

## Calf loss in northern Australia

### Meet the research team

The calf loss RD&E team will be in Richmond on Thursday 13 October 2016 at the Richmond Town Hall for lunch (12:30) and an afternoon forum on calf loss with beef producers. Everyone present will be canvassed on their opinion for future research before a Rabobank-sponsored dinner.

### What does calf loss cost in a typical northern herd?

When a pregnant cow fails to rear her calf to weaning:

- Her annual live weight production drops by an average of 130 kg
- The whole business profit drops by \$400 or more

### What is causing calf loss?

- By far the largest and most consistent loss is associated with poor nutrition and environmental extremes. We believe this causes calves to be born with low vigour and the cow to have reduced milk production. If daily milk delivery is not at least 3-5 litres from birth, the calf will usually die in 1-3 days. Bottle teats exacerbate this situation.
- *Vibrio* and pestivirus can also cause substantial calf loss, but tend to affect management groups only once every 5-10 years, after which immunity protects them for the following years of the cycle. Botulism also kills cows and suckling calves.

### What are the research priorities?

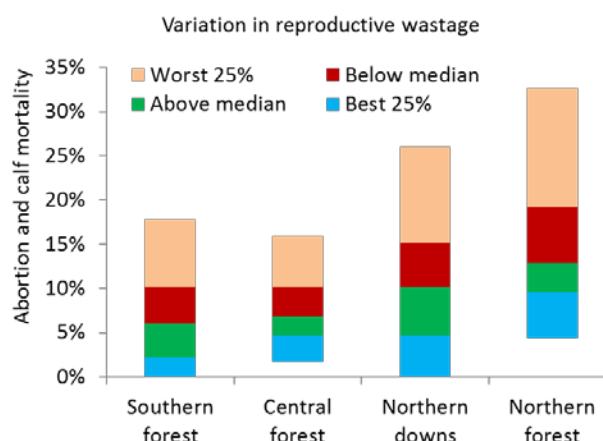
The research team is evaluating a range of management options to test to keep calf loss rates down. This will be part of new MLA-funded research we hope many producers will participate in.

### The research team

<i>Producers/MLA levy payers</i>	Wendy Brodie Rebecca Comiskey	Dan Lynch Alister McClymont	Geoff Murrell Kylie Schooley
<i>Uni of Qld</i>	Prof Michael McGowan	Prof Nigel Perkins Geoffry Fordyce	David McNeill Tamsin Barnes
<i>DAF Qld</i>	Dave Smith	Bruce Hill	David Mayer
<i>NT DPIF</i>	Kieren McCosker	Tim Schatz	
<i>UNE, Armidale</i>	Prof Roger Hegarty	Joe Miller	

### How many pregnant cows fail to rear a weaner?

- The achievable level is 5% loss or less except in the northern forest where it is 10%.
- The recent CashCow project showed 25% of properties are losing more than twice this number of calves.



### What can we do now to minimise loss?

Strategic vaccination plus any management that keeps body condition on cows and plenty of feed and water in front of them is expected to reduce loss. The main options recommended:

- Phosphorus supplementation where deficiency occurs
- Weaning management to hold condition on cows
- Stocking rates and water management that allow ready access to productive pastures
- Avoid handling around calving
- Vaccination: botulism in all cattle; vibrio in bulls; pestivirus as recommended by your cattle vet