

Statement of Emergency Animal Disease Biosecurity Policies and Programs for the State of Queensland

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INTRODUCTION

The State of Queensland, through its Department of Primary Industries (DPI), is required, under Clause 14 (b) (ii) of the Government and Livestock Industry Cost Sharing Deed In Respect Of Emergency Animal Disease Responses (Deed), to provide a (biosecurity) statement that outlines the Queensland Government's policies and programs that underpin its responsibilities in reducing the risk of entry and spread of transmissible infectious agents that could cause emergency animal diseases. The Deed specifies that the statement includes comments about feral animal management, public health controls and environmental matters that are relevant to emergency animal disease management.

The following is an outline of the biosecurity arrangements that the State of Queensland has to minimise the impact of any animal disease emergency. While DPI is acknowledged as the lead agency for any animal disease emergency response, several other agencies have key, ongoing roles that are relevant.

1. STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS – STOCK 'OWNERS' AND VETERINARIANS

Section 27 of the *Stock Act (1915)* requires any livestock owner (with 'owner' being defined very broadly to include anyone who has any responsibility for any stock or the premises or place where the stock are located), on suspecting the presence of a notifiable disease or a disease not previously recognised, to isolate and confine the stock and, within 24 hours, advise the nearest inspector. Registered veterinarians and other scientists involved in disease diagnosis have specific obligations to report a diagnosis or suspicion of a diagnosis of a notifiable disease. (An electronic version of the *Stock Act* and its Regulations can be found at the following web site: <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/Legislation%20Docs/CurrentS.htm>).

The *Exotic Diseases in Animals Act (1981)* imposes similar reporting obligations on persons in charge of, or otherwise being in control of animals, carcasses or animal products where those people become aware of animals, carcasses or products that are either infected or suspected of being infected with an exotic disease, as defined by that (exotic diseases) act. Veterinarians, under this legislation, are required to notify the nearest government veterinary officer as soon as possible after diagnosing or becoming suspicious of the presence of disease. This legislation provides the power for an inspector to quarantine an area or premises where exotic disease is suspected, simply by informing, in writing, the owner or person apparently responsible for that land or premises. (The *Exotic Diseases in Animals Act* and its Regulations can be viewed at <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/Legislation%20Docs/CurrentE.htm>).

Notifiable diseases under the *Stock Act* include many of the diseases subject to this Deed. Of those not included (as notifiable diseases under the *Stock Act*), virtually all are defined as exotic diseases under the *Exotic Diseases in Animals Act*. However, while the *Exotic Diseases in Animals Act* provides a mechanism for readily adding new diseases to its exotic diseases definition, its current listing is more of a reflection of the previous cost sharing arrangements for exotic diseases than the new Deed.

2. FERAL ANIMAL CONTROL

The majority of feral animal control in Queensland is undertaken by private sector landholders and lessees (grazing and agriculture). For State lands, such as National Parks, forest leases and reserves, state forest plantations and stock routes, the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* places obligations on government agencies responsible for those lands to control declared plants and animals. The Queensland Government Policy on the Management of Pests on State Lands reinforces this obligation.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines (NR&M) is recognised as the State's lead agency for feral/pest animal management, and this includes feral animal management during exotic disease events. The basic focus of NR&M's role is management of declared species, such as wild dogs/dingoes, feral pigs, rabbits, foxes, feral goats, locusts, hares and a range of potentially invasive exotic mammals and reptiles. Some non-declared species are also addressed by NR&M such as rodents (native and exotic). Freshwater pest fish are managed by DPI and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has legislation to prohibit the entry of a small number of exotic bird species that have been listed as 'prohibited fauna'. The EPA has no other controls over exotic birds. Currently no agency deals with introduced feral birds in Queensland. The EPA addresses native animals that have pest impacts.

The EPA is the agency responsible for the management (including feral/pest animal management) of National Parks in Queensland, through its Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). The QPWS is also the State agency responsible for feral/pest animal management in the State's forests and reserves, other than State owned plantations (Queensland Forest Service).

2.1 Focus, outcomes, expenditure

The current focus of pest animal management is to minimise existing economic and environmental impacts caused by naturalised pest species and to prevent the escape and naturalisation of potential pest species. Given recent overseas experiences with FMD and BSE, public sentiment for governments to eradicate pest animals in order to minimise their impacts on any future emergency animal disease events is growing. Eradication of pest animal species that have become widespread and abundant in Queensland is, currently, not considered feasible due to various technical, financial, social, political and environmental reasons.

Expenditure on pest animal control is largely dependant on resources allocated by individual landholders and this allocation is very dependent on viability of industries, benefits, seasons and availability of techniques, all of which vary significantly over time. As there are no mechanisms or requirements to collect information on such expenditure, the amount of private investment on pest animal control in Queensland is unknown.

2.2 Guides, handbooks on control

Pestfacts sheets and other technical information materials are provided to the public outlining control options and strategies for individual species. These Pestfacts are available from NR&M's website (<http://www.nrm.qld.gov.au>).

2.3 Projects and training programs for community groups, landholders

Training is conducted by NR&M for local government officers in the use of vertebrate pesticides and pest management generally every two years. The new national competency standards for vertebrate pest control will soon be available which will provide a nationally recognised standard for all stakeholders interested in managing vertebrate pests.

NR&M provides general information to the public on control strategies and techniques. Training in the use of pest animal control techniques is generally not provided due to legislative restrictions and conditions on the use of poisons, firearms and trapping.

NR&M's pest management staff is provided with training on a regular basis and most have completed a relevant diploma or degree.

2.4 Pest control programs

NR&M coordinates and /or encourages landholders and local governments to undertake broad scale control programs primarily for wild dogs, and for other species causing locally identified problems.

Control programs are aimed at limiting the economic and environmental impacts these pests are having now and, to a lesser extent, at their potential impacts on future exotic or endemic disease.

Most programs are at the discretion of landholders and local circumstances and issues usually drive these programs. Programs vary in size, participation rates, techniques used, effectiveness and the species targeted.

NR&M promotes large-scale coordinated programs using 'best practice' techniques to maximise effectiveness and efficiency.

2.5 Research activities

NR&M undertakes research into the ecology and control of wild dogs, feral pigs, foxes, rodents and rabbits dependent upon stakeholder and agency priorities and to some extent the availability of funding from, and the priorities of, external bodies.

2.6 Vertebrate Pest Committee (VPC)

Queensland is represented on VPC by NR&M's Dr Peter Mackey, and other NR&M staff are involved in working groups on matters such as 1080 use and animal welfare. Queensland Government technical staff also have input to national decisions about the keeping of exotic animals that have pest potential.

2.7 Reviews of pest control eradication and exclusion

Eradication of pest animals is generally regarded as not feasible for species that have become widespread and abundant in Australia.

Very little work has been undertaken to monitor control programs, apart from research demonstration sites, specific predator control programs to protect some native species and anecdotal information from landholders involved in programs.

The value of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence in times of exotic disease was included in a recent cost benefit review. (EconSearch (2000) Economic Assessment of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence, Queensland Department of Natural Resources, October 2000.)

2.8 Monitoring –distribution and numbers

NR&M has made a significant investment in the PESTINFO GIS database. This system can be used for recording pest numbers, distribution and impacts. To date there has only been limited input of qualitative data on pest animal numbers and distribution. Accurate quantitative data are not yet available on a statewide basis. A pilot trial of a pest animal impact reporting system, utilising PESTINFO, is about to commence. Financial and other assistance is available for local government staff to be trained in PESTINFO.

Distribution and numbers of pest animals vary significantly over time. This variability and the size of potential habitat ranges of feral animals in Queensland make potential monitoring programs that are rigorous and comprehensive, very expensive and, therefore, rarely done.

2.9 Legislation – feral animal management

The *Rural Lands Protection Act 1985* was replaced in 2002 by the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act*. This new legislation continues to make landholders responsible for the control of declared pest animals on their lands. It also provides the State and local governments with power to enforce control and recover control costs where landholders fail to take appropriate control. While this legislation will be binding on the State (which will include National Parks and State Forests), enforcement action cannot be taken against individual agencies. Given the

complexity of the enforcement process for pest animal control, no successful prosecutions have been brought to date.

Under the new *Land Protection Act*, the State is required to prepare a Queensland Pest Animal Management Strategy which will contain an agreed direction for the management of pest animals in Queensland, including that for disease management. It is envisaged that local government area, regional, catchment and property management planning will have input into the development of this strategy. Local governments will be required to prepare pest management plans for their areas of responsibility. These plans will need to be consistent with the State strategy and endorsed by the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines.

This new legislation also regulates the keeping of potentially invasive exotic species within zoos and wildlife parks, and prohibits most other forms of private keeping.

3. LIVESTOCK CONTROL

3.1 Saleyards and Abattoirs

Queensland has regulatory requirements for cattle, sheep and goats traveling to slaughter to be healthy and accompanied by a waybill identifying the place from where the movement commenced. Transport of diseased stock requires prior approval by an inspector (under the *Stock Act*) after due consideration of the risks involved and an associated permit (to travel) must be issued.

There are no regulations governing the movement of pigs or poultry in Queensland but, at slaughter, pigs (with exemptions for pigs less than 30 kg and owners of fewer than three pigs) must be identifiable to their owner (or previous owner if resold within seven days) by tattoo. In light of the FMD experiences in the UK in 2001, Queensland regulatory authorities are considering a tightening of requirements so that all moved pigs are identifiable to property of origin and are accompanied by documentation similar to that required for other livestock.

Consistent with the remainder of Australia, all stock consigned to AQIS controlled export abattoirs must be identifiable to their property of origin and be subjected to ante- and post- mortem inspection.

4. PUBLIC HEALTH

4.1 Food safety

Food safety controls are being enhanced in Queensland, along the entire food supply chain from the source of initial production to the final point of sale, through an initiative known as Safe Food Queensland. The purpose of this initiative is to:

- ensure that Queensland's food production systems meet national food safety standards; and

- ensure that consumers have confidence in the food produced in Queensland.

The Safe Food Queensland initiative will introduce a two step process into each primary industry. This two step process will involve:

- developing sector specific food safety schemes; and
- developing and implementing food safety programs.

A food safety scheme is a generic framework under which food production activities will be required to operate. Under specific sector food safety schemes, all components of each particular food production industry will be required to meet the agreed and auditable standards of food safety for that industry sector. These schemes are also to conform to the requirements of the Australian Food Safety Standards and the *Model Food Act*.

The initial sectors for food safety scheme development are:

- dairy;
- meat;
- seafood; and
- eggs.

A food safety program is a written plan for each business that:

1. shows how that business has systematically examined its own particular operations and identified possible food safety hazards; and
2. specifies how:
 - identified hazards will be monitored and controlled; and
 - hygienic and safe handling conditions will be monitored and maintained.

4.2 Bat surveillance

Bat virus surveillance is conducted in Queensland through DPI and Q Health. The program has three components:

- monitoring for Australian Bat Lyssa (ABL) virus in animals (mostly dogs and cats) that have had confirmed or suspect contact with any bats, and examination of any bats displaying neurological changes;
- surveys of wild bat populations to help understand the geographical and species distribution of ABL, Menangle and Hendra viruses ; and

- monitoring of cared for bats and bat carers for ABL virus.

4.3 Zoonoses

Queensland is involved in active (zoonotic) surveillance for ABL, Menangle and Hendra viruses (see 3.2 above). Queensland also participates in the National TSE Surveillance Program. There are no other active zoonoses surveillance programs conducted by the State.

Many of the recognised zoonotic diseases are notifiable in Queensland under both human and animal health legislation. Human zoonoses are recorded by Q Health and reported to a national database, which is published on the Communicable Diseases Intelligence website (<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/cdi/cdihtml.htm>). This information is also used by Q Health to monitor the epidemiology of these diseases in Queensland. While there is no formal arrangement for this information to be routinely conveyed to Queensland's animal health authorities (or vice versa), informal mechanisms are used when the need arises.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL

5.1 National Park Policies

All government agencies in Queensland have an obligation under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* to control declared plants and declared animals on land under their control. This legislation and the Queensland Government Policy on the Management of Pests on State Lands places an onus on the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) to develop, adopt and implement agency strategies and plans to control pests on land and water bodies for which it has direct management responsibility. The QPWS is also required to contribute to local government planning.

With responsibility for nearly 12 million hectares of land as well as large areas of marine and freshwater, pest management is a major component of the custodial role of QPWS.

Conservation of natural communities and the maintenance of natural integrity are the prime responsibilities in the management of these lands in concert with recreation or sustainable utilisation of the natural resources of the land. The control of non-endemic species, of both plants and animals, to any particular part of the QPWS estate throughout Queensland is an important component of maintaining the natural condition. In order to ensure the ongoing survival of these areas, consideration of the use and management of surrounding lands is an integral part of the management of those areas. Pest management is required to be undertaken in an integrated way across all lands regardless of tenure, restraints imposed or ownership of the land. In many cases, native species out of natural balance will be controlled as problem species, rather than as pests.

Any non-endemic species will, by its existence, provide a disruption to the natural communities and thus interfere with the natural integrity of the QPWS estate. The degree of interference provides a measure of the importance to lessen the impact of the potential or existing pest species by eradication or control. The effect of the potential or existing pest species on surrounding land use is equally important in determining any eradication or control program.

Any QPWS pest control strategies, with respect to the QPWS estate, are to address all matters on pest management including control, eradication, quarantine (all aspects including weed seed protocols, transport of all plant and animal materials), monitoring, research, impact measuring including the degree of interference with natural integrity, impact on resource exploitation, impact on recreational use (both active and passive uses) and relationships with surrounding land use and the community.

In managing the impacts of pests in Queensland, the cost effectiveness of any pest eradication or pest control program is a major consideration for the whole community, including QPWS, neighbours, local governments and other stakeholders.

In managing pests on its estate, QPWS's philosophy is to:

- facilitate the management of native animal and plants that may become problem species;
- ensure that pest animal and weed control is undertaken on lands and waters managed directly by the agency;
- for leased or other areas under agreement:
- appropriately condition such leases/agreements with respect to lessee pest management responsibilities; and
- enforce such conditions.
- minimise the impact of pest animals and weeds on native fauna and flora;
- monitor and regulate any environmental impacts of pest animal and weed control methods;
- contribute to a cooperative State-wide approach to pest management; and
- respond to its pest management commitments and responsibilities subject to consideration of:
 - provisions of legislation and State and QPWS policies;
 - the principles of pest management for land;
 - assessment of the risk posed by the pest;
 - location and extent of infestations requiring specific control;

- priorities for specific action;
- recommended control techniques and estimated costs for each area requiring specific control action;
- obligations of lessees and permittees in regard to control actions required on leases and permits issued over the QPWS estate;
- protection of the environment and adjoining lands; and
- resources available for pest management.

5.2 Planning regulations

The *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, generally, does not allow for off site environmental impacts from piggeries, cattle feedlots and dairy farms. All waste from these enterprises is to be contained on site although solid wastes may be exported from the site, usually as a condition of the licence. The destination of exported wastes must be recorded as well as details of the purchaser's name and address.

There are no required separation distances between dairy farms under Queensland legislation. Guidelines for other industries are:

- piggeries - 2000m;
- poultry facilities – at least 500m and 15m minimum between sheds on the one farm.; and
- cattle feedlots - sufficient land must be available to allow all liquid wastes to be disposed on site.

In reality, there are few feedlots within sight of other feedlot premises. Depending on the environmental sensitivity of the area surrounding a feedlot site, 20m to 50m of densely grassed and tree covered buffers can be required between waste utilisation areas and watercourses.

Protection of ground and surface waters from pollution is a paramount concern with any application. No deep leaching is allowed and all effluent ponds now have to meet a permeability standard not exceeding 0.1mm/day.

All new or expanding cattle feedlots, piggeries and poultry farms have, since 1998, had to comply with both planning legislation (*Integrated Planning Act 1997*) and environmental legislation (*Environmental Protection (EP) Act 1994*). There are no controls on dairy farms apart from the general (*EP Act*) environmental duty of care.

All carcasses must be disposed of by either burial in pits that are clay lined (permeability less than 0.1 mm/day) and covered by at least 1m of soil or are composted on a pad with the same impermeability and covered with 300mm of sawdust. Sites suitable for the mass disposal of stock must be identified in the property environmental management plan.

5.3 Use of treated sewage and effluent

Agencies in Queensland with regulatory responsibilities for effluent reuse are EPA, local governments, NR&M, State Development and Q Health. These agencies, with input from DPI, have helped develop the National Water Quality Management Strategy (NWQMS) Guidelines for Sewerage Systems No 14 “Use of Reclaimed Water”.

From an animal health perspective, enquirers (mainly local governments) are advised that these (NWQMS) guidelines adequately satisfy DPI’s animal health concerns.

Draft guidelines are being developed by the above regulatory agencies for the sustainable use of recycled water in Queensland. While these guidelines, when completed, would generally be applicable across Queensland, they are being developed as part of a feasibility study on piping Brisbane effluent to the Lockyer Valley and Darling Downs.

The NWQMS is also working on Guidelines for Sludge (Biosolids) Management but progress is slow because it is a contentious issue.

5.4 Advice on bird control – Avian influenza

Both the chicken meat and egg industries in Queensland recognise the importance of clean water supply for their production systems. Major operators in the egg industry abide by the Australian Egg Industry Association Codes of Practice (<http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/EGGS/01-109sum.html>) which specifies enclosed header tanks and water free of pathogenic bacteria. The National Egg Quality and Production Assurance Code addresses biosecurity including sanitation of surface water for drinking. Growers of meat chickens are required, through their processors, to meet housing and biosecurity standards including use of only treated water.

While there is recognition of the importance of clean water supplies amongst free-range producers, achieving that aim is more difficult under their production systems.

Small producers, independent of the larger marketing chains/processors and ‘back yard’ operators remain a problem.

6. BIOSECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL OF QUEENSLAND

The Queensland Biosecurity Advisory Council (BACQ) is an initiative of the Department of Primary Industries and was established in December 2002. It will focus on strategic animal and plant biosecurity policy issues at the State level and provide policy advice to the Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities. The BACQ consists of 10 members appointed for their expertise in a variety of relevant fields including intensive and extensive livestock industries, agribusiness, horticultural and field crop industries, policy development and implementation,

economic analysis, animal and plant biosecurity regulation and program management, food safety, food technology and human health issues that relate to animal and plant biosecurity, strategic and financial management expertise, including risk management skills, and understanding of national and international marketing requirements. The mission of the Council is to guide the development and maintain standards of animal and plant biosecurity in Queensland that meet the requirements of domestic and international markets and meet community expectations.