

Neospora ... what's the fuss?

By **DAVID BRASCH**

THE threat of Neospora to the greyhound racing industry is no threat at all.

That's according to one of Australia's foremost experts on the topic, Professor John Ellis of the Faculty of Science at the University of Technology in Sydney.

Prof Ellis has been studying Neospora for the past 12 years.

Neospora Caninum is a major problem in the cattle industry, a parasite that can cause abortion and neonatal morbidity and mortality in cattle.

"It is a parasite that rarely occurs in dogs," said Prof Ellis.

"Seroprevalence studies of wild and domestic Australian dogs show that about 10% have probably been infected by the parasite at some stage.

"I also know of two recent overseas studies that rarely found the parasite in dog faeces.

"In my opinion, clinical signs of disease rarely occurs in a dog. I believe it simply exists in a dog as a metabolically inactive parasite and doesn't do much.

"I believe the greyhound racing industry is jumping up and down about nothing."

Prof Ellis said he attended an Australian Veterinary Association conference in Adelaide at which discussion was made about Neospora in the dog population.

"I was aghast at what I was hearing," he said.

"Here they were discussing this topic and quoting research I had done, and yet they were getting it all wrong."

Prof Ellis said he was not aware of any evidence that Neospora would affect the performance of a greyhound. "And I would question the diagnostic methods that are used to 'find' the disease within the greyhound population," he said.

"The problem can occur when it is passed down from an infected broodbitch to her pups."

Dogs are believed to pick up Neospora by

eating infected tissue. Shedding of oocysts in the faeces by the dog can then spread the parasite to cattle in a paddock which continues the process.

Obviously, it is believed Neospora is picked up by the greyhound population through eating beef.

Most believe this is not the case because rarely today do greyhounds eat beef, rather kangaroo.

"I am still not convinced that a healthy animal is the optimal candidate for contracting this parasite. In my discussions with the experts on Neospora, I was led to believe the treatment of meat to inactivate Toxoplasmosis should also inactivate Neospora," said Dr Larry Bernstein a Florida (US) vet who has also studied the "alleged" problem.

"We know cooking will do this, but it was also interesting to find out that freezing the meat for 24 hours should also kill the organism.

"I feel this parasite is real, but it has existed for many years and is not some new dreadful disease sweeping through our pets."

Prof Ellis agrees.

"Freezing or cooking of meat is the commonly accepted way of stopping a parasite from spreading," he said.

"If trainers feel it could be a problem, simply freeze for 24 hours the meat they buy for their greyhounds, or cook it each night."

He did warn that once Neospora was in a dog's system, it could not be got rid of.

"I am aware there is a lot of misunderstanding about this problem within the greyhound industry," he said. "Some people have gone over the top about it."

Dr Clell Bagley, D.V.M., a USU Extension Veterinarian, says: "The good news for the control and prevention of the disease is that a vaccine for cattle has been developed by a North American company."