

## Session 2.1 – Global Partnerships

### Introduction

- Australia has a three-pronged international work agenda on avian and pandemic influenza: bilateral, regional and global.
- We have just heard from our US and Canadian colleagues about some of the global approaches:
  - IPAPI: Australia is participating in the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza and we support the IPAPI Core Principles
  - International Health Ministers Meeting (Ottawa): Australia's Health Minister was an active participant.
- Bilaterally, we have provided assistance through our aid program to a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region for emerging infectious diseases such as SARS and avian influenza
  - total commitments of A\$41 million since 2003, including
    - Indonesia (\$15.5 million), including recent funding for 50,000 courses of Tamiflu
    - Pacific - \$8 million over 4 years.

### APEC

But I would like to focus mainly on our engagement through APEC – and in particular, to give an update on the recent meeting in Brisbane.

- The APEC economies cover the geographical area of greatest risk of an avian flu outbreak.
- APEC attention to infectious diseases is not new.
  - As far back as 1996, APEC established an Emerging Infectious Diseases Network.
  - In 2001 APEC leaders endorsed an APEC Infectious Diseases Strategy.
- Australia has been working with our regional partners in APEC since 2001 on measures to help the region prepare for and respond to pandemic threats such as avian influenza.
  - This work has been coordinated through the APEC Health Task Force and, more recently, the Task Force on Emergency Preparedness
    - Work in both these task forces has accelerated during 2005 and the issue is expected to feature prominently at the Leaders Meeting in November

- Last week, Australia hosted a two-day high level APEC meeting on avian and pandemic influenza in Brisbane.
- This meeting brought together around 100 participants including
  - Principal pandemic and disaster management coordinators from APEC economies, along with health and quarantine experts
  - Observer delegations from non-APEC ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Burma, Laos), ASEAN Secretariat and Pacific Islands Forum
  - the APEC Business Advisory Council, International Federation of the Red Cross and international organizations such as WHO, FAO, OIE, World Bank
- The objective of the meeting was to ensure a swift and coordinated regional response by:
  - Improving communication between the key personnel leading the fight against avian influenza in the Asia-Pacific region
  - Sharing information about and improving transparency of regional and national strategies for avian influenza preparedness and response
  - Identifying gaps in regional preparedness, and
  - Developing mechanisms to better coordinate the regional fight against any outbreaks.
- Discussion in the meeting was dynamic, with most economies keen to share their perspectives and identify gaps in regional preparedness.
  - Many commented that they found the discussions useful in refining their own strategies, particularly in the often-overlooked areas of business continuity/recovery and consular issues.
- Key themes at the meeting included:
  - Strong commitment by all economies to regional cooperation
  - Recognition that APEC has a valuable and unique role to play given its cross-sectoral agenda and access to both business and regional leaders
    - Action is required not just in the animal and human health fields, but also across customs, transport and tourism
    - Business continuity planning is also crucial
  - But any action through APEC must complement, not duplicate, work in other fora.
  - Regional economies must be prepared for a human pandemic but should be careful not to overplay the threat.
    - Scaremongering may undermine effective planning and cause unnecessary economic damage.
    - Public education and risk communication are extremely important
  - Regional preparedness and response plans vary according to the needs of individual economies but must be transparent and coordinated.
  - Cross-sectoral cooperation, particularly between agricultural and health sectors, will ensure the threat is attacked at its source – animal populations

- Regional coordination and collaboration can reduce the strain on stretched resources.
- Participants at the meeting agreed on some practical ways in which APEC economies could strengthen cooperation on avian influenza and prepare for a possible human pandemic. These included:
  - Establishment of an expert capability in the region to respond where requested to any human-to-human transmission outbreak
  - Testing of avian and pandemic influenza management plans at the regional level
  - Effective and transparent regional communications systems, including a register of disaster/pandemic coordinators
  - Technical assistance to help economies respond to any outbreak at source
  - Development of protocols on business continuity and recovery, maintenance of essential services and consular management issues.
- These outcomes and suggested actions will be considered by APEC Ministers and Leaders at their meetings in Korea in mid-November.

### Pacific

I would like to say a bit more about one of the regions represented in Brisbane, a part of the world that is often overlooked in discussions of global issues: the Pacific islands. (The Pacific Islands Forum has observer status at APEC and Papua New Guinea is a full member.)

- Around ¼ of Samoa's population died during the 1918 influenza pandemic
  - Pacific remains vulnerable to outbreaks of infectious diseases
- While some of the issues faced in the Pacific are similar to Asia – preparedness planning, surveillance, monitoring, infection control, etc – these may be even more challenging given small populations and human capacities
  - Collaboration and cooperation across national borders is particularly crucial, since individual small countries cannot possibly prepare and respond on their own.
- The Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (supported by WHO and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community) was established in 1996 to improve communicable disease surveillance and response
  - Includes early warning systems (PacNet)
  - Laboratory facilities (LabNet)
  - Response planning (EpiNet)
  - Is considered a good model for regional cooperation.
- Australia [and New Zealand] are supporting Pacific states in their efforts to improve preparedness

- Australia's Prime Minister recently announced a new commitment of A\$8 million over 4 years to support WHO, SPC and other partners to implement the *Asia-Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases* in the Pacific region and strengthen national and regional capacity to respond rapidly to emerging diseases.

### Conclusion

- In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that Australia recognizes and supports the crucial coordinating role of the relevant technical organizations – WHO, FAO and OIE – and multilateral development banks.
  - The initiatives I have outlined, such as the APEC processes and our support for the Pacific region, are consistent with the broader global strategies outlined by those organizations.

Thank you.