RISE IN TERRITORY CATTLE PRODUCTION

The Territory’s beef cattle production could rise by almost 30% over the next three years and 54% by 2014 – according to pastoralists from across the NT.

This is the major finding of the first comprehensive survey of all the Territory’s pastoral regions.

The survey was conducted by the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines (DPIFM), in collaboration with industry, through the Northern Territory Cattlemen’s Association (NTCA).

The results were released by Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries Kon Vatskalis at the annual meeting of the NTCA in Darwin today.

“My departmental officers have travelled far and wide conducting 151 face-to-face interviews with pastoralists from cattle enterprise of more than 300 head, accounting for 75% of Territory producers.

“This survey is a historical snapshot of a dynamic industry undergoing constant change and will serve as an invaluable guide for future research.

“What we have is a definitive guide to the methods, problems, attitudes, successes and issues faced by Territory pastoralists,” said Mr Vatskalis.

The Northern Territory is divided into four pastoral regions - the Top End, Katherine, Barkly and Alice Springs.

The Territory’s pastoral industry is worth more than $300 million and directly employs more than 1600 people. More than 40 per cent of Australia’s South East Asian cattle exports come from the Territory.

Mr Vatskalis said pastoralists are aware of the need to balance environmental issues with economic production.

“This shines through in the detail of this survey where pastoralists identify land management issues, sustainability, grazing capacities and erosion as important issues.

“Advances in pastoral production and increasing veterinary, animal and plant health knowledge are all positive signs that this industry will continue to expand and play a key role in the Territory’s development,” said Mr Vatskalis.

The complete survey results for the Top End, Katherine, Barkly and Alice Springs pastoral regions are available at: http://www.primaryindustry.nt.gov.au
Other major findings of the report were:

- The biggest animal health concern for producers is botulism. Top End producers are also concerned about buffalo fly.

- Native tree or shrub build-up has a significant effect on pasture growth and mustering. Controlled burning is used by 50% of producers.

- Pastoralists spent an average of $19,568 a property to control weeds in 2004.

- Feral animals also hamper production. Wild dogs have the biggest impact and feral pigs pose a threat in the Top End. The average cost per property of controlling feral animals in 2004 was $4928.

- 9% of pastoralists supplement their income by opening their gates to tourists.

- Recruitment and retention of staff is the biggest hurdle, although Alice Springs producers say seasonal conditions are a bigger problem.

- The most significant threats to economic sustainability are rising costs, cattle prices and other market issues, and road conditions.

- A total of 535,000 cattle are turned off in the Territory, of which 270,000 are sold into the South-East Asian export trade, mostly from the Top End and Katherine regions. The Alice Springs Region tends to supply the domestic market to the south, while the Barkly mostly sends store crossbred cattle to Queensland.

Contact: Gemma Buxton 0401 110 064