprise

Nearly two years of delays caused by frustrating official red tape have not broken the spirit or determination of the Northern Territory's only dairy farmers, Geoff and Sharon Arthur.

Production at the Arthur's Lambells Lagoon operation near Darwin is now in full swing and the early public response has been enthusiastic.

Geoff and Sharon launched Beatrice Buffalo Pty Ltd three years ago with a newly acquired riverine herd. They were eager to start milking the cows and producing specialised cheeses and yoghurts as soon as possible but were initially thwarted by one delay after the other.

They are presently running a herd of about 30 riverine buffalo, including milkers, calves and heifers, and have another large group of cows, heifers, steers, weaners and calves agisted away from their property.

They also faced frustrating delays in moving into their new cheese-making room, where they had planned to start processing last April to capture the dry season visitor throng, but couldn't get moving on it till November.

Despite the costly hurdles, the path has finally smoothed and the Beatrice Buffalo dairy range of specialised cheeses and yoghurt is now being tried, bought and enjoyed around the Territory.

The range includes a traditional creamy-sweet style ricotta, a salty Haloumi-style beer cheese, firm mild

natural yoghurt, paneer and the soon-to-be-released fresh mozzarella.

"We're just concentrating on these five products at the moment and when we get our separator in the next month or two, we'll introduce low fat yoghurt and probably make some butter."

Sharon learnt to make cheese at a special course at the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia in Melbourne, and by reading and practicing. "We keep learning as we go along. We're pretty happy with where we are up to with the things we are doing at the moment," she says.

Both Geoff and Sharon have a substantial background in the dairy industry with cattle. They say buffalo have made it that bit more satisfying because they are wonderful animals to work with. Sharon also has education and experience in dairy manufacturing and other industries in relation to food safety.

They are selling their cheeses to hotels and restaurants in Darwin and outer Darwin and are in talks with retail operators who seem keen to sell the Beatrice Buffalo Dairy line. They also have a list of interstate markets and contractors to follow up and are currently working through the inherent freight issues that send the prices up.

The Arthurs also did a trial run of direct selling at the Coolalinga Markets in rural Darwin recently and were delighted with the public response.

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## Buffalo News

We welcome contributions on any issue or activity relating to Australia's buffalo industry.

Stories and/or photos can be sent to, or discussed with:

**KERRY SHARP - EDITOR**

Phone: 08 8981 4999

Mobile: 0419 845 714

Email: sharp@octa4.net.au

Postal: PO Box 2227 Parap NT 0804

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*Geoff, Sharon and Buffalo - in a promo shot from the TV show, Mercurio's Menu*



## RESEARCH UPDATE: Mixed outcomes from four AI rounds in 2010

The RIRDC-sponsored buffalo AI program continued to progress in 2010 with four rounds completed – in July, September, November and December.

The last two groups of six head each were firstly the recent calvers from the October 2009 AI round of the previous year. The second six were the non-pregnants from Rounds 1 and 2 of 2010.

The results were 16 pregnant out of 29 in Round 1 and nine out of 14 in Round 2. In Round 3 (the

last calvers), three out of six cows became pregnant, including Cow No 28 from the USA, owned by the Fishers from Swim Creek Station and born in 1994.

Round 4 involved all the misses from Rounds 1 and 2. Only one confirmed pregnancy (plus one other possible) out of six was achieved.

The results suggest that there are a small number of difficult-to-AI cows which might prefer a bull to do the job!

## Murrah access hurdles force a research rethink

VicBIC has been disappointed with difficulties faced in trying to start up a planned RIRDC approved research project focussed on *Upgrading of Dairy Buffalo in Australia*.

“Things have not gone as programmed,” President Athel Smith says. “Dr George Malinov visited Bulgaria in December 2009 with the intention of arranging the purchase and shipment of Murrah buffalo semen to Australia. However, we were not successful and are currently pursuing the semen through Austrade in Warsaw. This pursuit is ongoing. As a consequence of not obtaining the Murrah semen, we reverted to Italian Riverine semen and started the program at a much later date, when the impact of above average rainfall became an issue.”

VicBic has thanked the NT Government for providing the Italian riverine semen.

## ABIC state reps meet in Windsor

Buffalo producers from around the country attended this year’s Australian Buffalo Industry Council AGM and field day at Windsor, NSW this month. Participating state representatives got the opportunity while in Windsor to check out progress on Ian and Kim Massingham’s local buffalo farm.

**A full report on the meeting and associated activities will be in the next *Buffalo News*.**

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## MEAT ANALYSIS

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“The project involved buffalo in age groups of 18 months and 30 months. Testing will hopefully give us some insight into the change in tenderness with age. This will give some indication of whether the cut-off age for TenderBuff is realistic or able to be lengthened. The carcass weights averaged 223 kg and 293kg respectively for the two age groups. Results will be made available in a later *Buffalo News*. (PHOTO: *Buff processing at Gunbalanya*)

# Buffalo News & Views . . .

*from around the country*

## The vagaries of climate

Unruly climatic conditions played havoc with primary production across many parts of Australia in 2010. Queensland and Victorian buffalo producers have faced anxious times in light of the extensive severe flooding that has impacted on both states in the latter part of the year. At time of going to print, Cyclone Yasi, Australia's biggest cyclone on record, had crossed the Queensland coast through Mission Beach and Tully, cutting a swathe of destruction. With the

cyclone imminent, ABIC reps Mitch Humphries and Jana Kahabka were forced to pull out of the 2011 ABIC conference so they could take care of things at home. In WA's south west, wildfires remain a constant threat due to lack of rain.

## Weaning milestone

In November 2010, Barry Lemcke and his Beatrice Hill Farm team carried out the first weaning of calves sired by AI from the new Italian semen from COFA that arrived

in 2009. The calves were born in April-May 2010 and averaged 280kg at weaning. Barry reports that quite a variation in colours was noticed despite them being purebred. "It will be interesting to watch their progress as two of these sires are in the top ten performance list in Italy at present," he says "They are Caesar and O-B-One, currently at No. 3 and No.4 respectively.

## Buffalo muster

NT buffalo producer and stock transport contractor Michael Swart has been in discussions recently with three Top End Aboriginal organisations that are keen to start mustering free-ranging swamp buffaloes in the 2011 dry season. One group is on Melville Island and the others in Arnhem Land where tens of thousands of buffalo are still present.

## New industries focus

Queensland producers Mitch Humphries and Marg Thomson were on hand to showcase the industry when the New Rural Industries Australia (NRIA) inaugural conference and expo was staged on the Gold Coast in December. The event highlighted Australia's new and emerging rural industries and their products and diversity. Organisers reported that the RIRDC-supported conference and expo provided an excellent opportunity for industry people to interact and exchange information. It also gave them a chance to hear from both recognised leading Australian and overseas research organisations and 'hands on' producers. Participants were able to sample wide-ranging produce through industry displays and booths.

## Australian Buffalo Industry Council State / Territory Representatives

### QUEENSLAND

**Mitch Humphries** (ABIC Vice-President) - Ph: 07 4097 2544  
Fax: 07 4097 2038 - Mob: 0407 254 435 - Email: mitch@dairybuffalo.com.au  
**Jana Kahabka** (ABIC Sec/Treas) - Ph: 0428 405 522  
Email: jana@capeyorkbuffalo.com  
**Marg Thompson** - Ph: 07 5494 4420 - Fax: 07 5494 4252  
Email: malenybuffalo@yahoo.com.au

### VICTORIA

**Athel Smith** - Ph: 03 5965 2368  
Mob: 0428 878 207 - Email: athel.smith@yahoo.com  
**Robyn Richmond** - Ph: 03 5453 3305 - Mobile: 0458 533 305  
Email: shannkirst@bigpond.com

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Milton Stevens** - Ph: 08 8688 5032 - Mob: 0429 694 736

### TASMANIA

**Phillip Oates** - Ph/Fax: 03 6239 6712  
Mob: 0427 889 487 - Email: tasmanianbuffalo@westnet.com.au

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**Andrew Stewart** - Ph: 08 9381 5955  
Email: andrew@adhstewart.com.au  
**Daryn Rowland** - Ph: 08 9764 1951 - Mob: 0409 477 323  
Email: onthepass@bigpond.com

### NEW SOUTH WALES

**Doug Robertson** - Ph: 02 6848 5315 - Fax: 02 6848 5359  
Email: dougr@bordernet.com.au  
**Ian Massingham** - Ph: 1300 360 200 - Fax: 1300 360 800  
Mob: 0414 743 118 - Email: ian@ausenviroservices.com

### NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Michael Swart** (ABIC President) - Ph: 08 89471661  
Email: michael@wrsc.com.au  
**Ernie Schlupe** - Ph: 08 8988 6092 - Mob: 0429 694 012  
Email: ernstschlupe@hotmail.com

## BUFF CHEESE NT STYLE

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"We are keen to sell our products directly to the public and our experience at Coolalinga Markets was good," Sharon says.

"A lot of people were quite excited about it and an estimated 50 per cent of those who stopped at our stall made a purchase. It was interesting to observe just how enthusiastic people were and good to actually see people eating our cheeses and liking them then buying them.

"It's a good sign for the future. It was good to also come across a number of people who were interested in making cheese themselves – though a fresh milk supply for this would be a challenge.

"We are focussing on producing a cheese which can be eaten as is but which avid foodies will find attractive as a raw ingredient to use creatively to make something special. We aim to have people buy it and do something special with it – and we don't plan to add a huge number of products to our list. We just want to keep it to a tight group of cheeses.

"I'm also making a mozzarella but I'm not quite happy enough with it to release it yet so it's being refined.

The Arthurs attribute much of their success to the ongoing support of Barry Lemcke and the NT Department of Resources.