

“I’ve still got my arse hanging in the wind.”
Farmers’ experiences with *M bovis* and the
associated processes.

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Outline

- Background
 - Study Aims
 - Previous research on endemic cattle disease impact
 - *Mycoplasma bovis* including in NZ
- Method
 - Stakeholders & Governance
 - A qualitative approach
- Results
 - Themes
 - Stories



Study – aims, progress, outcomes

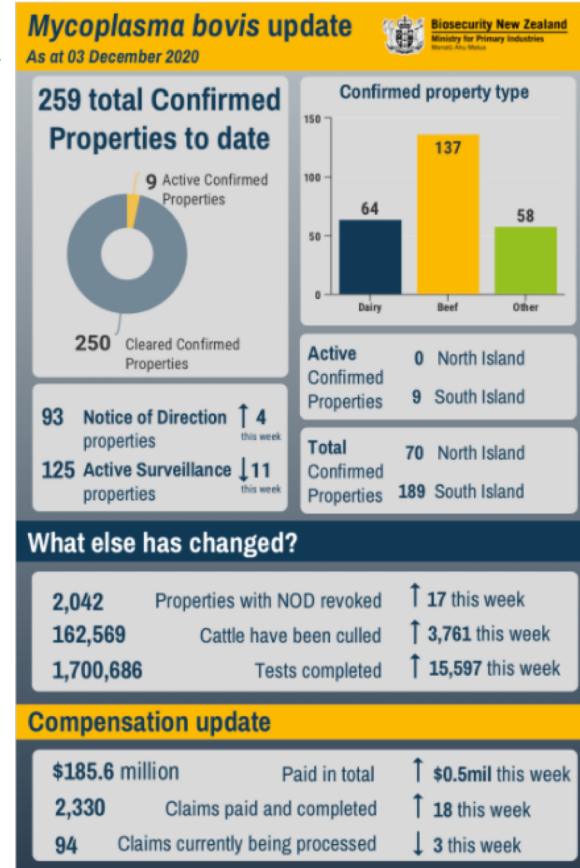
- **Aim**—To understand the health and social impact of the initial detection, spread and subsequent attempt at eradication of *Mycoplasma bovis* on farmers and rural communities in the Otago and Southland regions of New Zealand.
- Describe the emotional, social and psychosocial impact
- Identify supporting and undermining factors impacting on rural communities
- Analyse impact of media scrutiny, on affected communities
- To inform relevant agencies of factors that would enhance future disaster management planning, regarding mitigating the human impact of similar events

Previous research on management of endemic cattle disease incursions

- Mort et al., 2001 Foot and Mouth, UK
 - *Animal disease and human trauma*
 - “Life after the epidemic was characterized by distress, feelings of bereavement, loss of trust in authority and systems of control, a sense of undermining of the value of local knowledge” (2001:145)
- Hood and Seedsman, 2004
 - *Psychosocial investigation of individual and community responses to the experience of Ovine Johne’s Disease in rural Victoria*
 - “The control program was perceived as having very limited scientific credibility and its implementation was described as heartless, inflexible and authoritarian. Involvement with the program resulted in farmers reporting emotions, such as, trauma, shame, guilt and stigma.” (2004:54)

Mycoplasma bovis – New Zealand

- First farm diagnosed by local vet in July 2017
- Mixed picture overseas
- Unsure how NZ could pan out
- May 2018- decision to eradicate nationwide
- Current (December 2020)
 - 9 'active' properties
 - 250 cleared properties
 - \$185.6m paid in compensation
 - 162,569 animals culled



Methodology

- Collaboration between Otago University and VetSouth
- Rural community divided into 6 distinct groups:
- Multiple data streams:
- Stakeholder Panel
- Governance Group

1. Farmers
2. Small rural businesses
3. Larger agribusinesses
4. Frontline workers
5. Farming rep bodies
6. Rural health professionals

- Interviews (individual)
- focus groups
- diaries*
- visual image*
- analysis of the media

* Ultimately not utilized (timing / limited buy-in)

Farmer interviews – sampling frame

1. Non-affected	2. NOD or tested; partial cull	3. IP/Total cull
a. high risk (neighbour)	a. NOD revoked	a. experienced a cull
b. low risk (distant)	b. NOD proceeded-awaiting cull	b. scheduled or mid-cull
	c. partial cull	c. cull on farm (stock not removed)
	d. mid NOD	d. lost farm
	e. tested only	

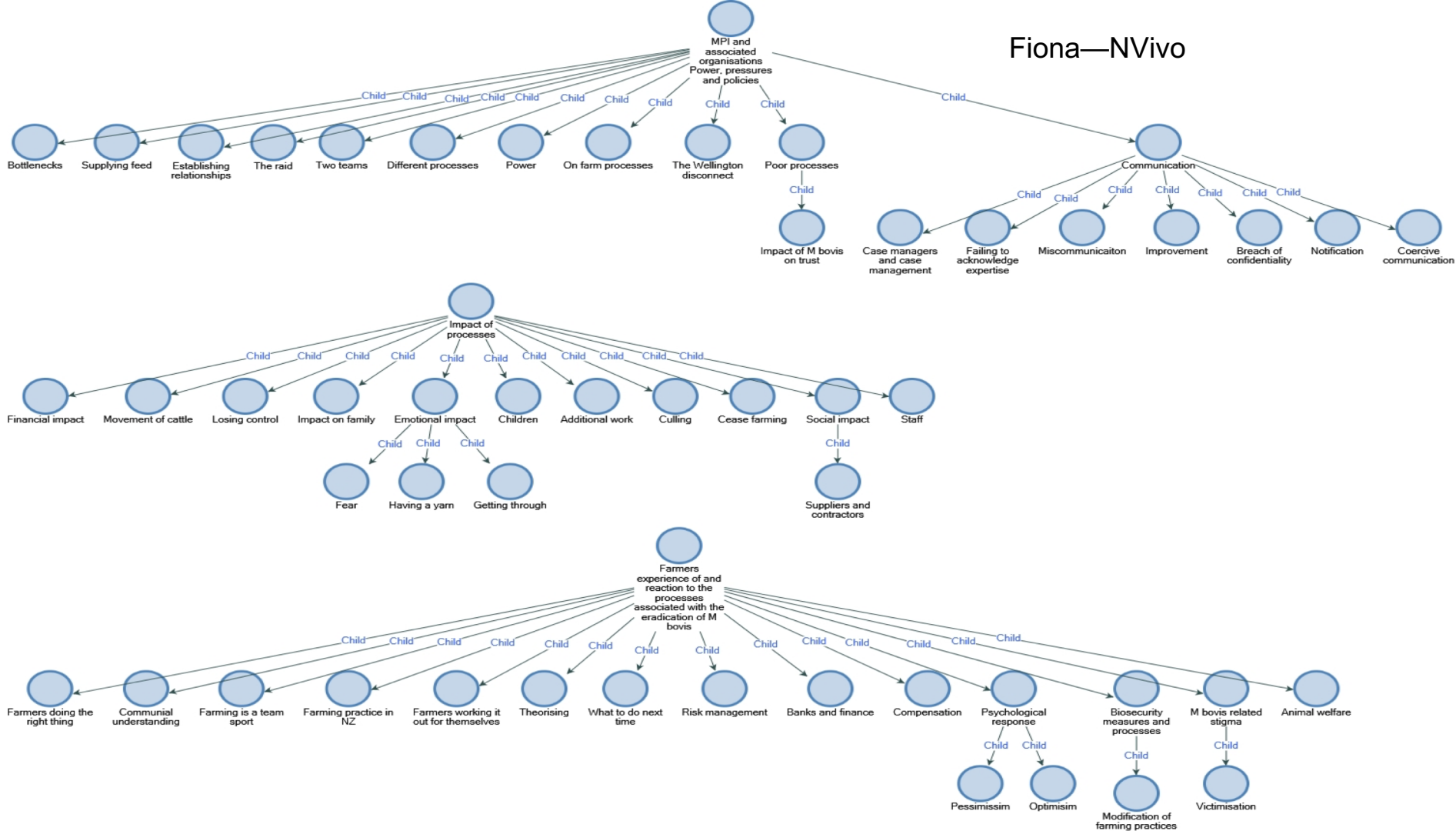
Sampled:

- Dairy (72%) and beef
- Southland (88%) and Otago farmers

Demographics:

- 18 farmers / farming couples (n=27)
- 66% male
- 92.5% NZ Euro
- 7 farming couples

Fiona—NVivo



THEMES

FIONA

MPI & associated organisations;
power, pressures and policy

- The raid
- Power
- Bureaucracy

Communication

- Miscommunication
- Case management
- Ignoring expertise

Impact of Processes

- Financial
- Emotional
- Losing control
- The cull

Farmers' experience of/reaction to
bovis eradication processes

- Animal welfare
- Doing the right thing
- Risk management
- Biosecurity response

CHRY

Timeline elements

- MPI communication
- Disrupted farming rhythms
- MPI inflexible
- Bureaucracy

Supports

- Vets
- Case manager
- Supporting staff

The Key Players in the drama

- MPI
- Farmers
- Stock

Narrative elements

- Restitution/recovery
- Chaos
- Community support

Truth Games

- Farmer expertise contested
- MPI distrusted
- How 'real' is M bovis?
- Compensation difficult

GEOFF

MPI management
of bovis

- MPI bureaucracy a barrier
- MPI not sharing information
- MPI ignoring local knowledge

General systems

- RST support
- Multiple people connected to farm
- Financial implications

Farmer experiences

- Emotional commitment to farming
- MPI process creates stress
- Poor MPI-Farmer engagement over response
- Positive experiences with process

Farmers as actors

- Farmers need control
- Farmers planning ahead
- Farmers doing the right thing
- Increasing significance of biosecurity
- Farmers as problem solvers

Themes—MPI refining process over time

So, I think, yes, they did put in better systems that you could... And you could actually talk to a person face to face. Like our D-CAT person came in and sat around the kitchen table two or three times, and we actually went through the numbers. He understood the process, he understood the animals. Whereas to start off with, as I say, it was like talking to a faceless void, and you couldn't get past the person on the end of phone who thought that they had all authority and all knowledge and knew nothing.

—f12

Bureaucracy: No better, no worse

Well this is the mindlessness of it. So, they stripped all the boards out of the shed, all the timber, and burned it. And then they've got all the screws. Now at the beginning of the cleaning process, they had a table, they had four ladies sitting around the table, scrubbing each individual screw with a wire brush and dipping them in disinfectant and scrubbing. How much is a box of screws?

—f18

MPI ignoring farmer expertise

I'm planning paddocks for two years now. I don't know what I'm going to do in those paddocks two years from now. Farmers do it without thinking, it's just what you do, I don't think a lot of the people in the MPI can get their heads around that, that you think six months ahead of yourself, you know, and plan for that. Then the MPI come in and...farming's like a great big wheel...and they cut a chunk of that wheel out and it collapses. Then it takes years to get that wheel back to that size again...It just **breaks farmers down, losing control** like that. And not having people who can think six months ahead.

—f11

Loss / control

Farmer 2:

You're still not really in control, as such. You're not in control of them, really.

Farmer 1:

I don't think on-farm we were out of control thinking "Shit, we've got cows with uncontrolled, lameness everywhere, we've..."-

Farmer 2:

Oh, no **but** who controls the process, **you're not in control of the process.**

Farmer 1:

We were never in control of the process, no.

—f3

Loss / animals

When the guy turned up to take photos of the 19, I just had to go home because it was just too awful. I took photos of the whole 19 and sent them up to the MPI office. That's how ridiculous I was, saying, "You're going to kill these beautiful animals." And I just couldn't go anywhere near the shed when they went. And they had to have big red ear tags, that was fine, but then they wanted us to paint them bright red.

—f16

Loss / memory

Farmer:

We took over the farm on the 1st of September, **we had our fourth child** on the 7th of December, and **I feel like I can't remember it**...If I'm honest, it's probably the only birthday that I feel like it's a struggle to remember...so...[breaks down]

Interviewer:

Yeah, yeah. Okay. Yeah, big impact. Sorry.

Farmer [crying]:

Never really thought about this...[silence].

Interviewer [consoling]:

No. It's ok

—f2

The emotional toll

Farmer [Crying]:

I just explained to the lady at MPI, since we moved here, all we've done is work for MPI, and we've worked for MPI for three years, and we've done it through love, not love for them, but love for our family and love for our land and love for where we want to be. And you've kicked us in the guts. You've done nothing to help us, absolutely nothing, and we've done everything for you. We've done everything you've asked of us.

—f18

Discussion—management of *M. bovis*

- A visceral effect on NZ farmers and their communities
- Significant financial and livestock impacts mask the human cost
- Bureaucratic processes not meshing with farmer pragmatism
- Has it changed how NZ farmers farm?:
 - Heightened awareness of biosecurity
 - Animal tracking (NAIT, MINDA)
 - Trading, closed herds
 - Relations between farmers and other rural professionals
 - Banking, rural businesses
- MPI – what have they learned?



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