

Biosecurity policy statement

NFF policy position

Australia's biosecurity system is fundamental to the success of our agriculture industries, to the health of our natural environment and to our society and economy at large. Ensuring Australia's biosecurity system is innovative, adequately resourced and operating efficiently is critical and should be a shared priority for governments, industry, and the broader community.

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) 2030 Roadmap identifies a robust national biosecurity system as integral to achieving the agriculture sector's vision of \$100 billion GVP by 2030¹. The Roadmap explicitly links biosecurity to market access and international competitiveness, which is underpinned by our favourable pest and disease status. Biosecurity is also central to on-farm productivity, profitability and sustainability, minimising the damaging impacts of invasive species² and the associated costs of management.

In an increasingly complex global environment where international trade and travel will continue to increase significantly, the risk of major biosecurity threats entering and establishing in Australia is heightened. Added to this challenge is a changing climate, which will increasingly affect the range, habitat, spread and impact of invasive species – both known and yet to be identified. Changing demographics and patterns of land use are also altering the biosecurity risk profile. The NFF is concerned that resourcing of the national system – at a federal, state and territory level – is not keeping pace, and that the system may not be fit for the challenges of the future. This concern is substantiated by several recent expert reviews³.

The NFF strongly supports the principle of shared responsibility, where all biosecurity system participants play a role in reducing risk along the biosecurity continuum. The primary industry sector is a critical part of the continuum, and primary producers contribute in-kind and financially to the national system through their own activities and through levies and other fees that support emergency response arrangements, research, development, extension and adoption (RDE&A). The primary production sector must continue to improve biosecurity management and awareness, including by embedding biosecurity in industry assurance and certification programs along the entire supply chain. It is important that government policy and programs formally recognise these industry-led initiatives and that supply chains and co-existing land users value the primary producer implementing such programs. It is also important that the efforts of governments and the primary production sector are matched by

¹ <https://nff.org.au/policies/roadmap/>

² 'Invasive species' should be read in this document as including pests, diseases/pathogens and weeds affecting primary industries, the environment and communities.

³ E.g. 2017 Independent Review of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (the Craik Review), and recent Inspector General of Biosecurity reports including: *Adequacy of preventative border measures to mitigate the risk of African swine fever* (2020); *Pest and disease interceptions and incursions in Australia* (2019); and *Effectiveness of biosecurity measures to manage the risks of brown marmorated stink bugs entering Australia* (2019).

other industries and by the broader community, who have a role to play in reducing biosecurity risk along the continuum.

A partnership approach is essential to deliver a modern system that successfully manages biosecurity risk, and the NFF is calling for a national biosecurity strategy and long-term investment plan for the system, collaboratively developed, funded and implemented by governments and industry.

Context

Australia remains free of many damaging invasive species found elsewhere in the world. This brings many benefits. Not only does this status protect the environment, community and primary industries from the direct damaging impacts of these invasive species, it also provides a competitive advantage when marketing our produce domestically and overseas. Export markets in particular demand high-quality, safe food and fibre, and market access often relies on being able to demonstrate freedom from certain invasive species. Australia's favourable pest and disease status contributes to our produce being both highly competitive and sought-after on the world market. Maintaining this status is central to industry growth ambitions.

To achieve our desired level of protection, it is important that appropriate biosecurity practices are in place along the pre-border, border and post-border continuum. The generalised invasion curve (**Figure 1**) demonstrates the economic return on investment at each point of intervention – prevention (including planning and preparedness), eradication (including early detection), containment and ongoing management. It costs far less to stop invasive species from arriving than it does to eradicate or contain them, or to manage their impacts once they have established.

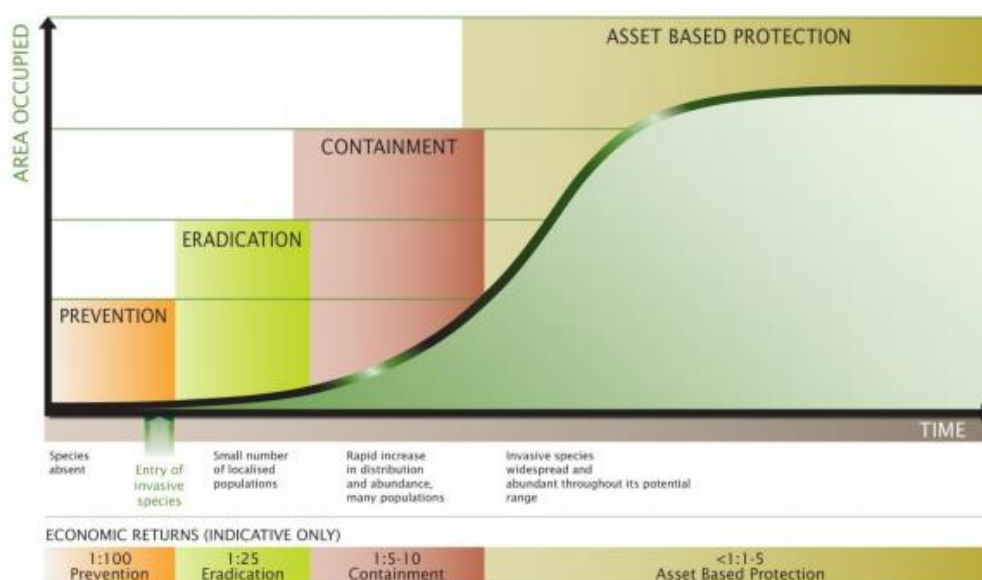


Figure 1. Generalised invasion curve showing actions appropriate to each stage
(Source: Agriculture Victoria, <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/protecting-victoria>).

The invasive species that do make it through the border affect our environment, community and primary industries – and in doing so have a significant impact on the broader economy. While the exact economic cost of all invasive species present in

Australia is unknown, researchers have conservatively estimated the combined cost to be more than \$13 billion a year⁴.

The direct costs to industry and governments of managing emergency responses to individual incursions is significant – for example, over \$600 million to date for the red imported fire ant response in southeast Queensland, \$150 million for the 2007-08 equine influenza response, and \$25 million for the 2013-17 banana freckle response. Within the agriculture sector, the economic cost of established pest animals is estimated at \$797 million a year⁵, and weeds have an estimated annual cost of \$4.8 billion⁶. Costs include both the direct costs of management as well as production losses. The impact of established insect pests and diseases is difficult to measure but immense, affecting plant industries, livestock and intensive animal production.

Resourcing

Funding arrangements for Australia's biosecurity system are complex, with a range of government and industry parties contributing. Notwithstanding this, the 2017 Craik Review determined that at a national level the system is underfunded, and that there is inadequate funding for those areas where the greatest return is likely to be achieved. This includes the prevention activities on the left-hand side of the invasion curve (**Figure 1**). Other underfunded areas include education and awareness building, cross-sectoral research and development, and environmental biosecurity.

The Craik Review also determined that government appropriation funding has generally been static or in decline, while cost-recovered funds and levies have been increasing. Further, recent reviews by the Inspector General of Biosecurity have pointed to similar concerns – reporting a 25 per cent drop in frontline biosecurity inspection staff between 2013-14 and 2017-18⁷, and a halving of the number of biosecurity detector dogs between 2012 and 2017⁸. Concerns about resourcing levels, capability and capacity have also been raised in reviews of state government biosecurity functions.

This is of concern to industry, given the steady growth of the biosecurity task, and the risks to all Australians when the system fails. Industry welcomed new biosecurity measures introduced in 2019, allowing authorities to deport or amend the visas of travellers who bring in undeclared high-risk items. The use of these measures sends a strong message to would-be offenders. Industry also strongly welcomed an Australian Government commitment of \$66 million in 2019 to address the risk of African swine fever including through more biosecurity officers and six new detector dogs. However, strategic long-term funding must be assured, and the quantum of funding should be linked to growth in traveller numbers, trade volumes and associated biosecurity risks.

The NFF's principles for the national biosecurity system

The NFF seeks a strong, well-resourced, efficient and innovative biosecurity system that protects Australia's primary industries from the damaging impacts of invasive species and underpins the competitiveness of Australian produce overseas.

⁴ Hoffman, B. D. and Broadhurst L. M., 2016. *The economic cost of managing invasive species in Australia*. NeoBiota 31: pp 1-18.

⁵ McLeod, R., 2016. *Cost of Pest Animals in NSW and Australia, 2013-14*. eSYS Development Pty Ltd, 2016. Report prepared for the NSW Natural Resources Commission.

⁶ McLeod, R., 2018. *Annual Costs of Weeds in Australia*. eSYS Development Pty Limited. Published by the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, Canberra, Australia.

⁷ Inspector General of Biosecurity, 2019. *Effectiveness of biosecurity measures to manage the risks of brown marmorated stink bugs entering Australia*.

⁸ Inspector General of Biosecurity, 2019. *Pest and disease interceptions and incursions in Australia*.

The NFF endorses the following principles regarding the national biosecurity system:

- **Shared responsibility.** A well-functioning biosecurity regime includes a strong emphasis on the concept of shared responsibility, encompassing all governments (Federal, state and territory and local), industry, supply chains, the community and individual land owners and managers.
- **Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB).** The IGAB is a central part of our national biosecurity arrangements, providing a framework for governments to coordinate and identify priority areas of reform to strengthen the system. Progress on agreed reforms, driven by the National Biosecurity Committee, should be prioritised and reported on for the benefit of all Australians.
- **Funding.** A successful biosecurity system relies on sustained levels of well-targeted investment, underpinned by funding principles and arrangements that are nationally coordinated, consistently applied and well communicated. Funding should be linked to the growth of the biosecurity task, with priority given to the areas of greatest return on investment and high-risk pathways.
- **Planning and decision making.** The primary industry sector is a major stakeholder in the national biosecurity system, and has an important role in national planning and decision making in partnership with governments.
- **Risk-based approach.** The assessment, prioritisation and allocation of resourcing to biosecurity activities across the continuum should be informed by a risk-based approach that is responsive to new and emerging threats.
- **Awareness and readiness.** Improved awareness of biosecurity among producers, industry stakeholders, supply chains and the general community will support biosecurity readiness and is vital to ensure good biosecurity practices, compliance with legislated requirements, and the prevention and/or prompt management of incursions.
- **Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP).** Australia's legislated ALOP should be applied in a consistent manner to reduce biosecurity risk and provide certainty to trading partners and domestic stakeholders.
- **Biosecurity workforce.** Governments should give priority to attracting and retaining an appropriately skilled biosecurity workforce, including surveillance officers, diagnosticians, Northern Australian Quarantine Service officers, detector dogs and their handlers.
- **Surveillance and diagnostics.** Effective systems for surveillance and diagnostics underpin prevention, preparedness and early response. Governments and industry must continue to work together to ensure national systems are innovative, well targeted, coordinated and adequately resourced.
- **Data and information systems.** National collaboration on data and intelligence sharing - including modern, interoperable systems and agreed data sharing protocols - will strengthen system performance in managing biosecurity risk.
- **Compliance and enforcement.** Regulatory compliance and enforcement tools, including civil penalties, criminal sanctions and visa cancellations, should be used appropriately by governments to manage biosecurity risk and encourage compliance with biosecurity requirements.
- **Emergency response.** All industries should sign up to an emergency response deed, to strengthen the national partnership and the national biosecurity

system. Emergency response arrangements should be underpinned by up to date pest and disease categorisation.

- **Traceability.** Effective traceability and information systems underpin an effective biosecurity system. Traceability systems should facilitate prompt and efficient responses to biosecurity incursions and food safety incidents, and provide confidence to trading partners regarding pest and disease status. These systems should be industry led, implemented in partnership with government.
- **Research, development, extension and adoption.** Commitment by governments and industry to ongoing investment and collaboration in RDE&A will inform best practice and innovative approaches across the biosecurity continuum and ensure Australia remains a world-leader in biosecurity management.
- **Established and endemic invasive species.** Successful management of established and endemic invasive species requires strategic, long-term, coordinated and collaborative approaches between industry, governments, researchers and the community.
- **On-farm biosecurity programs.** Implementation of biosecurity systems by primary producers at an enterprise level is highly effective in managing biosecurity risk and should be recognised and supported by governments and supply chain participants.

The NFF's role

The NFF recognises the important role that its member organisations and their members play in delivering and driving improvements to the national biosecurity system, including as signatories to the emergency response deeds. As the peak body representing Australia's primary industry sector, the NFF's role is to:

- Represent the primary industry sector's interests in national biosecurity policy and regulatory reform, including as related to the Commonwealth *Biosecurity Act 2015* and underpinning regulations and cost recovery arrangements.
- Advocate for sustainable and equitable funding arrangements to ensure the national biosecurity system is resourced to effectively manage risk and support market access into the future.
- Promote industry collaboration and coordination and provide leadership on cross-commodity biosecurity issues.
- Work with governments to engage bilaterally and multilaterally to influence the global agenda for biosecurity policy, in line with Australia's trade interests and in keeping with best practice biosecurity risk management.
- Work with governments and others to ensure appropriate biosecurity measures are in place pre-border, at the border and post-border.
- Lead and support government and industry in national communications and awareness activities relating to the national biosecurity system, biosecurity incidents and farm biosecurity. This includes promoting the importance of biosecurity to all Australians.

Priorities for industry

The NFF has identified the following immediate priorities for achieving a strong national biosecurity system that is fit for the challenges of the future:

- A national biosecurity strategy developed and implemented by governments, industry and community groups and supported by a long-term sustainable investment plan for biosecurity. A strategy should encompass the full biosecurity continuum - from offshore to on-farm, as well as RDE&A.
- Commitment to ensuring adequate long-term funding for the national biosecurity system, through prompt implementation of the onshore biosecurity levy (which replaces the earlier proposal for a Biosecurity Imports Levy), increased appropriation funding and adjustments to cost recovery charges.
- Publication by governments, through the National Biosecurity Committee, of a progress report on implementation of the 42 recommendations of the 2017 IGAB Review report, including timeframes for implementation of outstanding recommendations.
- Implementation of recommendations made by the Inspector General of Biosecurity must be prioritised and adequately resourced.
- Removal of arbitrary Australian Government staff caps and the application of efficiency dividends for cost-recovered and critical biosecurity frontline functions.
- Management of biosecurity risk at the border and pre-border, where the economic returns are greatest, should be a priority for governments.
- Priority should be given to developing flexible and timely responses to ongoing non-compliance from countries exporting risky material.
- The National Biosecurity Statement, developed through a government-industry-environmental stakeholder partnership, should be actively used by all stakeholders to raise awareness about shared responsibility.
- Industry in partnership with governments should commit to long-term funding of biosecurity RDE&A across the biosecurity continuum, including management of established pests and weeds.
- The emergency response deed for exotic production weeds should be finalised as soon as possible.
- Industry and governments to work together to review all agricultural pest and disease lists and categorise all high-risk agricultural pests and diseases as a matter of urgency.
- Industry must be integrated in national biosecurity communications activities during and outside of biosecurity incidents, through the National Biosecurity Communications and Engagement Network.
- Industry should continue to lead development and implementation of national traceability system reforms, working in partnership with government and supply chains towards innovative, fit-for-purpose and nationally consistent systems and approaches.
- Industry must prioritise the mitigation of biosecurity risk on-farm and through the supply chain, and commit to continuously improve and value biosecurity practices. These on-farm biosecurity practices must be recognised by supply chain participants and co-existing land users such as utility companies.
- Commitment by state and territory governments to allocate resourcing required meet their obligations under the various national biosecurity agreements.