

# Routine Calving Induction

## Dairy industry revised policy position

### Questions & Answers

#### Background:

In April 2015, following a series of meetings and consultation with farmers, vets and processors, the dairy industry agreed to phase-out routine calving induction\* nationally. Since then information has been circulated through dairy industry communications and dairy companies to farmers and veterinarians about the implementation of the revised ADIC policy. This includes the introduction of the 2016 target that routine calving induction will be limited to a maximum of 15% of cows in a herd, unless an exemption is granted, either by implementing a herd fertility management plan or by obtaining dispensation for exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the herd manager.

*\*Routine calving induction is all non-therapeutic inductions*

#### Q. Why is the Australian dairy industry phasing out routine calving induction?

- We all want the best outcomes for our cows.
- Farmers are constantly reviewing and improving their practices and as a result calving induction is being phased out.
- Following extensive consultation with dairy farmers, industry and veterinary experts Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) and dairy processors through the Australian Dairy Industry Council (ADIC) agreed to a revised policy to phase out routine calving induction through improved herd management practices, tools and technologies.
- This will involve a similar approach to the successful New Zealand strategy, where routine calving induction without exemption has now been banned following a long phase-out period.
- Caring for cows is always a key priority for Australian dairy farmers and our industry. The industry is dedicated to providing a high standard of care for our animals, and to changing practices when in the best interests of our livestock and to protect the reputation of our industry.
- The Australian dairy industry wants to be as proactive as possible on measures to support excellent animal welfare outcomes and to meet the expectations of customers and consumers. Failure to meet these obligations, risks the introduction of onerous and unrealistic regulations and/or damage to our reputation and markets.
- All major dairy producing countries have restrictions on the use of calving induction.

#### Q. What is calving induction?

- Calving induction is a medical intervention where the cows are treated to initiate delivery of the calf before full-term pregnancy. This may be performed for therapeutic purposes when the welfare or survival of the cow or calf is at risk due to illness or to misalignment in the size of cow and calf.
- Routine (or non-therapeutic) calving induction is used as a management tool in seasonal calving herds, by advancing calving dates of late pregnant cows in order to achieve a compact calving spread and efficient utilisation of seasonal fodder production (aligned to peak nutritional requirements). This practice helps to avoid culling late calving and non-pregnant cows when fertility is not optimum.

**Q. What is the revised policy regarding routine calving induction?**

- The revised industry routine calving induction policy is:

“ADIC does not support routine calving induction and will work to phase it out through improved herd improvement practices, tools and technologies.”

**Q. What is the routine calving induction target for 2016?**

- After reviewing 2015 induction data, the industry has introduced a target for 2016 that routine calving induction will be limited to a maximum of 15% of cows within a herd unless a dispensation has been granted.
- The 15% limit will apply unless a fertility management plan has been implemented or dispensation is granted for exceptional circumstances beyond a farmers control such as herd health issues, severe weather events (floods, fire), AB failure as well as other issues.
- Farmers can apply to the Oversight and Engagement Panel via their vet for special dispensation to carry out inductions in excess of the 15% limit for routine calving inductions.

**Q. Why has no timeframe for the phase-out been set?**

- The dairy industry has not set a timeframe for the phase-out to reach zero per cent. Instead the industry has agreed to review the target each year and revise it as appropriate
- ADIC and DA are working with farmers, veterinarians, state dairy farmer organisations, processors and other stakeholders, to ensure the phase-out achieves the best animal health and welfare outcomes.
- The industry wants to ensure all timeframes are achievable.
- The timeframe for the phase-out will be reviewed annually and the dairy industry will work with farmers and their advisers to ensure the targets are achieved.
- We all want the best outcomes for our cows – and farmers are constantly reviewing and improving their practices and as a result calving induction is being phased out.
- Improving herd fertility is a fundamental requirement to reduce the need for routine calving induction. The dairy industry has been working closely with farmers, vets and reproduction advisers to understand the key issues and ensure advice and services are available to assist farmers with fertility management.
- Dairy Australia has invested in RD&E activities to help ensure advisers and farmers have up-to-date information and tools for the management of herd reproduction. These include the InCalf program, training of Repro Right advisers and the In Charge workshops for farmers. Together with the improvement of herd fertility by genetic selection, led by ADHIS, these have already made a difference in reducing the practice. In 2014, less than 1.5% of the national herd were induced (approximately 24,000 cows).

**Q. What consultation has taken place?**

- Dairy farmers have been consulted directly at a workshop in 2015 as well as through their state dairy farming organisations, Regional Dairy Programs and the ADF Animal Health and Welfare Policy Advisory Group. Dairy companies have been consulted directly, as well as through the

Australian Dairy Products Federation and veterinarians have been consulted through the Australian Veterinary Association Australian Cattle Veterinarians Special Interest Group and through participation in industry meetings.

**Q. Who is implementing the phase out?**

- A Steering Group, including dairy farmers, representatives from the Australian Cattle Veterinarians, Dairy Australia and the Australian Dairy Products Federation (ADPF), has been established and is progressing the phase-out.
- Farmers, processors and vets are represented to ensure we all work together and that all sectors views are taken into account.

ADF will continue to consult with farmers, veterinarians, state organisations and other stakeholders to ensure that the timing, process and outcomes are right for animals and farmers.

**Q. How will routine calving induction be phased out?**

- Improving herd fertility is a fundamental requirement to reduce the need for routine calving induction. Getting fertility right is complex and it takes time. Adopting herd fertility management plans with the assistance of a veterinarian or reproduction adviser will be an important measure to support the strategy.
- Annual limits on routine calving will be progressively reduced until eventually no routine calving induction is undertaken unless a dispensation is granted for exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the herd manager.
- This approach is similar to the successful New Zealand strategy where routine calving induction without exemption was banned after 6 years from the introduction of annual limits and 12 years from the decision to stop routine calving induction.

**Q. How many calving inductions are performed now?**

- A survey of veterinary practices performing inductions was undertaken in 2015. The results confirm estimates from previous farmer surveys that the number of cows induced is declining.
- It is estimated that in 2015 less than 1.5% of the national herd were induced (approximately 24,000 cows), however there is considerable variation between farms and regions.
- The industry is now working to reduce even further the number of cows induced.

**Q. What is being done to help farmers who use routine calving induction?**

- Improving herd fertility is a fundamental requirement to reduce the need for routine calving induction and it also delivers many benefits for farm profitability and resilience.
- Getting fertility right is complex and it takes time. Adopting herd fertility management plans with the assistance of a veterinarian or reproduction adviser will be an important measure to support the strategy.
- The industry is working closely with veterinarians and reproduction advisers to ensure advice and services are available to assist farmers with fertility management.

- Industry programs such as InCalf, Repro Right network and InCharge Workshops will be enhanced and the industry will provide targeted reproduction advice to those farmers most in need.
- Dairy companies will also work with their suppliers to facilitate the implementation of the revised policy for routine calving induction.
- Dairy Australia has invested in RD&E activities to help ensure advisers and farmers have up-to-date information and tools for the management of herd reproduction. These include the InCalf program, training of Repro Right advisers and the In Charge workshops for farmers. Together with the improvement of herd fertility by genetic selection, led by ADHIS, these have already made a difference in reducing the practice. In 2014, less than 1.5% of the national herd were induced (approximately 24,000 cows).

### **Oversight and Engagement Panel**

#### **Q. How do I apply for dispensation?**

- Farmers who plan to induce more than 15% of cows will work with their vets and apply to the Oversight and Engagement Panel for an exemption through their vets. Applications will require supporting information and a fertility management plan. When there are exceptional circumstances additional information will be required.
- The Oversight and Engagement Panel secretariat is Dairy Australia and contact details for the Panel are below:

Applications must be sent via email to Induction Oversight and Engagement Panel C/- Dr R Condron, Dairy Australia ([rcondron@dairyaustralia.com.au](mailto:rcondron@dairyaustralia.com.au)) with the relevant documents attached, two months before planned calving start date, for the review by the panel.

- Applications for dispensation should include:
  - An outline of the reason for the application (i.e., what is the problem);
  - A brief case history;
  - What actions are being taken to reduce inductions (Herd Fertility Management Plan);
  - Plan for the routine induction of dairy cattle.

#### **Q. Who is on the Oversight and Engagement Panel?**

- The Oversight and Engagement Panel includes representatives from ADF, the Australian Cattle Vets and Australian Dairy Products Federation (ADPF).
- Farmers, processors and vets are represented to ensure we all work together and that all sectors views are taken into account.
- ADF will continue to consult with farmers, veterinarians, state organisations and other stakeholders to ensure that the timing, process and outcomes are right for animals and farmers.

#### **Q. What will the Oversight and Engagement Panel do?**

- The panel, with support from Dairy Australia, will establish guidelines and consider requests for exemptions exceeding the annual target (Limit 15% set for 2016).
- Farmers can apply to the Oversight and Engagement Panel via their vet for special dispensation to carry out inductions in excess of the 15% limit for routine calving inductions.

- The Steering Group will work with the Oversight and Engagement Panel to monitor progress and review the target each year in order to establish updated annual targets.

#### **Q. What is a fertility management plan?**

- A template for a fertility management plan that covers the key elements as a condition for dispensation has been prepared for veterinarians and reproduction advisers to establish with their clients.
- Fertility management plans will include:
  - An assessment of reproduction performance and the herd fertility goals
  - Current and proposed actions to improve fertility management
  - Consideration of; Replacement heifers, Cow health and transition management, Heat detection and AI practices, Genetics, Bull team and Record keeping.

#### **Q. What are examples of exceptional circumstances for dispensation?**

- Exceptional circumstances that impact reproductive performance and are beyond the control of the herd manager may include:
  - Failure in artificial breeding
  - Farmer health issues
  - Severe weather, bushfire or natural events
  - Animal health issues
  - Outbreaks of pestivirus (BVD)

#### **Q. What about late calving induction?**

- A particular concern recognised by industry has been the use of late calving induction.
- Late inductions (performed within 4-6 weeks of the due calving date) provide no overall reproductive benefit for the herd and should not be performed except for the welfare of the cow or her calf.
- ADF is aware that several veterinary practices no longer perform late calving inductions, as they provide no reproductive benefit.
- Early pregnancy testing is required by these practices to make sure late inductions are not occurring.

### **New Zealand**

#### **Q. What happened in New Zealand when they phased out routine calving induction?**

- The New Zealand dairy industry has phased out routine calving induction over a long period of time and as of 1 June 2015 NZ has banned the practice unless an exemption for exceptional circumstances is granted.
- The Australian approach is similar to the successful New Zealand strategy where routine calving induction without exemption was banned after 6 years from the introduction of annual limits and 12 years from the decision to stop routine calving induction.

- The industry is liaising with counterparts in New Zealand to understand and learn from their approach; in particular, the setting of annual limits with a dispensation process.

### **Legal status of the policy**

#### **Q. What is the legal status of the phase-out of routine calving induction**

- Following extensive consultation with dairy farmers, industry and veterinary experts Australian Dairy Farmers and dairy processors through the Australian Dairy Industry Council (ADIC) have agreed to phase-out routine calving induction through improved herd management practices, tools and technologies.
- The industry will use a similar approach to the successful New Zealand strategy, where routine calving induction without exemption has now been banned following a long phase-out period.
- Whilst there is no legal requirement on dairy farmers to achieve the 15% target the dairy industry is seeking to achieve industry-wide practice that is over and above the legal requirements and is confident farmers will adopt the recommended industry targets as the phase-out progresses.
- The industry will be providing advice and services to assist farmers in achieving the target as the phase out progresses.
- We all want the best outcomes for our cows – and farmers are constantly reviewing and improving their practices and as a result calving induction is being phased out.

### **Cattle Standards and Guidelines**

- The Cattle Standards and Guidelines include an objective that breeding and management practices are appropriate to minimise the risk to the welfare of cattle

#### *Breeding Management (essential requirements)*

- Standard 7.4 – A person in charge must ensure calving induction is done under veterinary advice.
- Standard 7.5 – A person in charge must ensure that induced calves receive adequate colostrum or be humanely killed at the first reasonable opportunity, and before they are 12 hours old.

#### **Q. What if there is a breach of the calving induction policy?**

- There is no legal requirement on dairy farmers to achieve the 15% target the dairy industry is seeking to achieve.
- Whilst the new policy is over and above the legal requirements, ADF is confident farmers will adopt the recommended industry targets as the phase-out progresses due to the support systems and programs being put in place to assist affected farmers.
- ADIC is also confident that farmers understand the need for this policy to be put in place and will strive to meet their dairy company supplier requirements.
- If a farmer proposes to induce more than 15% of their herd, they must apply to a Oversight and Engagement Panel, composed of representatives from Australian Dairy Farmers, the Australian Cattle Veterinarians special interest group and the Australian Dairy Processors Federation, with assistance from Dairy Australia.
- ADF understands that the policy may have significant implications for the small number of farmers who induce a portion of their herd. The industry is committed to working with these

farmers to improve the fertility of their herd and to phase out calving induction for the benefit of the industry.

- Improving herd fertility is a fundamental requirement to reduce the need for routine calving induction. The dairy industry has been working closely with farmers, vets and reproduction advisers to understand the key issues and ensure advice and services are available to assist farmers with fertility management.

### **AH&W – General Question**

#### **Q. What are you doing about Animal Health and Welfare issues?**

- We all want the best outcomes for our cows. Animal welfare practices underpin the reputation and integrity of the dairy industry.
- We are being as proactive as we can on these issues. We are really trying to make sure onerous regulations are not imposed on us or the industry's reputation is unfairly damaged.
- The Australian dairy industry wants to be as proactive as possible on measures to support excellent animal health and welfare outcomes and to meet the expectations of customers and consumers. Failure to meet these obligations, risks the introduction of onerous and unrealistic regulations and/or damage to our reputation and markets.