Biosecurity Incident Public Information Manual

Part 2: Public Information Operations

Version 2.0 – May 2018

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Authority

This manual has been prepared by the National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN). The NBCEN comprises agricultural health organisations and communication managers from Commonwealth, state and territory agencies responsible for biosecurity.

Note: Name change from National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network to National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network in November 2017.

Version control

Version	Date of issue	Author	Comments
V1.0	April 2014	Biosecurity Incident National Communication Network (NCN)	Endorsed by the National Biosecurity Committee in February 2014
V2.0	May 2018	National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network	Endorsed at NBCEN meeting November 2017
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Contents

1 Introduction

Part 2 of the Biosecurity Incident Public Information Manual (BIPIM) provides guidance on a nationally consistent public information response to biosecurity incidents. It should be read in conjunction with parts 1, 3 and 4 of the BIPIM. The manual supports the Biosecurity Incident Management System (BIMS).

Phases of a biosecurity incident

The Public Information function is required through each phase of a response to a biosecurity incident:

- investigation and alert
- operational
- stand-down.

The Public Information function will also apply during recovery from a biosecurity incident. Recovery can begin at any stage during the response and may continue once response activities have concluded. This is consistent with BIMS.

As an incident progresses, not all jurisdictions will be in the same phase at the same time (see Section 2.4 in BIMS).

The Public Information function in a biosecurity incident

In the event of a biosecurity incident, the Public Information function is responsible for the management of public information generated from and received by the incident's control or coordination centre. This includes information from and for the public, those affected by the incident, businesses/industry and the media.

The public information function may be established in a Local Control Centre (LCC), State Coordination Centre (SCC) and National Coordination Centre (NCC), depending on the size and complexity of the incident. Local or regional incidents may not require the entire public information suite and personnel could cover multiple roles. However, all eight scalable functions will be needed for larger incidents:

- Public Information Management
- Media liaison
- Social media
- Website
- Collateral
- Call centre
- Stakeholder engagement
- Internal communication.

2 National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network

The National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN) produces nationally consistent public information in response to pest and disease incursions and animal welfare incidents. The network comprises communication managers from agricultural health organisations and Australian, state and territory government agencies responsible for biosecurity.

During a biosecurity incident the NBCEN:

- reports to and provides strategic communication advice to the relevant technical consultative committee or National Management Group
- develops a national communication and engagement strategy for agreement by the relevant technical consultative committee or National Management Group and oversees its implementation
- ensures that national media and communication procedures for biosecurity incidents are activated and implemented accordingly
- explains policies, plans and practices to all stakeholders clearly, consistently, openly and quickly
- facilitates the flow of information between jurisdictions
- provides experienced public information officers to other jurisdictions (where available and/or necessary)
- ensures the key principles of crisis communication are upheld throughout a response to a biosecurity incident.

NBCEN membership

The NBCEN is chaired by either a representative from the National Biosecurity Committee or a Senior Executive Service officer in the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The NBCEN's core membership comprises relevant communication managers from:

- the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
- state and territory agriculture departments or biosecurity agencies
- Animal Health Australia
- Plant Health Australia
- Wildlife Health Australia
- CSIRO
- the Australian Government Department of Health

Wildlife Health Australia, the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions and the Australian Local Government Association are NBCEN observers.

Note that plant and livestock industry representatives as well as National Farmer Federation's state representatives will be invited to attend face-to-face meetings in their region to present and engage with NBCEN members.

The NBCEN chair may also invite communication managers or liaison officers from affected industries and/or organisations to participate in NBCEN meetings held in response to a specific biosecurity incident, including:

- industries affected by a biosecurity incident
- other relevant Australian, state or territory government agencies
- national/state farming organisations
- non-government environmental organisations
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand
- the Australian Food and Grocery Council
- the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority.

Where an organisation does not have a communication manager, the president, CEO or relevant executive of that organisation may be invited to join the NBCEN during the response to the incident.

How the NBCEN works with the Public Information function

The NBCEN interacts with the Public Information function in each local control centre and state/territory or national coordination centre.

Investigation and alert phase

The NBCEN representative in the affected jurisdiction contacts the NBCEN chair to discuss whether it is necessary to notify other jurisdictions or to call a meeting of the NBCEN.

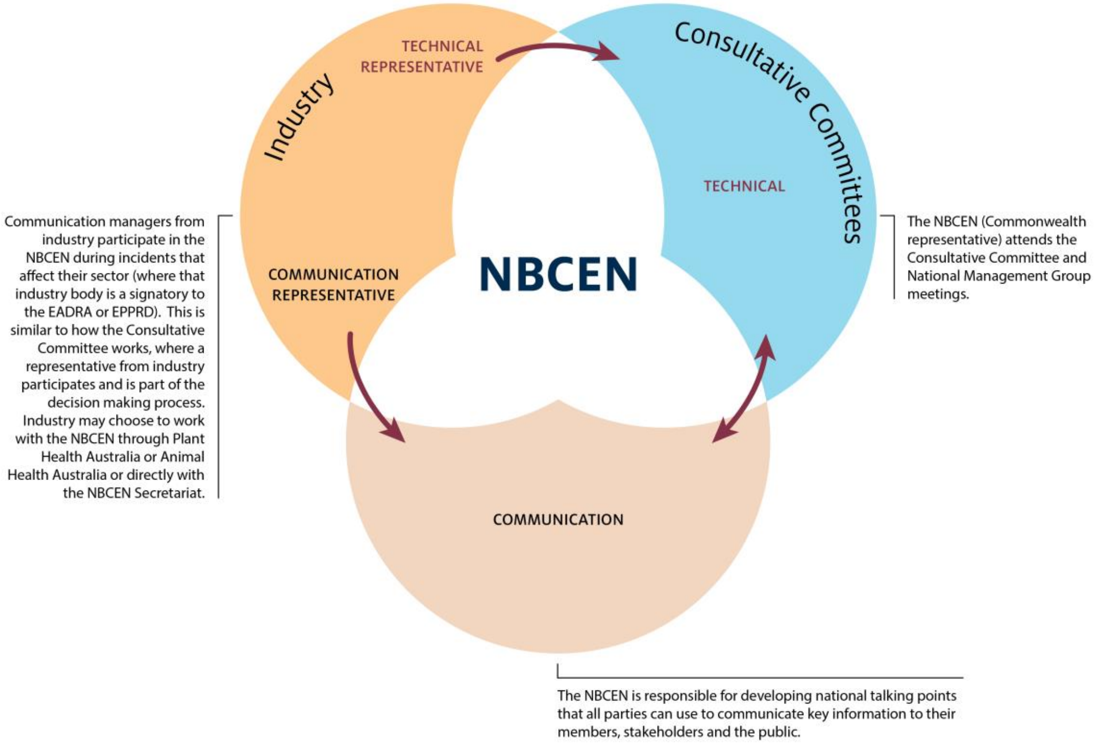
Operational phase

When an incident affects only one state or territory, the combat jurisdiction's Public Information function develops draft talking points and where needed, a communication strategy for the incident response. The NBCEN representative in the State Coordination Centre will share this material with the NBCEN.

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment performs a national coordination role during incidents that affect more than one jurisdiction. The Public Information function in the National Coordination Centre is responsible for developing and coordinating national communication materials and activities. The NBCEN chair or PI Manager in the NCC will activate the NBCEN and share relevant information and materials.

The NBCEN representative in the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment NBCEN(or NCC) will attend the consultative committee and National Management Group meetings, and develop national talking points and where required, a national communication and engagement strategy. The NBCEN has an established process (refer to Figure 2 p.7) for developing talking points which also explains how it works with the consultative committee during an incident. In fast moving widespread incidents, the NBCEN should meet after each consultative committee meeting so they can be updated on the direction of the response and action any specific requests.

Figure 1: NBCEN's relationship with industry and consultative committees



The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (through its NBCEN member/s) should always be consulted about trade and market access considerations before providing this type of information to the media, industry and other stakeholders.

Stand-down phase

If during the investigation and alert phase the pest or disease is proven not present, the NBCEN stands down.

If an incident moves from the operational phase into the stand-down phase, the NBCEN finalises involvement with a debrief to record what worked well and what lessons will help the next response.

If containment, control or eradication of the pest or disease is not possible, the consultative committee and the National Management Group may decide to transition to a management program. As part of talking points, the NBCEN develops messages that explain to stakeholders the reason for the decision and actions they can take to prevent or manage the pest or disease. The combat state will be responsible for developing a communication and engagement strategy, but if the pest or disease occurs in more than one jurisdiction the NBCEN has a role in developing a communication and engagement strategy that provides a nationally consistent approach.

Recovery phase

The NBCEN must continue to meet, as appropriate, to review communication strategies and messaging for the recovery phase. This ensures that messaging remains consistent in each jurisdiction.

The Public Information function

A series of scalable functions are implemented to manage public information during each phase of an incident. Scalable means that the individual public information functions can be activated and resourced as required. Local or regional incidents may not require the entire public information suite; however, all these components will be needed for larger incidents.

Public Information Management

The Public Information Management function is responsible for liaising with the NBCEN and coordinating all public information components including personnel in the following roles:

- Media Liaison
- Social Media
- Website
- Collateral
- Call Centre
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Internal Communication.

This function approves and oversees dissemination of consistent messaging to key stakeholders directly affected by the incident, including:

- producers/growers/fishers
- industry bodies
- supply chain businesses
- government agencies in Australia
- international stakeholders (including overseas trading partners)
- community groups and relevant non-government organisations
- the media (domestic and international).

The Public Information Management function may consist of a small team headed by a manager, deputy and public information officers responsible for tasks such as rostering, reporting, monitoring, etc. who can provide support to the section and be the central contact for the NBCEN. A dedicated person in this team should be the liaison point with the Planning and Operation functions to gather time critical information or that which is not provided in a Situation Report. The management function also needs to be closely engaged with the various industry and other liaison officers appointed to the response. This supporting team should prepare the communication and engagement strategy, talking points and key messages. An executive assistant and/or administrative officer may also be required.

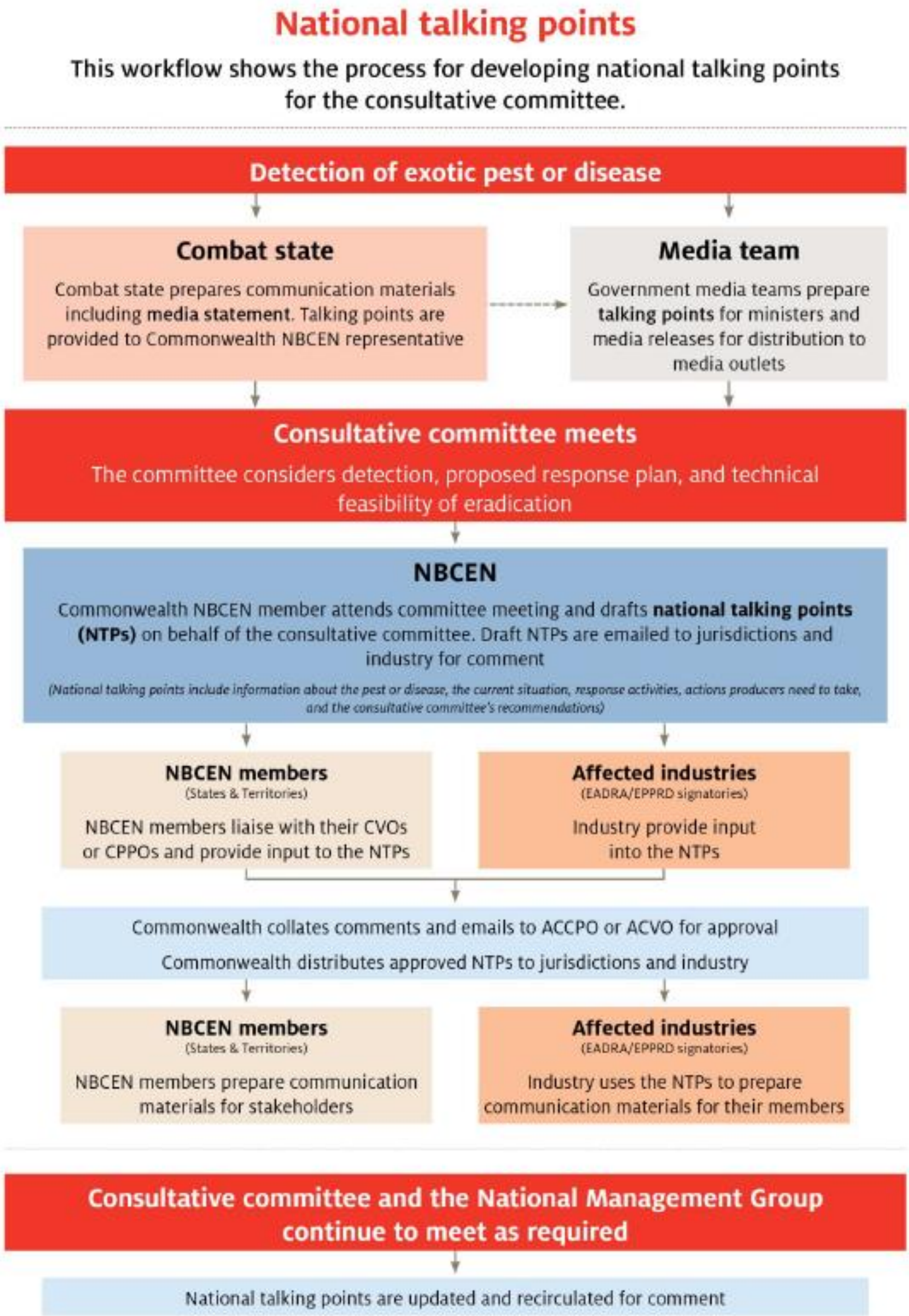
To avoid delays to the response, the manager may delegate tasks to the deputy. The deputy may attend meetings, provide approvals and make key decisions.

Depending on the scale of the incident and the operational environment, the Public Information Management function may also set up a Ministerial Liaison function that has a specific role in providing information to the minister’s office about communication and engagement activities.

The Public Information Management function is responsible for managing the health and safety of personnel working in and from the relevant control or coordination centre.

The Public Information function will be responsible for coordinating national talking points for the response.

Figure 2: National talking points process



IMPORTANT

Incidents carried out under one of the emergency response agreements (EPPRD, EADRA or NEBRA) require Parties involved to stay within the talking points agreed to by the Consultative Committee. These talking points can be developed by any of the Affected Parties and contain messages that allow Parties to respond effectively.

The state or territory where the incident occurs (the combat jurisdiction) should provide, if available, their incident talking points to the NBCEN Secretariat in the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. The NBCEN Secretariat will use these to draft national talking points either prior to or immediately following the relevant consultative committee meeting.

The national talking points are distributed out to NBCEN members and industry communication managers (or their representative) that are involved in the response for their input. It should be noted that the industry must be a signatory to either the EPPRD or EADRA to be able to receive and contribute to the national talking points.

The NBCEN members are expected to consult with the relevant consultative committee member within their own organisation. For example, for an animal disease response, the NBCEN member should liaise with their Chief Veterinary Officer on the talking points. Remember that good communication practice should be used for talking points: conversational tone, short sentences, no jargon, or acronyms and use common names where possible. Talking points are not a fact sheet. Also refer to the emergency communication principle in Part 1 of this manual.

National talking points should make sense to the public, regardless of where they are located in Australia and preferably only refer to one website (usually outbreak.gov.au) and phone number for more information.

A tight deadline is usually set for comments which need to be returned to the NBCEN Secretariat. Once the comments are collated they are sent to either the Chief Veterinary Officer, Chief Plant Protection Officer or the Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer for final approval. Once approved, the talking points are distributed back out to the NBCEN and consultative committee members for their use to develop their own specific communication materials

Media Liaison

The Media Liaison function must be staffed with experienced personnel with access to a designated, trained media spokesperson. This function works directly with the media, preparing and distributing media releases, organising and running media conferences and interviews, guiding media spokespeople, and where approved, arranging access for media visits.

Given the nature of the media environment, the Media Liaison function may need to be resourced outside business hours to cater for the frequency and intensity of media inquiries, including those from overseas. If this is the case, a personnel roster must be put in place.

This function should use an online media centre to assist in meeting media demands. The online media centre should provide media releases, audio or video grabs, photos of spokespeople, images/footage if available and links to supporting website information.

Media Liaison will need to work closely with all other public information functions in the control/coordination centre, particularly Social Media and Website as well as the Public Information Manager

To ensure media activities are supported and nationally consistent, it is critical that the LCC Media Liaison function must liaise closely with its equivalent function in the SCC. The SCC Media Liaison function must also liaise with its counterpart in the NCC.

Media spokesperson

One person should be designated as the media spokesperson for the incident. Using the same spokesperson provides a consistent, trusted identity (a face) for the response. A deputy spokesperson should also be fully trained and briefed to step in if the designated spokesperson is not available—especially in the event of a protracted or large-scale incident.

As well as being media trained, the media spokesperson should be a subject matter expert who can address technical and scientific matters concerning biosecurity. He/she should only speak on issues within their area of responsibility or expertise and defer any questions that affect other jurisdictions or industry groups. The media spokesperson may also have a joint spokesperson role with the relevant portfolio minister or other agencies involved in the response i.e. if it is a zoonotic disease, then alongside a health spokesperson. In a large-scale response, consideration should be given as to whether or not the spokesperson can also take on a leading position in the response team, as the media spokesperson role could be a significant undertaking on its own.

The spokesperson liaises regularly with the Media Liaison function to ensure he/she is informed about emerging or contentious issues and to ensure delivery of consistent messages.

Emergency broadcaster

The ABC is the national emergency broadcaster. Each jurisdiction should establish a contact and have an arrangement in place with the ABC in its state or territory to deliver key messages during biosecurity incidents.

Individual jurisdictions may also have agreements with other broadcasters to provide emergency messages.

News media

During an incident, the news media will expect an immediate and continuing flow of timely and accurate information. In high profile incidents, media demands will be intense.

The media's priority will be to produce news for their audience, not to assist in communicating technical information about the response. However, the media can assist in communicating key messages to the community and those directly affected and support containment and eradication efforts.

The Media Liaison function provides reliable information to journalists who will tailor it to their various audiences.

Experience has shown that it is best to be proactive about what is happening—even if the news is bad. Delays can allow misinformation to gain prominence in the media and on social media platforms.

Handling interviews

Most interviews will be delivered by the media spokesperson. However, journalists may ask other senior officials or technical experts for an interview in order to get a range of different angles. Refer to your jurisdiction's policy on media spokespeople.

News conferences

Issuing a media release usually satisfies the print and online media's initial need for information, but television and radio require interviews. A major development will make it necessary to participate in interviews or call a news conference. These conferences are a useful tool in reaching many media outlets at the same time. They have the added advantage of allowing spokespeople to present the facts and answer questions.

Demand for a news conference is often driven by media organisations and is a good indicator that a door stop or conference should be held as soon as practical. The frequency of door stops or conferences will depend on the size, impact and urgency of the incident.

Due to the rapidly changing situation in an outbreak (e.g. number of infected premises), media briefings should be scheduled once or twice a day at consistent times, rather than the spokesperson having to perform numerous interviews throughout the day.

Consideration needs to be given to consistency of messages. For example, due to the timing of when Situation Reports are issued, the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer may not know the current number of infected premises (IPs) in Western Australia, so if he/she announces a different figure to the WA CVO who may also be conducting an interview, this could be seen by the media and public as inconsistent information being provided by the government. The latest Situation Report should be used to report IPs etc. which may help with providing correct figures. It may be the case in a rapidly changing response that exact figures are difficult to provide and this evolving situation would need to be explained to media.

Identification cards for the media

Reporters and other media personnel should be asked to wear their own accredited identification cards while covering the incident. Where media representatives have been granted access to film, it may also be appropriate to provide them with any necessary incident specific identification.

Media kits

An electronic package or media kit can be distributed to media outlets prior to or following a live interview. These should contain the most recent media release, information (for example, a fact sheet) about the pest or disease and key contact details. Consider providing profiles of the spokespeople, including their name, role and expertise in relation to the incident.

Having pre-prepared handouts/templates will aid in developing information kits within a tight timeframe.

Media access to infected premises or dangerous contact premises

Movement restrictions are put in place during an incident. The Media Liaison function is responsible for briefing media on the risks and restrictions attached to the incident, including where they may and may not film.

During an incident, state, territory and Australian Government authorities do not divulge the names or addresses of infected, suspect or dangerous contact premises. If the Incident Manager decides to allow the media to enter such premises, access must also be approved by the property owner.

A Guide for media in an outbreak contains more information and is available on the Outbreak website.

Dealing with media requests

Option 1 Deny access

Given quarantine restrictions and the probability that the owner of an infected, suspect or dangerous contact premises will not welcome intrusion into the quarantine area, denial of access will be the most likely initial response.

Being denied access will be more acceptable to the media if they are offered high-quality images as an alternative. As such, response agencies would need to arrange for appropriate footage and/or photographs to be taken and distributed to media outlets. It is important to remember that any footage or photographs do not encroach on the privacy of individuals impacted and include appropriate material e.g. all personnel using appropriate protective personal equipment.

Option 2 Restrict access

Access to an infected, suspect or dangerous contact premises to obtain pool images (i.e. one media outlet given access to provide material to all others) must be approved by the Incident Manager. The Media Liaison function must work closely with the Operations function to facilitate access.

Any authorised visit should be supervised. The Public Information Management function must ensure any special conditions applied by the Incident Manager and/or property owner are accepted by journalists and media crews and are complied with. For example, those entering an infected premise may be required to wear special clothing and footwear or to cover and disinfect equipment.

Media helicopters and drones

Most news media, especially television, have access to helicopters and drones. This can pose problems for the incident response.

The Public Information Management function should assume that helicopters could be used to transport journalists to the site of an outbreak or, more commonly, to fly over the site to gather aerial shots. The Incident Manager should be notified of the likelihood of any media flights occurring. He/she may consider declaring restricted airspace in the restricted area.

If restrictions are applied, assistance should be sought from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment or the NCC to declare a restricted airspace in the vicinity of the properties and the media should be informed immediately. Reasons for the restrictions should be stated, such as the possible dispersal of a disease agent, the risk of panicking animals making control measures more difficult or the possible danger to helicopters and personnel from firearms.

Trespassers

Groups including journalists or animal welfare protestors may attempt to enter quarantined properties. The combat jurisdiction should inform the police if they are aware of breaches.

Media access to laboratories

The Public Information Management function will liaise with the appropriate laboratory contact to agree on an appropriate response.

Follow-up for the record

When the immediate priorities are dealt with, the Public Information Management function and the Incident Manager should arrange for file images of the outbreak to be collected as a part of the historical record and as resource material for future communication activities, education and training purposes.

Social Media

Social media presents governments with opportunities and challenges. Challenges will be heightened during high profile incidents, particularly those involving animals.

Social media should be used in addition to other communication channels. Journalists monitor government social media accounts to keep up-to-date with information as it is issued, track conversations and gauge responsiveness.

All forms of messaging, including social media, should refer to the relevant government website.

Some agencies prefer to set up social media channels before an incident so the community using it grows. Naming a channel with a business area of government, rather than specifically for an incident, may give it ongoing value following the response phase. Refer to your jurisdiction's social media policy.

Social media network with industry and other stakeholders (i.e. re-sharing, re-tweeting and so on).

Responding to questions and comments

Social media users often make comments or ask questions in relation to posts, tweets or videos on government social media pages or channels. It may not be appropriate to respond to all comments on social media channels; however, responses to social media must be prompt.

Pre-approved standard responses to common questions can speed the process. Adopt these messages from talking points or website content that has already been approved. Access to subject matter experts is also critical in terms of timely responses.

In a response there are always unexpected questions raised that are not covered in talking points or situation reports. It will be helpful to establish a contact in the Planning and/or Operations functions, from whom the Public Information function is able to obtain prompt technical information that can be used to answer questions on social media and other channels.

Resourcing

Resources required to manage social media for a biosecurity incident will depend on the nature and scale of the situation. To ensure accurate information is communicated in a timely manner the Social Media function will need personnel with experience in communications and social media postings, as well as access to subject matter experts.

Incidents that generate a lot of public interest will require additional resources for monitoring and research. In a large-scale incident, the Social Media function may have to be considered after hours.

Website

During an incident, users need to be able find website information quickly. The website must be updated regularly as soon as new information becomes available, with the latest and most important information appearing first.

An effective approval process is needed to ensure website content is uploaded quickly. Having a subject matter expert available to the Public Information function may help speed up preparation of information and approvals.

Website information must be succinct and accessible to all users, including people with a disability, people with low literacy and those who do not use English as their first language. Websites should provide access to an interpreting service or have information translated by an authorised provider

Outbreak website

Where a biosecurity incident warrants the provision of information to the public, the combat jurisdiction should publish the relevant information on its website. Where a pest or disease incident occurs in more than one jurisdiction or gains public attention outside the combat state/territory, the primary gateway for information will be the Outbreak website [outbreak.gov.au]. The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment hosts and manages the Outbreak website as a shared resource for each jurisdiction.

In an incident where national advertising or messaging is required, all materials and key messages should refer the audience to the Outbreak website as a source of consistent information about the incident.

During an incident, website users eventually access information directly from their jurisdiction's website for more localised information. This was shown in the 2007 equine influenza outbreak. However, it is important for consistency that the Outbreak website address is published in all national advertising as the gateway to information about the incident. Outbreak provides links back to all other state and territory websites. It also serves as the authoritative source of information for overseas trading partners and governments.

The Outbreak website provides situation reports, information resources including, maps, fact sheets, media releases, audio grabs and video, frequently asked questions, contact details and instructions on how to report pests and diseases.

Where reliable information already exists on one website, other websites should link directly to that information to avoid duplication, for example, videos showing disease symptoms.

Collateral

Collateral includes a wide range of materials that are produced to support the response. This usually includes print and online materials such as advertisements, fact sheets, brochures, signage and other items that can be handed out. This team may also have a role in creating a nationally consistent brand or style for response materials, especially where the response is likely to be long term.

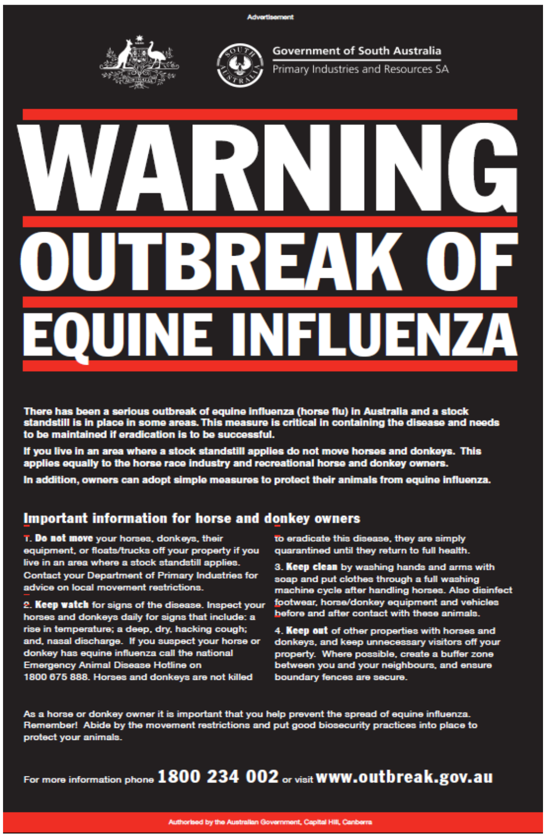
The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment holds a ready-to-go suite of generic emergency advertising for online, press, radio and television that can be activated whenever a large-scale incident requires a national campaign. The generic advertisements (Figure 2) can be modified quickly to be made disease-specific. The newspaper advertisement shown below was used during the 2007 equine influenza outbreak in South Australia (Figure 33).

Figure 2 Generic ready-to-go newspaper advertisement

Note: Generic advertisement used during the first few days of an outbreak.

Source: the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Figure 3 Ready-to-go newspaper advertisement on equine influenza



Note: This advertisement, used for all equine influenza outbreaks, first appeared during the 2007 outbreak in South Australia. Includes reference to the national hotline and Outbreak website.

Source: The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Advertising provides greater control over public messages during an emergency biosecurity incident. Information about movement restrictions, biosecurity measures and reporting signs of disease symptoms is critical in supporting containment, control and eradication efforts.

Press advertising should only be considered where a response is likely to be long-term. Where more immediate notifications are required, e.g. for implementing a livestock standstill, advertising through social media should be considered in addition to radio, television and electronic road signage.

The radio announcement warning of an animal disease outbreak is available in English, Arabic, Cantonese, Croatian, Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Maltese, Mandarin, Punjabi and Vietnamese.

All national advertising refers to the Outbreak website (rather than the website of the individual state and territory) and the national 1800 234 002 telephone hotline (see Call centre for details).

Where an incident is limited to one jurisdiction, the combat state/territory may instigate its own advertising as required. Each jurisdiction is responsible for working with its own government to obtain and put in place electronic road signage.

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment holds copies of the ready-to-go national advertising and a draft letter to the Special Minister of State that seeks an exemption during emergencies from the standard Australian Government advertising campaign process. Emergency exemptions enable prompt placement of advertisements.

Call Centre

Call centre activities will depend on the severity of the incident and interest generated by affected stakeholders and the public.

The Call Centre function in the SCC and where activated, the NCC, are responsible for establishing the call centre, developing call centre scripts (for example, questions and answers) and updating call centre personnel on a regular basis. The function is also responsible for passing feedback to the Public Information Management function to guide further public information activities.

In a low-level incident contained to a small geographical area, the SCC Call Centre function may choose to establish a call centre. During much larger events where the incident affects more than one jurisdiction, and is a major threat to public health, industry and/or trade, the NCC's Public Information Management function may ask the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) to activate its national call centre under the Emergency Services Schedule that it has in place with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. This call centre can be scaled up or down to meet demand. The NCC Call Centre function is responsible for providing DSS with updated call centre scripts throughout the incident.

When a national call centre is activated, all national advertising materials and messages must refer to **1800 234 002**, the number assigned to the DSS national call centre.

Where call centres operate in the SCC and NCC, both call centre functions must liaise regularly to ensure consistency of messages and call centre scripts.

Pre-recorded or on-hold messages must provide people with a website address or Facebook page, where they can access information

Stakeholder Engagement

Community engagement

Community engagement is a planned process of interaction with people to achieve a desired outcome. Incidents that significantly affect the community or create significant community interest may warrant on-the-ground communication activities. Activities can include:

- door-knocking
- identifying or establishing communication channels such as mobile offices at key locations
- identifying and working with key individuals and organisations, such as affected producers, local councils, community groups, clubs and event organisers.

Community engagement may also include organising and managing information booths, face-to-face meetings, training sessions and events held locally to provide information, address concerns and harness community support for the response effort.

Community engagement activities need significant resources, including skilled staff, vehicles, signage, laptops and other mobile communication devices. Access to a technical expert, such as a vet or biosecurity officer, helps when dealing with questions specific to technical or operational matters.

Messages delivered through these forums must be consistent and supported by those delivered through other communication channels.

Community engagement activities are usually delivered by Local Control Centre personnel, but the State Coordination Centre must have oversight of what is being delivered out of the LCC. If more than one LCC is established, the SCC must coordinate the activities across all LCCs. Consideration should be given to the number of personnel required s to deliver the on-the-ground activities in each LCC as well the number of LCCs that will be assigned to personnel in the SCC, particularly where a disease is widespread and many LCCs are being established.

The Community Engagement function in the SCC will also have a role in providing time critical information to the industry liaison officers, and this could be a dedicated, resource intensive role.

Resource intensive with the right people. Core materials such as fact sheets, talking points etc. must be generated out of the SCC with approval from the Incident Controller and SCC PI manager.

Key considerations in community engagement

The local council and mayor should be contacted when planning to undertake these activities within a community. Councils can provide contact lists and vital information about the local area, community traits and property uses (for example, animal stocking details).

Take a whole-of-government approach to community engagement activities. If one or more government agencies are trying to provide the community with information, deliver it in a package; for example, one fact sheet with joint branding, rather than three different fact sheets delivered by three different departments. Approaches from several government representatives may cause resentment in the community and be detrimental to the overall response effort.

The Community Engagement function must liaise closely with the Operations function to ensure key messages are consistent and any planned activities are not duplicated, such as, contacting property owners who have already been visited by Operations.

Engagement methods must be carefully considered to avoid inadvertently spreading a pest or disease or to avoid giving the impression that community engagement personnel might be doing so. Consider implementing decontamination procedures for community events and always use good biosecurity practices when conducting activities; for example, to avoid spreading weeds, park cars at the front gate or use the main thoroughfares to enter properties.

Entering affected properties may not be possible if a disease is highly contagious. Such cases may require assistance from the Operations function, whose biosecurity officers can engage with people on affected properties.

Any intelligence (such as tracing information) gathered by the Community Engagement function should be fed back to the relevant control or coordination centre as a priority. Community engagement activities must be recorded, particularly face-to-face discussions.

See Part 4 of this manual for forms and templates to be used by the Community Engagement function:

- T12 Stakeholder and Community Engagement Activity Record
- T13 Stakeholder and Community Engagement Activity Schedule
- T14 Public Information Officer Movement Record.

See Staff safety for information about tracking the movements and safety of public information officers.

Note: the Australian Local Government Association is a member of the NBCEN and can assist with distributing information to a network of local councils across Australia.

Stakeholder engagement

Unlike community engagement which has a wide audience, stakeholder engagement is more focused on clearly identified and known stakeholders affected in a response. Direct communication channels for engaging with these audiences need to be considered. Documenting or mapping these stakeholders including the impacts the incident will have on them, their influence, key messages and communication channels as well as prioritising communication with them is critical to the success of the response.

Many of these groups need face-to-face or personal contact such as quarantined property owners who would be engaged through personnel on the ground. Groups such as local governments would fall into this category and as they can help provide information to wider audiences and should be prioritised for a high level of engagement.

In terms of industry groups, liaison with these groups can be done through Industry Liaison Officers or through other mechanisms such as setting up an industry advisory group or industry response group. When multiple industry groups and representatives are involved, having an industry response group is the most effective way to engage with these groups. The public information function needs to work closely with all liaison officers appointed to the response to gather intelligence, provide information back to industry members and provide technical and subject matter expert advice. In a large-scale response, an engagement role within public information solely dedicated to working with liaison officers may be required.

It is important to keep in mind that many of stakeholder groups have subject matter experts of their own and will be seeking detailed and in-depth information about the response. As such, information provided to these groups can be more time-consuming to compile and provide.

Overall, making sure stakeholders have a clear and consistent contact point will be important in building relationships with them. Tracking engagement and interactions with these stakeholders will also be critical to ensure that they have the information and resources they need.

In large-scale responses separate community and stakeholder engagement officers will be needed and likely multiple positions of each.

Industry liaison officers

Industry liaison officers will be appointed to the response usually from within industry groups but will be based within the LCC or SCC. These officers are representatives of industry and are placed to act in the best interests of the industry groups they represent. These officers play a pivotal role in terms of providing feedback and intelligence from their members; providing technical advice and support on industry operations; and communicating important information back to their members.

While these officers generally report to the SCC Coordinator or LCC Controller, a strong relationship and engagement with the public information function is needed to ensure the success of the response.

In large-scale responses separate community and stakeholder engagement officers may be needed. Community engagement officers may concentrate on the broader local community, whereas stakeholder engagement officers may work closely with local affected industries.

National Biosecurity Engagement and Communication Framework

The National Biosecurity Engagement and Communication Framework (refer to BIPIM Part 4) should be used as a basis for stakeholder and community engagement and communication activities.

The framework is based on the International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum, which uses the approach of inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower. It provides guidance to support incident teams in the delivery of public biosecurity messages about prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, management and surveillance.

Ministerial Liaison

In accordance with the Biosecurity Incident Management System Framework, the Public Information Management function will usually liaise with the minister's office. The minister's office should be treated as a key stakeholder.

In low-level incidents, ministerial liaison is likely to be initial advice about the incident to the minister by the Director General of Biosecurity, Chief Plant Protection Officer or Chief Veterinary Officer, and subsequent updates as part of regular whole-of-agency ministerial briefings.

If it is a Level 3 incident or higher, it is likely that the lead agency executive management will provide regular situation reports to the minister. The Public Information Management function may or may not be involved in these meetings but has a role in keeping the minister's office informed of communication activities, even in a low-level incident.

The minister or minister's office can support the Public Information function during an incident by:

- using public messages that are consistent with those generated by the Public Information function
- supporting the implementation of the agreed incident response communication strategy
- coordinating media appearances with appropriate members of the lead agency executive
- facilitating prompt approval and funding of campaign materials, such as advertising.

In some jurisdictions, the lead agency's corporate communication manager (or equivalent) may act as a conduit between the Public Information Management function and the minister's media staff.

Internal Communication

Whatever is said publicly should be said internally, and preferably internally first. Agency staff will often be spokespeople, even if in an unofficial capacity while doing their day-to-day work.

The Internal Communication function is dedicated to keeping all staff in the wider department/organisation updated on the progress of the response. Staff should be aware of the current situation, that a control or coordination centre has been established, and know key contact details, including the relevant website and call centre hotline.

The Internal Communication function may consider sharing internal messages with other agencies that have staff involved in the response, such as local government, environmental agencies, fire authority and police. This will require approval from the Public Information Management function. Community engagement personnel should be made aware of such information sharing as they may be dealing with staff from other agencies on the ground.

Note: this function is not responsible for communication within the control/coordination centre.

Dealing with misinformation and criticism

Published information, including social media, no matter how inaccurate, can become self-perpetuating. Every opportunity must be taken to correct false and misleading statements. Public information personnel must monitor all media output to ensure accurate reporting of the event.

To correct misinformation, the journalist or organisation concerned should be contacted, made aware of the errors, and asked to correct them as soon as possible. This should be followed immediately by a written statement of the correct position, to be copied to the Incident Manager. If the incorrect information has been picked up and used by other media, a general news release should be issued with the facts.

The handling of any emergency may be criticised. In some situations, it may be necessary to provide misinformed critics with a personal briefing. Local groups likely to become involved, such as animal welfare groups and local government, should be identified and kept informed and group briefings arranged (see Stakeholder Engagement).

Malicious criticism requires a different approach, such as arranging for independent, knowledgeable sources to counter the criticism publicly.

Always provide links to the government's website as a source of authoritative and correct information. Check that the website information substantiates the correction that has been requested.

Communicating during recovery

Recovery communication starts as soon as the response begins; however, it focuses on the longer-term support and recovery of individuals, communities and affected industry groups.

Recovery should be addressed in the incident's communication strategy. It requires care and sensitivity and can often be impeded by significant physical, logistical, and psychosocial limitations. Observations of recovery after previous disasters have provided lessons for communicating in recovery.

People affected by an incident may be overwhelmed by large amounts of information. Establish a mechanism for coordinated and consistent communication with all organisations and individuals. For example, provide one fact sheet from several agencies, rather than four fact sheets from four agencies.

After an incident, people often have trouble remembering or understanding information. It is not appropriate to use jargon or overly complicated or technical language. Keep information short, sharp, and practical and have a clear call to action; for example, what does the reader actually have to do? Repeat key recovery messages because information is more likely to reach affected people when they are receptive, which may not be when you first have contact with them.

After the response phase of an incident, people may want to know:

- what is happening with the recovery process
- what support is available
- what they can do if they have questions, concerns or complaints.

The Australian Red Cross provides a guide for Communicating in Recovery.

Reporting and records management

Most government departments use an Incident Management System which is used to record response documents, correspondence, approvals, public information materials and relevant conversations etc. These things must be recorded properly, regardless of whether the activity was undertaken in the control or coordination centre or externally.

Records generated during an incident may be called upon at a later date to inform, for example, parliamentary inquiries, policy reviews and compensation claims. Refer to your agency/organisation's incident response plan or records management policy.

A system or mechanism to track the type, volume and content of all communication materials will be required. In addition, the system should track how and when information has been provided to stakeholders and the type of volume provided. This information will be required for a range of reports including sitreps. This type of reporting may be needed to highlight the effectiveness of the response.

Good file management is important, including file naming and date protocols, as well as version control. This must be considered, especially in long-running incidents where team members need to take a break/leave, and new personnel come into the control/coordination centre.

In addition, systems to document stakeholder contacts and/or a customer relationship management (CRM) system will be critical to the response and ongoing engagement and communication.

Staff safety

All employees working in response to an incident should be familiar with work health and safety requirements and aware of their obligation to report incidents and near misses immediately.

The Public Information Management function is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of personnel working in the Public Information function, in their respective control or coordination centres. Records must be kept on staff movements/locations and any issues concerning health or safety. This is vital when personnel, such as community engagement officers, are deployed in the field. The Public Information Management function should work closely with the Logistics function to establish and maintain these records.

The Logistics function must brief personnel on health and safety requirements as part of their induction at each control or coordination centre.

Evaluation

All communication activities undertaken by the Public Information function should be evaluated at the conclusion of each incident.

An evaluation of the response would examine all functions and how the response was handled as a whole. The Public Information Management function should participate in any incident debriefs and evaluation activities.

The NBCEN also has a role in evaluating the public information response to the incident, either by teleconference or formally at its next face-to-face meeting.

This manual should be updated immediately after the NBCEN identifies and agrees on improvements to a given incident response.