



# dairynews

ISSUE 3, SUMMER 2007

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## EDITORIAL



**Tony Dowman**

*Technical Specialist, West Kempsey*

Some people make things happen, some watch things happen, while others wonder what happened. The difference between these three types of personalities can be contributed to their ability to plan. Dairying is a complex business that requires many decisions to be made on a daily to annual basis. Some may only have a minor

impact on the business if you make the wrong decision, while others can result in financial ruin. Careful planning can help reduce the chances of making the wrong decision and give you more time to deal with the unplanned problems that can and do occur. Planning is really a risk management strategy.

So, what plans should you be working on? Feed planning is an obvious one. What to plant, when to plant, how many hectares, what sort and how much supplements, when to buy them, maximum you can afford to pay, what to do if there is no irrigation water, are some of the decisions that need to be planned. Feeding cows now consumes up to 60% of the total income, so getting the best return for your feeding investment is critical for cash flow.

Herd management is another area that is generally well planned. What breed, when and at what age to join and calve, which bulls to use, culling and herd replacement strategies all seem under control on most farms.

One area many farmers, and not only dairy farmers, tend not to plan so well is people management. For example, how many farmers have a clear, written down and well communicated business continuance or succession plan? Another area is farm growth or expansion. This may require the growth to be phased in over time to prevent serious cash flow problems. Planning is everything in these situations.

Financial planning should be an integral part of any business and for more reasons than just to satisfy your banks requirements to borrow money. How many farmers know their true cost of production, and what are the key performance indicators or benchmarks for their system of farming?

Plan your future, don't just let it happen. So which personality are you? Do you plan to make things happen and minimise the risk or are you one of the other two?

# Are our springs getting warmer?

**Katrina Sinclair**

*Research Agronomist, Wollongbar*

In response to farmer's concerns about a changing climate we took a look at what has been happening to maximum temperatures in spring over the past 50 years at Casino in northern NSW.

We did this because the growth of ryegrass in spring is critical to our dairy production systems. It is a period of peak milk production before the lower quality tropical grasses takeover. The high growth rates for ryegrass in spring are such that there is the opportunity to make silage.

The optimum temperature for ryegrass is around 23-25°C and when temperatures are above 29°C growth and quality is reduced.

So what did we find? Average maximum temperatures in spring have increased and more so in August and September. Not only has

the average maximum spring temperature increased but also the number of days with a maximum temperature above 29°C.

For the period 1961-1990 we had an average of 3 days in September when the maximum temperature was above 29°C. However, in last 5 to 10 years this has increased to around 13 days.

But what do these warmer spring temperatures mean for ryegrass in northern NSW? Using a pasture growth model we simulated the growth of an irrigated annual ryegrass pasture for each year from 1956 to 2005. We grouped the years into 10 year periods and averaged the production for each period.

Figure 1 below shows that for irrigated annual ryegrass production has remained steady from May to June. However, ryegrass now peaks in August and falls away in September and even more so in October and November.

What do you need to consider when planting ryegrass in the future? Options could include using short-season or more heat tolerant annual ryegrass or adding chicory or plantain or sowing more heat tolerant perennials such as prairie grass.

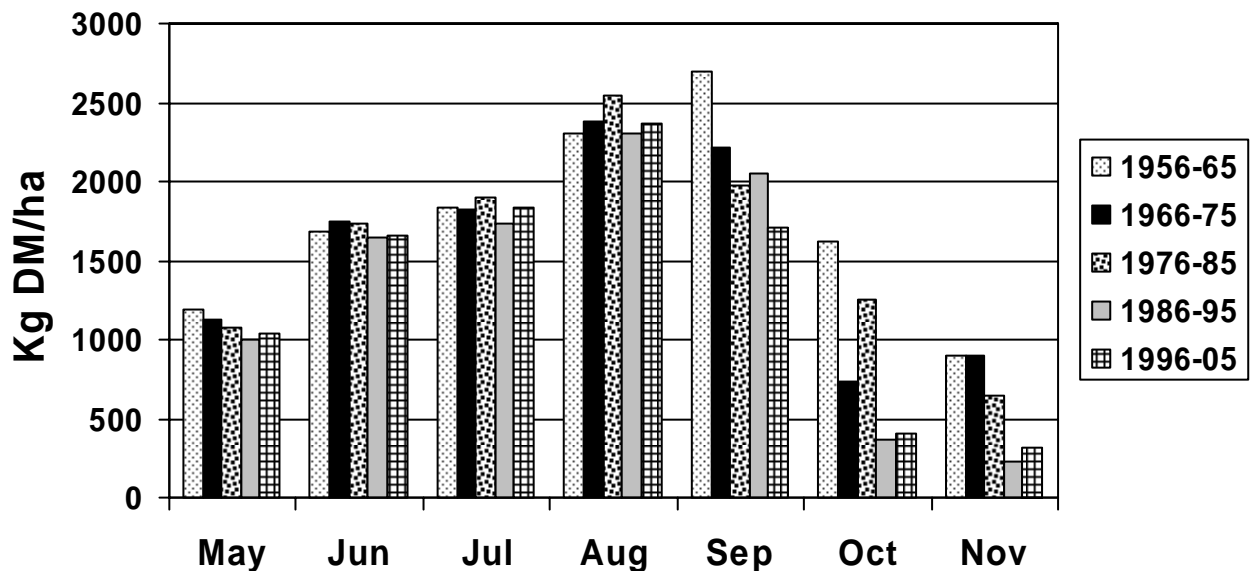


Figure 1 Modelled irrigated annual ryegrass in northern NSW from 1956 to 2005 averaged for 10 year periods.

# New BJD approach to occur on 31 March 2008

Sally Spence

*Technical Specialist Product Integrity, Orange*

A new approach for managing Bovine Johne's Disease (BJD) in NSW will be introduced on 31 March 2008.

It was initially planned to introduce the new approach on 1 January 2008 but the equine influenza outbreak derailed that plan – the changes will now commence on 31 March 2008.

## So, from 31 March 2008:

- Quarantines will be removed from **dairy** herds with an Infected or Suspect status for BJD.
- The Dairy BJD Assurance Score will be fully implemented. All non-assessed dairy herds in NSW have Score 3 – this will drop to Score 0 on 1 July 2008. Every dairy producer will need to know the Score for their herd.
- A completed Dairy BJD Assurance Score Declaration Form must accompany all cattle moving from all dairy properties, apart from cattle moving direct to slaughter. A pad of self-carboning Declaration Forms will be provided to each dairy producer before 31 March 2008.
- The 3-step calf plan and Dairy BJD Assurance Score will be included in the on-farm QA program and audited. However no penalties will be applied in response to the findings of the 3-step calf plan and Score audit.
- The BJD Control and Protected Zones will be maintained so dairy cattle from the Control Zone will only be able to move to the Protected Zone if they move directly to a dairy property or they meet the current movement requirements.
- BJD Infected or Suspect **beef** herds will continue to be quarantined as they can access the Financial and Non-Financial Assistance Package for infected beef herds.

## Testing rebate for dairy herds

Cattle Council of Australia has extended their \$550 BJD test rebate to non-assessed NSW dairy herds until 31 November 2008.

The purpose of this money is to facilitate the introduction of the Dairy BJD Assurance Score.

All non-assessed dairy herds in NSW have a Dairy BJD Assurance Score of 3. After 1 July 2008 this will drop to Score 0.

A herd can increase their Score by undertaking a herd test.

If a negative result is obtained in a 'Check Test' of 50 older cows the herd receives a Score 7.

## Accessing the rebate

You engage a MAP approved veterinarian to test your herd. They charge their normal fee which you pay.

When NSW DPI receives the lab result, a Cattle Council Subsidy Scheme Form and covering letter are generated and sent to you.

The rebate is paid on receipt of the completed Cattle Council Subsidy Scheme Form and a standard Tax Invoice.

A series of BJD Information days are being planned for delivery in February and March all across NSW.

Dates for the first round of the dairy days can be found on the back of this newsletter. More detailed information will be sent out early next year.



# Looking for staff? – the first step is the position advertisement

Regan Johnson

*Dairy Livestock Officer, Deniliquin*

Over the past few years I have been taking notice of the newspaper advertisements looking for dairy staff. It is very interesting the amount of time some farmers put into the critical first step of attracting staff. Remember the newspaper advertisement is the first point of contact for a future employee. If the ad does not attract people or is very short and blunt then the chances of attracting the right person for your farm is unlikely. Below are examples of an insufficient ad and a successful advertisement:

## Insufficient

Experienced milker needed  
Phone 5887 XXXX

## Sufficient

### Management Opportunity

**400 cows**

**Finley NSW**

We are seeking an experienced milker to manage our 400 cow milking herd. This person would be capable of further improving performance to achieve top results. A competitive wage rate will be offered to the right person.

We want to hear from you if:

- You have experience and enthusiasm to achieve targets
- You enjoy working in a team environment

We invite telephone applications (after 7pm). All application in strictest confidence to:

Bob Farmer, Smith Rd, Finley

Tel 03 5883 2222/0425 856 XXX

Fax 03 5883 XXXX

Email: Bob@finley.com.au

Which advertisement would inspire you?

Would you take a second look and think about applying for the position?

The successful advertisement may be more expensive to advertise however, finding the right person for the job will cost you less in the long term.



## Kikuyu – weed or valuable feed?

Carol Rose

*District Agronomist, Kempsey*

Across the state there is a division about the role of kikuyu. On the North Coast it is considered a valuable pasture species. Further south there are many that consider kikuyu a weed of rye grass pastures.

This attitude can vary from neighbour to neighbour. So why the difference? In the north the strong summer growing species is well adapted to the hot wet summers producing large amounts of feed for both dairy and beef enterprises.

In the south where winters are colder, the frost sensitive grass has a much shorter growing season. It is still a very strong competitor in the summer, actively competing with temperate species over summer.

As a summer growing species kikuyu is of lower quality than many of these temperate species. So how do dairy farmers in the north of the state manage kikuyu for dairy production over summer?

The answer lies in grazing management. Kikuyu is a 5 leaf plant, growing 5 leaves and then more stem. So grazing should occur when plants are at the 4.5 leaf stage and cattle should be removed with a 5 cm residual.

If a higher residual has been left in the past, cattle will be reluctant to graze below this, as quality will be much lower.

If you leave more residual than last grazing there will be a problem in the next grazing. Some farmers use slashing to maintain an even residual height. With kikuyu growing so fast over summer it may be as short as two weeks before grazing is due again.

To keep to this rotation it might be necessary to drop some kikuyu paddocks out of the grazing system. These paddocks can be fertilised and baled for silage. Kikuyu paddocks are sown to annual ryegrass in the autumn to fill the winter feed gap left by frosted kikuyu.

## Cool cows for Christmas

**Kerry Kempton**

*Dairy Livestock Officer, Tocal*

When cows are hot and bothered they don't want to eat, which will affect milk production. So what are some tactics you can use to encourage the herd to eat up big this Christmas?

- As mentioned in the previous article, keep the grass quality as high as you can. Offer the best pasture at night when the cows are more likely to eat it. Try giving a larger strip at night and a smaller one during the day, but still keep the rotation length right.
- Get the cows onto the morning pasture break as early as possible before the heat. This may mean shifting milking time a bit earlier in those hot spells; or even grazing first and milking a bit later in the morning and then later in the evening when it's a bit cooler.

- Invest in infrastructure to keep cows cool and you will reclaim some of the milk production you may be losing now. Some options are planting trees, build portable shade structures that can be moved around the farm, sprinklers in the dairy yard, covered feed pads. The climate scientists are predicting longer hotter summers so now is the time to look ahead at the impact for your farm and cows.
- Offer the cows plenty of fresh clean drinking water, ideally in troughs close to where they are grazing. If they have to walk out of the paddock and up a laneway to get to the water, they probably won't go back to the paddock.
- Use supplements to keep cows eating and to keep up the energy levels in the diet. High energy grain and concentrates will help to offset the drop in pasture quality that occurs when you shift from ryegrass to kikuyu pasture, so keep up moderate levels of grain if you want to keep milk production up. Offering the cows some quality silage or hay close by on the days where they want to camp under the shade all day will encourage them to eat more.

Many NSW dairy farmers who have been through the Farmer Targets for Change project have been able to access funding for on-ground works through Catchment Management Authorities for planting trees and providing troughs for off-stream watering. Contact your dairy officer or CMA for more details.



Portable shade structures for keeping cows cool.

# Give your farm a Tocal trainee for Christmas

**James Hooke**

*Education Officer, Tocal*

With milk prices on the rise, the promise of a return to “normal” seasons and the employment market active with school-leavers, now may be the time to consider a Rural Trainee for your farming business.

Potential benefits include allowing you and your trainee access to:

- training in the general skills needed in your industry
- training in specialised skills to fill an identified Skills Gap
- continuing levels of training which build upon current skills including a clear career pathway
- assessment and recognition of skills learnt in the workplace or elsewhere
- significant State and Federal Government Incentives (see an Aust. Apprenticeship Centre for more detail).

Access to this training and assessment can result in employees who make your farm more productive, effective and efficient. Not only does relevant training allow an immediate and more meaningful contribution to business but it can help to motivate your staff. As a result of training they are motivated and eager to learn. The extra responsibility makes them feel valued and it is therefore easier to retain them in the long term.

When deciding upon a traineeship there are a number of choices to make depending upon how much emphasis is to be given to off-farm training. A possible source of this type of training is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) such as **Tocal Agricultural College**, operated by NSW DPI.

Tocal College has a long history of agricultural training including the original Dairy Apprenticeship Program. We work closely with rural industries to ensure outcomes are relevant and highly valued. Additionally there is the reassurance that qualifications are backed by the Rural Training Package and are therefore recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The **Traineeship Program** at **Tocal** strongly believes that effective training requires a good understanding of fundamental principles and knowledge. Having this ensures that the trainee is aware of the reasons and value of performing a particular skill well. It also allows them to be

more adaptive if they need to perform that skill under changing or new conditions.

Delivery of effective training is supported by access to the Colleges and DPI's resources which includes lecture and advisory staff (e.g. agronomists and livestock officers), College properties, reference materials and visits to and from industry experts and mentors.

The Program offered at Tocal has traditionally maintained a minimum requirement for training at the College. This is usually six weeks per year, although it can be relaxed if the College is confident that all training needs can be otherwise met.

The Program feels that attendance is valuable for ensuring a fundamental understanding of skills but also for allowing group interaction. This interaction is important for the cross-pollination and analysis of ideas, practice of communication and presentation skills as well as for personal development in general.

It should also not be forgotten that many of the friendships formed during the Program will remain with them for life and may prove valuable in their careers.

Already 60% of current occupations require a nationally recognised qualification with around 70% of new jobs in the future requiring the equivalent of a Certificate III or higher (DET Newsletter, 2007).

If you would like to know more about how the **Tocal Traineeship Program** can help your new employee gain such a qualification and also receive effective training for your farm business, then call James on **02 4939 8960**.



Tocal students on a recent tour to the North Coast

# Well conditioned cows lift in-calf rates

**Vicki Smart**

*Livestock Officer (Dairy), South Coast & Highlands*

Cows in poor condition or losing weight are less likely to cycle and be detected in heat. This makes it harder to get them back in calf, extends their calving interval and affects cow performance.

There are two areas to manage:

1. Drying cows off in good condition improves fertility next lactation. The ideal period to lift cow condition is during the later stage of lactation (8-10 weeks before dry off).

This will allow maintenance feed in the dry paddock and have cows achieve condition scores 4.5 – 5.5 at calving. In early lactation, avoid condition loss (0.6 of a body condition score or more) to reduce the risk of poor heat detection rates and low fertility.

2. Cows calved between 40 to 60 days should have been detected in heat at least once. Focus on heat detection to reduce the impact of too many empty and stale cows this summer.

Heat expression during hot dry conditions is usually occurs at night and is suppressed or often absent, making the job of getting cows mated difficult. Be diligent when it comes to detecting cows in heat and put a system in place. Use heat mount detectors or coloured tail-paint to keep track of a cow's heat activity. Back it up with a record system that can track cow performance and fertility status over time. Heat synchronisation programs may be worth considering to help overcome poor heat expression and staff shortage problems over Christmas.



Contact your nearest District Livestock Officer (phone numbers are at the back of Dairynews) or visit: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au) or [www.incalf.com.au](http://www.incalf.com.au) for the latest on getting cows in calf.

# Hay shed fire warning

**Neil Griffiths**

*District Agronomist, Tocal*

Hay sheds have been burning across NSW where farmers have been caught baling hay they thought was dry only to find it has been heating within weeks and numerous hay sheds have burnt down.

It appears that farmers are baling drought affected crops which appear dry however there is still moisture in stems especially at the nodes or in thicker parts of the crop which is enough to allow a heating reaction to occur in the hay.

The problem is worse where growers cut using a straight mower rather than a mower conditioner which will crush the stems and nodes to allow more even drying. Also heating is more a risk with large square or round bales rather than the conventional small square bales.

The problem is so widespread NSW DPI is advising all farmers to monitor their hay sheds for signs of steam or condensation under the roof.

Smell to check for a caramel or burnt tobacco smell initially. Later on mould or smoke indicates the problem is getting serious.

Check temperature by driving a metal rod into the stack. Leave it for a while then check the temperature regularly.

Be very careful if you think there is a problem. Ensure a water supply and assistance is available before touching a suspect hay stack.

If moved a smouldering stack may ignite when air gets on it. Don't walk on suspect areas of the stack because they can collapse.

Normally we would expect small bales with up to 18% moisture to be OK while large round or square bales should be lower at 14% to 16% moisture to minimise risk of heating or mould affecting feed quality. Any hay with more than 20% moisture is at risk of burning in a stack.

The risk of fire is very high if moisture is in the 25-35% range. This may only occur in parts of the stack which came from a heavier yielding part of the crop or didn't wilt as quickly for some reason.

Farmers should also check they have adequate insurance. Hay is a valuable commodity in the drought and this must be allowed for to have full insurance cover.

A final warning against storing any tractors or machinery in a suspect hay shed and never store fertiliser in the same shed as hay. Insurance could be compromised if there is a problem.

## MP4P turns farm around in Kyogle

*(Reproduced from an article by Shan Goodwin, Land Newspaper)*

Few dairy farmers would argue that managing pastures based on evidence, as opposed to guesswork or tradition, has become a crucial driver of profit but at a time of escalating grain prices many are hesitant to go down a path that might increase on-farm costs and labour.

One young Far North Coast milk producer, however, has shown that dramatic lifts in pasture utilisation, leading to increased production, are possible without any additional capital outlay and very little extra work.

Terry Blasche, "Fairyvale" near Kyogle, milks 108 Holstein-Australian Red cows with his parents Kathleen and Sieghard, with 70 per cent of their production derived from home-grown feed.

In the past year, they have lifted their average 10 tonnes per hectare of dry matter utilisation to 16 tonnes and will this year send 800,000 litres of milk to the factory, up 100,000 on their average.

"It's all been achieved by simply taking notice of what the cows, and the farm, are telling you", Mr Blasche said.

That is the basis of the carefully-crafted industry principles and tools that come under the banner of the NSW Department of Primary Industries' Managing Pasture for Profit (MPFP) program, which "Fairyvale" has used to full advantage.

The 80 hectare farm has been divided up into 16 paddocks and Mr Blasche had drawn up a paddock rotation plan that ensures the herd grazes each paddock when it is at its optimum stage.

The rotation plan varies throughout the year subject to anticipated growth rates and the type of pastures. Over summer, it may be as short as 14 days for paspalum paddocks and in winter up to 35 days.

An uncomplicated system of numbered wooden blocks representing each paddock, kept in the dairy, allows the family to keep track of which paddock is the next to graze.

"If you want to improve what you're doing the first step is to fully understand what you're doing," Mr Blasche said.

Mr Blasche said he quickly figured out the big mistake he was making was leaving his cows on paddocks too long and letting his pastures grow too old.

"I was over-conservative, wanting to ensure I had feed, but in fact I was reducing its quality," he said.

"The changes we've made have meant we've conserved 110 bales of ryegrass silage this year that we will feed out next autumn and we've never done that before.

"And it hasn't cost us anything more, not even really in labour. It's something you do when you bring the cattle home or when you're out moving fences, which you have to do anyway.

"It's not at all complicated or costly."



New opportunity - Terry Blasche checking out his first ever wrapped baled silage, a legacy of his improved pasture management since being involved with Casino's MP4P group.



# Drought assistance update

**Tania Chesworth**

*Drought Support Worker*

There have been quite a few changes and improvements to the financial assistance that is available for farmers and small business owners through the Federal Government Drought Assistance Package. All RLPB areas of NSW are now in Exceptional Circumstances (EC) until September 2008.

## Farmers

The off-farm asset limit for farmers for the EC Interest Rate Subsidy Claimed through the RAA has been increased to \$750,000. Previously it was \$473,000 and does not include superannuation or Farm Management Deposits. Up to 80% of the interest payable on eligible farm debt can be claimed, with a limit of \$100,000 in 12 months and \$500,000 over 5 years.

For Centrelink EC Relief Payment for farmers the off-farm income exemption has been increased from \$10,000 to \$20,000. This means you can earn around \$40,000 off-farm and are still eligible for fortnightly payments. The off-farm asset limit remains the same as it was at \$473,000.

The Professional advice and planning grant of \$5,500 can be accessed by anyone who has been farming for two years and meets the off-farm asset test. If you have accessed this already you can re-evaluate your plans after 6 months with financial help.

The EC Exit Package is available to farmers who decide to leave the land. It is very important to apply for this package if you think you might be selling before you do. The grant is for \$150,000 only if your assets are below \$350,000 after all debts are paid. There is also \$10,000 for retraining and \$10,000 for relocation. Dairy farmers will no longer need to deduct their Dairy Structural Adjustment Payments (DSAP) if they were to receive assistance via the Exit Grant.

## Small business owners

One of the changes that came in on 25 September 2007 is for small business owners. Small businesses in towns of up to 10,000 population that have a significant reliance on farmers for their income and have suffered a downturn due to drought can apply for EC income support and interest rate subsidies. This new support measure will expire June 2009.

Remember, don't self assess. These measures are worth applying for and the criteria is changing

all the time. If you missed out before it may well be worth checking again.

For further information please contact your local Drought Support Worker for NSW Department of Primary Industries or Rural Financial Counsellor.

## DPI dairy website has a facelift

Have you visited the NSW DPI website lately?

We have recently given the dairy cattle section a total makeover and update so why not take a look at [www/dpi.nsw.gov.au](http://www/dpi.nsw.gov.au) → agriculture → livestock → dairy cattle

You will find lots of useful information, tools, tips and links under the topics:

- fodder production and animal nutrition
- herd management
- people on dairy farms
- business management
- natural resource management
- research
- Dairy Pathways
- contacts for dairy staff

Let us know what you think. You will also find copies of this newsletter to download or email to a friend.



## Application Form

### NLIS Dairy Rebate Scheme (NSW dairy farmers only)

The NLIS Dairy Rebate Scheme was developed by the NSW Farmers Association-Dairy Section and NSW Dairy Industry Conference to encourage NSW dairy farmers to apply NLIS approved tags and/or boluses by assisting to reduce the cost of the tags/boluses. Funding for the Scheme is by way of a grant approved by the Minister for Primary Industries, from former dairy industry funds held over from the regulated pricing structure. The Fund is managed by the NSW Dairy Industry Conference.

Applications are invited from NSW dairy farmers to claim a rebate of \$1.00 for each NLIS tag/bolus purchased after 1 March 2006 for the purpose of applying them solely to a dairy herd. Each tag may only attract a rebate once and applicants must complete the Statutory Declaration overleaf to this effect. Stiff penalties apply for incorrect Declarations (Oaths Act 1900).

To apply for a rebate please:

1. Complete the application information below
2. Complete the accompanying statutory declaration
3. Send application, statutory declaration and copy of supplier invoice to:

**Kate McGilvray**  
**Project Officer / Secretariat**  
**NSW Dairy Industry Conference**  
**PO Box 833, MUDGEE NSW 2850**

Name of applicant

Postal Address

Suburb

State & Postcode

Dairy Farm Address

Suburb

State & Postcode

Contact number

Email

Property Identification Code

Size of dairy herd (all dairy cattle)

No. already tagged

No. of tags purchased

Date purchased

Supplier

No. of bolus purchased

Date purchased

Supplier

Please read other page first.

# NLIS Dairy Rebate Scheme

## Statutory Declaration

### (Oaths Act 1900)

I,

Full name

of ,

Address

in the State of New South Wales ,

Occupation

do solemnly and sincerely declare that :-

1. That the eartags/boluses described in this application are of a type approved for use under the National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) ;
2. That we have not previously applied for and/or received a rebate under this Scheme for the eartags/boluses described in the application overleaf ;
3. That the tags/boluses described in this application have been or will be applied to dairy cattle residing on a NSW dairy farm and will not be used for any other purpose, be resold, or returned to the supplier without fully informing the Scheme operators.

and I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the provisions of the Oaths Act 1900.

Declared at

Signature of the person making this declaration

Place

on

of

Day

month

year

Before me

Signature of person before whom the declaration is made

Full name

Address

in the State of New South Wales, qualification:

- Justice of the peace
- Notary public
- Commissioner of the court for taking affidavits
- Legal practitioner authorised under Section 27 (1) of the Oaths Act 1900
- A person authorised to administer an oath under Section 26 of the Oaths Act 1900.



*Wishing you and your family a safe,  
happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year*



## COMING EVENTS

## BJD INFORMATION MEETINGS

19 February 2008	Bega
26 February 2008	Taree
27 February 2008	Upper Hunter
28 February 2008	Lower Hunter
4 March 2008	Berry
5 March 2008	Camden

## NSW CONTACT DETAILS

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