

# Cochrane South vet board asks not to change policy



**DR. RON URQUHART**

Leave the designated veterinarian services policy as is, is the message being sent to the province by the Cochrane South Veterinarian Board.

The board met Tuesday, January 25 at the CE Building in Matheson with Dr. Ron Urquhart of the Vet Services Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food who explained the recommendations from the study of veterinary assistance in northern Ontario.

Vet services in Cochrane South is provided through the designated area policy which pays the veterinarian a \$12,000 grant for the treatment of farm livestock.

The study, written by Dr. James White of Infor Results Ltd., was released last summer and circulated amongst veterinarians and users of the service for comment.

Addressing the group of 25 livestock producers and municipal representatives at the Tuesday meeting, Urquhart stated, "Some people have told us to do some terrible things with this (study)." He stressed that the report contains only recommendations—"they are not changes."

Before rushing off to meet the 9:15 p.m. train to Guelph, Urquhart told The Enterprise the report had met with opposition across the province.

"There is opposition in the high call areas because in two years-time they may lose the designation and there is opposition in the high call areas because the subsidy drops almost immediately," he said. He added that a compromise must be made.

Urquhart continued to say that there was speculation the recommendations could be in effect by the start of the new contract (April 1) "but I don't think so." He added that a

policy (regarding designated areas) may be formed by 1984.

While the Cochrane South Veterinarian Board did not tell Urquhart to do anything terrible with the report, members of the board and those present at the meeting expressed their concern about answering a questionnaire circulated by Urquhart.

Dr. Danny Saint, the veterinarian practicing under the designated area policy in Cochrane South, said vets in northeastern Ontario refused to fill in the questionnaire at the meeting in Kapuskasing last year, noting "it is evidence to hang ourselves."

The questionnaire, containing the 32 abbreviated recommendations for the report, asks if the users agree or disagree, with the recommendations, and a space is available to write comments regarding each recommendation.

It was noted the questionnaire was next to impossible to complete if the individual was not in favor of the recommendations. A concern was also expressed that the ministry would tabulate the answers and come up with the result that the majority of the recommendations were favored, therefore the complete study was favored.

Urquhart stated, "I do want feedback. It can be in the form of letters-to me or the minister (Dennis Timbrell)." He added if they disagreed with the questionnaire they should indicate that on the form.

In his explanation of the reasons for the proposed changes, Urquhart said that the present designated area policy has been in effect for 20-30 years. He added that the ministry was concerned when Cochrane South was left open for 18 months.

He continued to say the present policy does not have the flexibility to allow for the funding of clinics.

The Cochrane South Veterinarian Services Clinic was recently relocated from the basement of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Office in Matheson to a building at the Monteith Correctional Centre.

It had been renovated with a \$30,000 Ministry of Northern Affairs grant.

Urquhart said that in some instances, there are new vets trying to compete with those receiving the subsidy which challenges the security of a vet who has made an investment in their designated area. The ministry, he said, has tried to solve that problem by splitting the subsidy between the vets.

The report recommends the removal of designation from an area should occur only when farmers in the area are assured of veterinary services at rates comparable to those in southern Ontario and that the local vets are able to make an acceptable level of income from both their large and small animal practices.

"There is no need to remove the designation from an area when the number of large animal calls is small, if the vet is paid on the basis of service provided rather than as a flat fee as at present, provided his small animal practice is adequate to produce a reasonable net income," the report states.

It suggests that the designation not be removed unless two of the following criteria are met: 1) There are two or more veterinarians within the area located not over 30 kilometres apart. 2) There is an average of 1,200 large animal calls per large animal practitioners in the area. 3) Fewer than 25 per cent of the calls are over 30 kilometres from the veterinarian's office.

If two of the three criteria are met, the removal of designation would not be automatic but would only occur after thorough review, the report states.

Urquhart told the meeting it is recommended that vets in designated areas be paid on a basis of service provided by means of a fee which compensates for both time and car expenses. The rate, he said, would be the same as for civil servants travelling in northern Ontario representing about \$720 a year.

He added that vets who demonstrate their practice will not provide an acceptable net income may apply for designation as "hardship cases".

The report states that if a vet applies for a hardship allowance, the practice and situation would be reviewed by the ministry to verify that the vet is actively attempting to expand the volume of both their large and small animal practice.

Urquhart stated, "the other big thing is the proposal the vets be paid for drive time." in some cases, he said, that would mean an increase while in Cochrane South it would be a decrease-\$4,000 from last year.

He said the recommendations solve problems that have arisen in other parts of the province, adding, "I'm here tonight to see what new problems would result."

The report also recommends that only food or fur producing animals be included in the designated area program. "All horses would be excluded because of the difficulty in distinguishing between work and pleasure animals," it states.

In Cochrane South last year, 40 per cent of Dr. Saint's calls were for the treatment of horses.

He said that he is very happy with the system as it is and

added that it allows him to make more money if he works hard. Under the new proposals, he said, all incentive to work hard is taken away. Saint told the livestock producers that while he may not take advantage of that, some other vet might.

The Cochrane South Veterinarian Board also voted in favor of a resolution stating that every designated area have its own policy to deal with individual area needs.

In keeping with the motion, that the designated area policy remain as is, the board agreed to write letters requesting support from area MPs and MPPs, local councils and organizations.