

Biosecurity Capability Review: Interim Response

Background

In May 2015, the Palaszczuk Government commissioned an independent report on the capability of the Queensland biosecurity system to meet the needs of future biosecurity challenges. This report was conducted by an independent panel, comprised of biosecurity experts. The panel undertook a significant range of consultation with a number of biosecurity stakeholders including Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) staff, local government representatives, research bodies, interstate biosecurity agencies and peak bodies. In total, over 67 submissions formed the basis of the panel's findings.

What the panel found

The panel concluded that Biosecurity Queensland is viewed positively and has a record of success and passionate, committed and expert staff, but that there is an urgent need to enhance capacity and capability, across both the Queensland biosecurity system and Biosecurity Queensland. The panel's report acknowledged the importance of this in the context of unparalleled challenges to the capability of the system to respond to the increasing number, scale and scope of exotic biosecurity pests and diseases.

What the report recommends

As was required by the Terms of Reference, the panel put forward 32 recommendations, which can be grouped into four areas, and developed a high level road map that the panel believed would guide Biosecurity Queensland and the wider biosecurity system toward long-term success.

The four areas of focus for the recommendations are:

- I. Addressing Biosecurity Queensland's immediate capability gaps
- II. Developing a best practice Queensland biosecurity system where industry, the community and all levels of government

- III. accept their proportionate share of risk management responsibilities
- IV. Sound decision making on the level of investment for specific pests and diseases based on risk, rates of return and distribution of public and private benefits
- IV. Building the leading biosecurity agency in Australia – as a leader and enabler for the Queensland biosecurity system with the range of policy levers and business models required to meet future challenges and opportunities.

Achieving progress in these four areas will require government to work closely with all relevant stakeholders, from the research community and producers, to all levels of government.

Government's interim response

The majority of the panel's recommendations are based on well-known and agreed gaps within the biosecurity system, and the government supports the majority of the recommendations in principle.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will be undertaking a consultation program with stakeholders including detailed discussions on programs and funding challenges presented by the report. Stakeholders' views on ways to fund the program outside of standard government budget commitments will be particularly important during challenging fiscal times. As was indicated by the panel, funding of some of the recommended programs is likely to involve discussions around difficult trade-offs between programs, service delivery standards, industry contribution and/or current subsidy policies.

If stakeholders are required to choose between existing and new programs, the government will need to work in partnership with affected stakeholders to identify where funding opportunities lie. Undertaking this work would be one of our first priorities.

When will a final response be provided?

The government acknowledges future biosecurity outcomes will rely on sharing of decision making as well as risk. A final response to the report will only be possible once program and funding design issues have been consulted upon and resolved.

Working together is the only long term way to ensure Queensland has an effective biosecurity system that protects jobs and the community. The Queensland Government will hold a forum on the findings of the report to open discussions on implementation in May

2016. This forum will be the start of an ongoing conversation with stakeholders and the community about the importance of biosecurity, and how all parties can contribute to improving biosecurity in Queensland.

Following an appropriate consultation period, the government will develop a final response to the report, informed by stakeholder perspectives and ideas.

The attached interim response to the 32 recommendations (see table below) is intended to pave the way for initial consultation.

Rec No.	Key points from panel recommendations	Government interim response*	Comments on the interim response
<small>Subject to funding outcomes</small>			
Build the framework for the future Queensland Biosecurity System			
1.1	Develop a five-year Strategy and Action Plan which clearly articulates the roles of both government and stakeholders within the biosecurity system.	Agree in principle	Biosecurity Queensland is committed to the development of a new Strategy and Action Plan. As the panel has recommended, it will be a co-developed plan. Progress will be dependent upon being able to establish a partner group for this work. It is noted that stakeholders' competing interests might preclude agreement in some areas.
1.2	Co-develop the action plan by creating a <u>new</u> joint government/stakeholder industry group to widen and improve upon the work done by the current advisory council.	Agree in principle	The operating and running costs of such a group would need to be devised. For ease of administration, the government's preference would be an advisory committee structure. As recommended by the panel, our first steps will be to talk to the current Biosecurity Queensland Ministerial Advisory Council about options for governance of the new group, and talking to stakeholders about how they could contribute.
1.3	Explore the use of industry levies – proportionate financial and in-kind contributions provide a critical incentive for all parties to minimise overall risk, as it ultimately reduces the costs on them individually (as well as shared decision making).	Agree in principle	The government's initial preference is for a voluntary levy scheme, but this may be difficult where some parties would choose to not contribute and instead take advantage of other's investments. Further negotiation would be required to ascertain industries' appetite for levies and the feasibility associated with the establishment of levies (including the use of existing Commonwealth programs).
1.4	Get the best leverage and optimisation of internal resources in Biosecurity Queensland by coordinating funding and resourcing based on projects (not based on animal/plant/pest themes as currently used).	Agree in principle	Changes to the Department's accounting systems and reviews of organisational design should achieve this over time.
Refocus Biosecurity Queensland			
2.1	Help focus biosecurity outcomes by moving to another unit certain "non-core" or "non-biosecurity" functions such as management of brands, animal welfare, industrial hemp licensing and legislation for management of domestic cats and dogs currently held within Biosecurity Queensland.	Not supported	Functions such as the management of animal welfare have synergies with other work undertaken by Biosecurity Queensland. Relocation of these functions would increase service delivery costs to clients, especially in regional Queensland.

2.2	Undertake an organisational design change for Biosecurity Queensland to focus on core areas and move closer to an enabler role.	Agree in principle	An organisational redesign process will be completed as part of the Transformation Plan.
2.3	Skill up Biosecurity Queensland staff in a range of business skills that go beyond science skills (e.g. project and financial management, intelligence systems and engagement processes). Use a skills audit to inform the process.	Agree	A skills audit will be undertaken on a whole-of-Department level. This will inform subsequent training programs for staff.
2.4	Create leadership positions in a range of areas, including: biosecurity responses; decision making; innovation and business improvement; marine biosecurity and a Northern Queensland strategy.	Agree in principle	Creation of new staffing positions is likely to be budget dependent and affected by overall staffing number limits. Should those issues preclude new positions, the Department will look to ensure an existing senior officer is nominated for those areas.
Review and reprioritise investment in biosecurity programs			
3.1	Systematically change the way government invests by creating a unit to review and decide on investments, which will create a new investment framework to guide this.	Agree	This work will be led at a whole-of-Department level. Further work on very specific biosecurity metrics could be done if further resourcing was achieved.
3.2	Undertake a program with industry to look at how to move out of programs that deliver lower biosecurity returns to programs with higher risk/return areas.	Agree in principle	This work is likely to require significant stakeholder consultation about choices and priorities. There are likely to be conflicting interests and a need to take a phased transitional approach over time. This will require stakeholders to consider how they can step into new roles that government has performed in the past.
3.3	Move toward the prevention and surveillance spectrum rather than focusing on established pests.		
Develop a Queensland Biosecurity Surveillance Strategy			
4.1	Develop a new surveillance strategy guided by principles of risk management, pathway analysis, consequence and cost effectiveness.	Agree in principle	Biosecurity Queensland will develop a new surveillance strategy as part of an overall Strategy and Action Plan. Industry assistance will be required to ensure that surveillance is well co-ordinated between government and other stakeholder groups.
4.2	Leverage biosecurity into other agencies' and stakeholders' programs (including natural resource groups).	Agree	Biosecurity Queensland will work on these measures as part of the development of the Strategy and Action Plan to the extent that additional work can be done without funding.

Create incentives to report disease			
5.1	Use a multi-pronged approach to improve reporting.	Agree in principle	It is likely that this type of program would require additional funding. Further scoping work would be done as part of the development of the Strategy and Action Plan to see what tools are already available to encourage reporting and facilitate stakeholder feedback on what tools are most likely to be effective.
Dismantle red tape to improve flexibility for agricultural business			
6.1	Review current arrangements for less regulatory / costly approaches and build in contribution (risk creator) mechanisms if there's a need for intervention.	Agree	The new <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> is a reflection of this new way of regulating. A review of the Act will be done within three years of its commencement. Part of the Strategy and Action Plan work can include working with stakeholders for better alternatives.
Implement new approaches to build better support systems			
7.1	Implement a full cost recovery policy for the tick fever centre and the Veterinary Surgeons Board (to reinvest in surveillance).	No interim response	<p>The Veterinary Surgeons Board is a statutory body separate to Biosecurity Queensland. Independent of Biosecurity Queensland, it raises fees and charges to cover the cost of its regulatory activities. Much more detailed work and consultation would be needed before the feasibility of the tick fever centre could be established. While work can be done with stakeholders to examine this concept, until this further work is conducted, government is not in a position to respond to this recommendation.</p> <p>These may be important avenues to increase stakeholder contributions to biosecurity. Given the need to fund the overarching program, one of our first priorities should be to assess the feasibility of changes to these arrangements.</p>
7.2	Review the approach to the Property Identification Code (i.e. user contributions).	No interim response	An announcement on this matter will be provided shortly.
7.3	Implement an in-house model for diagnostics and review current subsidy levels to reallocate funds to surveillance.	No interim response	<p>A much more detailed work plan and consultation would be needed before the feasibility of this recommendation could be established. While the government is receptive to private beneficiaries contributing more for the benefit of services they receive, the diagnostics system is such that increased levels of testing also brings public benefits to managing overall biosecurity risks. Funding may also be required to conduct this analysis.</p> <p>Cost recovery of diagnostic services may be an important way to increase stakeholder contributions to biosecurity. Given the need to fund the overarching program, one of our first priorities should be to assess the feasibility of changes to diagnostic arrangements.</p>

Continue investment in flexible specialist systems			
8.1	Lock in ongoing investment in the Biosecurity Information Management System and look at future opportunities to integrate and share non-government information.	Agree in principle	Ongoing investment would be dependent on the development of a business case that demonstrates high return on investment. As is the case with many IT solutions, this recommendation is likely to be particularly resource intensive and only able to be looked at under a much longer term outlook (provided funding is available). Biosecurity Queensland is interested in working with stakeholders to see how future integration and sharing of data could be done in the future in a cost effective way. This scoping work could be built into the Strategy and Action Plan over time.
Establish a preparedness and response unit			
9.1	Create a unit to prepare for and respond to incidents	Agree in principle	Creation of new staffing positions is likely to be budget dependent and affected by overall staffing number limits. Even at the staffing levels suggested by the panel (10 staff), this will not provide capacity for complete incident management. It will, however, assist in smoother incident management through better preparedness and alleviate pressure on Biosecurity Queensland to continue with its day-to-day work during emergencies.
Establish a biosecurity network			
10.1	Set up an external rapid deployment network to supplement Biosecurity Queensland's internal unit.	Agree in principle	As above. The implementation of this recommendation will also be dependent on funding outcomes.
Establish an innovation function and develop an innovation strategy			
11.1	Establish an innovation function and an innovation strategy for Biosecurity Queensland.	Agree in principle	DAF has an innovation framework at a whole-of-Department level through the DAF Innovation Strategy. The work program and scoping for innovation in biosecurity can be developed with industry as part of the Strategy and Action Plan.
Build expert and regional capability			
12.1 to 12.5	The panel recommended a range of activities to build capability (including in regional Queensland). Some of the recommendations included further recruitment, having a fellows and mentor program, developing a succession plan and delivering training in engagement and partnership leveraging.	Agree in principle	DAF already provides a range of tools at a whole-of-Department level. There will be work over the immediate short term to concentrate on integrating biosecurity outcomes.
12.6	Develop a biosecurity initiative for northern Australia	Agree in principle	Biosecurity Queensland will scope opportunities to leverage the interests of all parties in biosecurity activities in North Queensland as part of the Strategy and Action Plan.

12.7	Design and deliver a pilot project with local governments and natural resource management groups to better co-ordinate and leverage at a regional level.	Agree in principle	Biosecurity Queensland agrees that current co-ordination programs from pests can be expanded to other sectors. However, this will require further consultation and resourcing, which would occur through the Strategy and Action Plan.
Joint investment in a coordinated on-farm biosecurity campaign			
13.1	Work with stakeholders to design and deliver a coordinated project to drive uptake of on-farm biosecurity.	Agree in principle	Preliminary scoping suggests that substantial work on this issue has already been undertaken by industry and other agencies. One of the longer term actions under the Strategy and Action Plan will be to look at how to utilise work already developed by other groups.
Fine tune funding for responses			
14.1	Top up the existing Exotic Pest and Disease Fund (EPDF) to \$1.5 million (ongoing) and restrict funding (to prevent routine access for programs such as West Indian Drywood Termite (WIDT)).	Agree in principle (in part)	Fiscal constraints are likely make the implementation of this recommendation challenging. Consultation on levels of contribution to WIDT funding are being reviewed separately.
14.2	Change the way resources are used in managing responses so that the commencement and continuance of involvement is evaluated at each stage (including review and evaluation)	Agree	DAF will be seeking to link its new investment principles to ensure that they are applied to biosecurity responses.