

Statement on Commonwealth Biosecurity Policies and Programs relevant to the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement

INTRODUCTION	2
1. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY - AUSTRALIA	2
1.1. Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health	3
1.2. Market Access and Biosecurity	4
1.3. Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service	4
1.4. Bureau of Rural Sciences	6
2. COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION	7
3. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE (ENVIRONMENT AUSTRALIA)	7
4. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE	8
5. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGED CARE	8
RELEVANT LEGISLATION	9

INTRODUCTION

Maintaining the integrity of the national border is the principal responsibility of the Commonwealth Government in the area of biosecurity. Under the Australian Constitution, the states and territories have primary carriage of animal health matters within their relevant jurisdictions. The Commonwealth is responsible for quarantine and international animal health matters including disease reporting, export certification and trade negotiation. It also provides advice and coordination of national government policy, and, in some circumstances, financial assistance for national animal disease control programs.

The animal health role of the Commonwealth Government is delivered through four business groups within AFFA:

- Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health;
- Market Access and Biosecurity;
- Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS); and
- the Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS).

In addition, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) provides diagnostic services, exotic and emergency disease support and independent scientific advice.

The Commonwealth Departments of Health and Aged Care, Defence and Environment and Heritage also contribute to maintaining Australia's biosecurity.

1. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY - AUSTRALIA

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia (AFFA) is actively involved in maintaining and improving international trade and market access opportunities for agriculture, fisheries, forestry and food industries. This is achieved through establishing scientifically-based quarantine policies, providing effective technical advice and export certification services, entering into negotiations with key trading partners, participating in multilateral forums and international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standard-setting organisations and collaborating with portfolio industries and exporters.

AFFA has developed the AFFAEMPLAN, a departmental response plan that describes the proposed AFFA approach to an emergency involving an animal, aquatic animal or plant disease or pest, animal welfare, food residues or other food safety or sabotage threat. The document provides guidance based on an analysis of existing arrangements, linking policy, strategies, implementation, coordination and emergency management principles.

In the four years from 2001, the Commonwealth Government provided additional resources for AFFA and the Australian Customs Service (ACS) so that all cargo, mail and passengers entering Australia are screened.

Specifically, the Government's package injected significant additional funds into quarantine, including funds:

- to AQIS until 30 June 2001, to fund extra measures due to the UK and the European foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks;
- to AQIS border operations;
- to ACS to support AQIS quarantine services;
- for new infrastructure at international airports and international mail centres, and ongoing costs for Australia Post, to allow greater scrutiny of incoming mail, passengers and goods;
- to strengthen risk management and preparedness arrangements for FMD and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), being coordinated by a high-level industry and government management group; and
- for the purchase of reagents to allow the rapid testing of suspected FMD cases as part of Australia's surveillance program.

1.1. Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health

The Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health (PIAPH) business group provides a coordinated national approach to issues related to animal health and welfare, plant health and protection, and residues and food safety that affect Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Australian Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) is the executive manager of the Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Group.

A Budget Initiative, "*Building a National Approach to Animal and Plant Health*", was announced by the Commonwealth Government in the 2000-2001 Budget. Funding has been provided over four years to develop programs to improve Australia's animal and plant health infrastructure and to improve pest and disease prevention and emergency response capacities.

PIAPH is currently developing a Commonwealth emergency plan to ensure that, in the event of an agricultural emergency, relevant Commonwealth agencies are coordinated and have a jurisdictional position.

1.1.1. The Wildlife and Exotic Diseases Preparedness Program

The Wildlife and Exotic Diseases Preparedness Program (WEDPP) is a joint Commonwealth-State/Territory program that commenced in 1984-85. It aims to develop practical field strategies for the eradication, control and management of wild animals in the event of any outbreak of exotic or other emergency animal disease that could threaten Australia's livestock industries. WEDPP's mission is to improve Australia's emergency animal disease preparedness by supporting AUSVETPLAN

through the development of strategies to monitor, prevent, control or eradicate emergency diseases in wildlife and feral animals.

1.1.2. Other Exotic Diseases Preparedness Program

The Other Exotic Diseases Preparedness Program has two main activities.

1. Provision of grants for training and awareness of private and government veterinarians.
2. Provision of funds for projects to improve exotic disease preparedness, principally relating to Australia's long term Screw Worm Fly Preparedness strategy in recent years.

1.1.3. International Contribution Program

The Program funds Australia's membership of:

1. The Office International des Epizooties (OIE – the international animal health organisation); and
2. The International Foot and Mouth Disease Vaccine Bank (IVB).

1.2. Market Access and Biosecurity

The Market Access and Biosecurity business group undertakes activities that enhance the competitiveness of Australia's agriculture and food industries by:

- maintaining and improving market opportunities through policy and technical advice, and participation in negotiations for market access and trade agreements in international fora; and
- permitting safe trade while protecting Australia's plant, animal and human health and the environment through scientifically based biosecurity policy.

An important unit within the Market Access and Biosecurity group is Biosecurity Australia, which was established in October 2000. Biosecurity Australia protects Australia's animal health status and the natural environment by developing and reviewing biosecurity policies for the importation of live animals (including aquatic animals), animal genetic material and animal products. Biosecurity is achieved by a continuum of strategies, incorporating pre-border measures, border controls and post-arrival measures.

1.3. Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

AQIS provides quarantine inspection services for the arrival of international passengers, cargo, mail, animals and plants or their products into Australia, and inspection and certification for a range of animal and plant products exported from Australia.

AQIS ensures:

- market access worldwide for Australian exports through international negotiations and efficient certification systems;
- protection of Australia's agricultural production, consumers and environment through efficient inspection systems; and
- protection of human health and the health of the Australian flora and fauna through effective quarantine systems.

Rather than consider quarantine as a series of protective measures applied solely at the barrier or national borders, the continuum concept implemented by AQIS takes a holistic approach, commencing offshore in Australia's neighbours and trading partners, proceeding through the traditional quarantine border and continuing into on-shore (post-border) activities. The objectives are to identify and keep disease risks offshore, while maintaining present border operations, extending to an on-shore surveillance capacity to detect diseases that might have become established despite quarantine measures.

1.3.1. Animal Programs

Within AQIS, Animal Programs implements import protocols for live animals and genetic material. The system of quarantine implementation involves the following activities:

- issuing import permits with prescribed conditions;
- examining imported animals and animal products after arrival;
- examining the health certification accompanying consignments for compliance with the import permit conditions;
- managing the risk associated with variations of the import permit conditions to ensure equivalence;
- liaising with overseas certifying authorities to ensure the certification is consistent with the permit conditions;
- managing the associated quarantine stations that are used for quarantine isolation and testing of imported live animals from a variety of countries;
- supervising offshore isolation/quarantine premises;
- inspecting aircraft used to transport animals to Australia;
- formulating standards for private quarantine stations; and
- inspecting, monitoring and auditing privately operated quarantine stations.

1.3.2. Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy

The Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS):

- assesses quarantine risks in northern Australia; and
- provides early warning of incursion of exotic pests and diseases.

The program operates in a coastal strip (with inland high-risk areas), which stretches from Cairns to Broome, and includes the Torres Strait islands, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and East Timor. For pests and diseases of livestock, detection relies on regular surveys, sentinel herd monitoring and insect trapping. Activities designed to increase the probability of detecting disease incursion, such as public awareness and research into better testing methods, are also carried out.

1.3.3. National Sentinel Hive Program

The National Sentinel Hive Program was established in 2000 to enhance surveillance for exotic bees and bee parasites at 28 seaports. Exotic parasites of primary quarantine concern to the Australian apiary industry are varroa mites, tropilaelaps mites and tracheal mites. The ports selected are those that receive a significant volume of containerised cargo. Containerised cargo vessels are considered to present a significant opportunity for the transportation of feral bees either in containerized equipment or in vessel holds.

1.3.4. Export meat inspection

AQIS's Meat Program provides independent government inspection and export certification services that meet importing country requirements. This Program also works closely with State and Territory departments of agriculture, the SAFEMEAT group and Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health in the implementation of animal health, food safety, and chemical residue surveillance and control measures.

1.4. Bureau of Rural Sciences

At the interface between science and policy, the BRS is an essential part of the Government's capacity for integrated evidence-based policy development. BRS provides scientific advice to government in support of more profitable, competitive and sustainable, Australian agricultural, food, fisheries and forestry industries and enhancing the natural resource base to achieve greater national wealth and stronger rural and regional communities.

1.4.1. The National Feral Animal Control Program

The National Feral Animal Control Program (NFACP) is administered jointly by Environment Australia and AFFA, and is delivered through the Natural Heritage Trust. The Program aims to develop and implement, in cooperation with State, Territory and local Governments, a program to reduce the damage to agriculture and the environment from feral animals.

The NFACP is a six-year program operating from 1996/97 to 2001/02. The agricultural component of the program, administered by the Bureau of Rural Sciences of AFFA, supports a wide range of activities which will assist the development and adoption of best practice pest management.

The objectives of the NFACP (Agricultural Component) are to:

- develop and promote the adoption of integrated strategic approaches to managing the impacts of nationally significant pest animals;
- develop best practice guidelines for managing the impact of nationally significant pest animals;
- participate in risk assessment processes to reduce the threat of new pest animal species becoming established; and
- provide and stimulate investment in priority research, management and extension projects.

Vertebrate pest management guidelines, including guidelines for feral pigs, goats and horses and a general overview of the principals of feral animal control have been published as part of the program. Twenty-five projects are currently being funded to develop and promote the adoption of more integrated, strategic approaches to managing the impacts of nationally significant feral animal pests.

2. COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

CSIRO Livestock Industries undertakes animal health research and operates the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) at Geelong in Victoria. AFFA provides approximately half of the funds for AAHL's core operational costs. AAHL is one of the most sophisticated laboratories in the world and is critical in Australia's efforts to remain free of major exotic diseases. The laboratory is a national facility for disease diagnosis and research and also carries out training, develops and tests vaccines, maintains the National Animal Serum Bank (used for retrospective studies on diseases) and acts as a regional and national reference laboratory. Scientists at the laboratory also have considerable expertise on endemic diseases, plant toxins and food pathogens.

CSIRO Entomology provides diagnostic services for exotic insect pests, particularly in regard to animal health relating to the diagnosis of Screw Worm Fly. The Division also undertakes an extensive research program into insect pests of animal, plant and forestry industries and manages the Australian National Insect Collection.

3. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE (ENVIRONMENT AUSTRALIA)

Environment Australia advises the Commonwealth Government on policies and programs for the protection and conservation of the environment, including both natural and cultural heritage places.

The Commonwealth, through Parks Australia within Environment Australia, manages Commonwealth parks and reserves, which come under its direct responsibility. Three of the six Commonwealth national parks, namely Kakadu and Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Parks in the Northern Territory and, more recently, Booderee National Park in the Jervis Bay Territory are managed jointly with their Aboriginal owners. The other three national parks protect unique island ecosystems in the Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands and the Christmas Island Territory (in the Indian Ocean) and the Norfolk Island Territory (in the South Pacific).

Each national park has developed a plan of management, which prescribes action for the feral animals that are found within its boundaries. The plans vary to a certain degree depending on the overall objectives for managing the various species in that particular park, however, at a minimum are consistent with those developed under the National Feral Animal Control Program.

Environment Australia also manages a number of major programs, the most significant of which come under the umbrella of the Natural Heritage Trust.

3.1.1. The National Feral Animal Control Program

The NFACP (Environmental Component) is managed by Environment Australia.

Under this component of the program, the Biodiversity Group of Environment Australia has responsibility for implementing nature conservation initiatives particularly those that relate to obligations under the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992*. Where feasible, joint initiatives will be implemented, recognising that feral animals need to be managed across landscapes rather than separately in areas inside and outside of protected areas.

3.1.2. Importation of wildlife and wildlife products

International movement of wildlife and wildlife products is regulated by Environment Australia, including the import of live plants and animals that, if they became established in Australia, could adversely affect native species or their habitats.

4. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

The Australian Defence Force conducts surveillance and regional operations in support of other Commonwealth agencies such as the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and AQIS. These activities involve biosecurity matters such as disease monitoring and the protection of natural resources.

5. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGED CARE

The National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System (NNDSS) was established in its current form in 1990 under the auspices of the Communicable Diseases Network Australia New Zealand. This network monitors the incidence of an agreed list of communicable diseases in Australia and New Zealand including brucellosis, hydatidosis, leptospirosis, listeriosis, ornithosis and Q fever.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Quarantine Act 1908

Export Control Act 1982

Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 2000

Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1982

Endangered Species Protection Act 1992

and subordinate legislation