

Submission to the Quarantine Biosecurity Review

This submission addresses three critical areas:

- Peri-urban biosecurity
- Pre-border capacity building, and
- Public communications.

(a) Peri-urban biosecurity

Australia is witnessing an explosion in the number of peri-urban farmers, a trend that until recently has been largely ignored by agriculture agencies and is associated with dynamic socio-economic forces and increased biosecurity risks.

These farmers are “peppering” the zone on the outskirts of major cities, regional centres and small towns (see Figure 1) and their farming practices and engagement with mainstream agriculture potentially presents a significant challenge to biosecurity.

Peri-urban farming seems to be one of three defining features of Australian agriculture: a growing concentration of large commercial interests largely focussed on export trade; a contraction in the number of family farms; and a rapid expansion in small rural landholdings predominantly in peri-urban areas.

It is obvious we need to gain a better understanding of peri-urban farming than currently is the case. The continued growth of hobby farming has clear implications for animal and plant health policy and its implementation including areas such as:

- Industry representation and liaison
- Emergency animal and plant pest and disease awareness
- Knowledge of the location and types of stock and crops in each jurisdiction
- Animal identification and tracing
- The use of agricultural chemicals and pesticides, and, ultimately
- Emergency animal and plant pest and disease control measures and responses.

There is evidence this group has little knowledge of biosecurity and its importance and their non-farming backgrounds in many instances has also given rise to concerns about good land management.

It is well understood that potentially the peri-urban biological risk is “extremely high and needs serious and urgent attention”.

Each hobby farmer only needs to have a couple of head of cattle for this to represent a significant herd across a district which could give rise to serious disease control issues.

Research has found:

- These farmers have a low awareness and understanding of agriculture
- They have a low farming history
- Their management of pasture, stock, land, weed and pests tends to be poor

- They have little awareness of plant and animal diseases
- Many are absentee owners, and
- They have a poor connection to industry bodies.

There has been a view within agriculture to regard this group as a negative, but there is growing evidence they are positively transforming the sector in terms of productivity gains, they contribute significantly to the gross value of agricultural production, and they are boosting rural economies that otherwise would have suffered dramatic declines in Australia due to the prolonged drought.

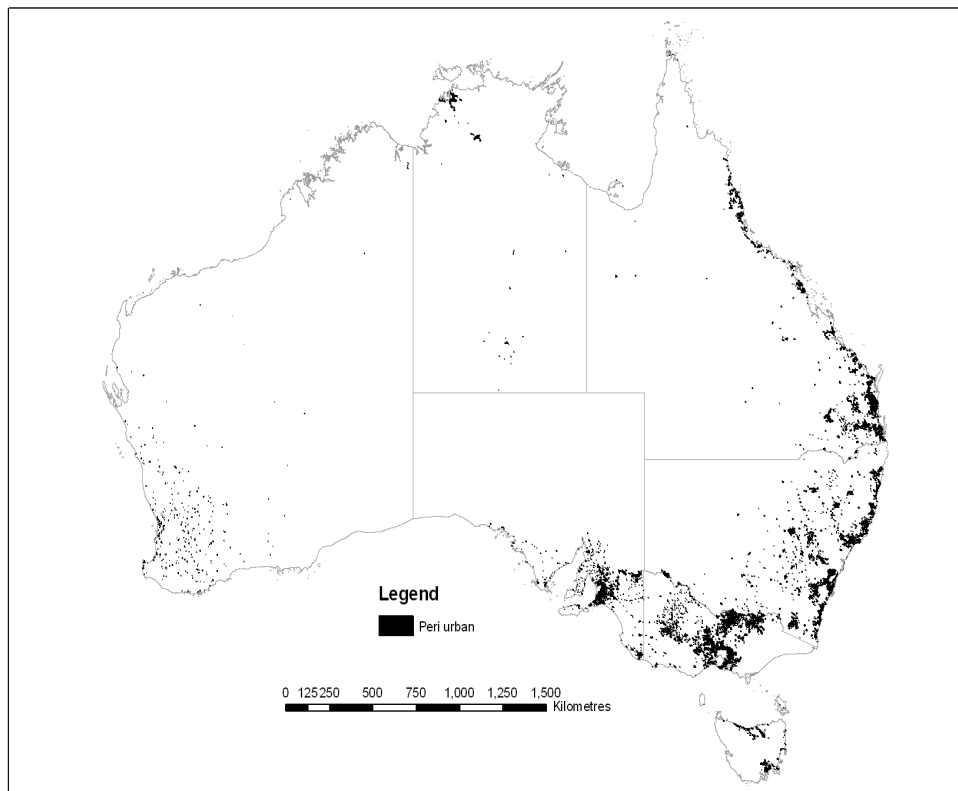


Figure 1: Peri-urban areas of Australia

(identified in the BRS report, *Biosecurity and Small Landholders in Peri-urban Australia*, 2007. Note Western Australia and Sydney Basin data information was not available).

This group is cashed up and is injecting vital dollars into local economies and businesses through the purchase of services and a range of products including fencing materials, feed, seeds, fertilisers, etc.

Not restricted to Australia

By no means is peri-urban farming an issue unique to Australia. I recently returned from a DAFF sponsored trip to North America and the UK to study this group and to discover how other countries are engaging them.

All are experiencing the same thing, the emergence of a large number of non-traditional farmers located in peri-urban areas giving rise to significant concerns about biosecurity.

Canada, the USA and the UK have seen a rise in the number of biosecurity emergencies mostly related to small scale or backyard poultry production.

A common theme associated with the peri-urban trend overseas, like Australia, has been a rapid growth in farmers' markets and increased consumer demand for organic or bio-dynamic produce. The economies also share another aspect associated with this phenomenon, the emergence of live markets.

It is generally accepted this trend will increase and strengthen in these countries for various socio-economic reasons and evidence is beginning to emerge that this group when organised has the potential to form a potent political force and directly shape agriculture policies.

Agricultural authorities in USA acknowledge one of the reasons it moved from a mandatory to a voluntary livestock identification scheme for cattle was the vocal opposition from its small rural landholders.

At a national level, Australia is developing an understanding of the overall trend in terms of numbers of people involved, their location and motivation, what is being produced, and policy implications thanks to market research and engagement with this audience through education and awareness initiatives that support improving biosecurity outcomes.

However, at a local level the investment in extension services channelled through education institutions in the USA such as in Florida is a major strength in terms of keeping tabs of what is actually happening on the ground with this group. Florida invests \$US300 million annually in agriculture extension services.

Another country experiencing this phenomenon is France. During the presidential elections, both candidates were pressed about their policy regarding "life-stylers" purchasing productive farms in the Bordeaux wine producing region. This trend was creating local tensions with district farmers and giving rise to fears about the introduction of pests and diseases associated with the poor management of vines.

Last year, the mayor of a French village of Cesny-aux-Vignes in Normandy forbade complaints about farmyard noises reportedly in a pre-emptive strike against a growing number of urban newcomers, so called "neo-rurals", prepared to sue for their "right" to rural peace.

In Ontario, urban sprawl and the loss of productive farmland has given rise around Toronto of a greenbelt and generated a debate that as farmers are the potential losers they should be compensated "financially for implementing environmental stewardship activities that benefit everyone".

The Canadian Government is also being urged to encourage the consumption of food grown in the greenbelt through farmers markets and promoting crops that appeal to the country's growing visible minority population.

A report says steps should be taken to ensure that farmland in the greenbelt stays productive so that the area can continue to "provide a secure local food source in the future".

Peri-urban farming issues

Hobby farmers are not organised as a group in Australia. There is no Hobby Farmers Inc. to talk with and as such this is not an easy group to engage for agriculture agencies more used to dealing with traditional peak industry bodies. Other issues the sector is giving rise to include:

- We don't fully understand the potential risks they pose
- We don't really know who they are or what their motivations are
- We don't know what they are actually doing on their small blocks, and
- We don't really understand how they interact with mainstream industry and the nature of this relationship – an issue that goes to the potential pathways of disease spread.

Definition

There are many labels for this group including hobby farmers, weekend warriors, blockies, sea changers, tree changers, down-shifters, dirt shifters and alternative life-stylers. Overseas they are also recognised as good lifers (after the TV show *The Good Life*), white settlers, and even gypsies.

Into this mix are also farmers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (formerly known as non-English speaking background farmers).

Commonly hobby farmers are defined as small rural landholders on properties of between five and less than 100 hectares whose main source of income is derived off-farm.

It is also a common view that peri-urban farmers tend to value land more for its visual amenity, environmental conservation and healthy lifestyle than for its earning capacity. However, one of the great difficulties with this target audience is in defining it at all.

A more useful concept may be to consider them as a continuum as the Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS) has suggested. At one end are "life-stylers" who enjoy the amenity of farming blocks and who generate 100 per cent of income off-farm and, at the other end, "farmers" who run small fully commercial enterprises totally reliant on what they produce on-farm for all their income.

BRS suggests peri-urban farmers shift backwards and forwards along the continuum depending on seasonal factors and income requirements.

Another major defining theme for this group is the organic or bio-dynamic nature of their produce which is used as a point of difference at sale and can attract a price premium.

Numbers

The sheer number in this group is much higher than generally appreciated and officially recorded and their diversity in terms of background and motivation presents real challenges to long-term engagement.

Numbers of hobby farmers are rapidly growing. Official figures suggest there are 53,000 hobby farmers in Western Australia and that this number has increased dramatically by more than 20 per cent in the last five years.

Around Perth alone, there is thought to be 15,000 hobby farmers and there is another major concentration in the State's South-West.

Victoria quotes an official figure of 29,000 small rural landholders. However, DAFF recently had good reason to think the official figures are on the light side by a considerable margin.

During the equine influenza outbreak, the department undertook a mail out to all peri-urban farmers. A mailing house estimated a staggering 2.3 million households in peri-urban areas (not including the Northern Territory) when it overlaid known concentrations with post code information.

The 2.3 million figure counts every rural mail-box, post office box, and other address in peri-urban areas.

A good State to highlight the contrast between the official and unofficial figures is Victoria. For the equine influenza mail-out, information was sent to 400,000 households in peri-urban areas based on post code information, a marked contrast with the 29,000 hobby farmers that are officially recognised in the State.

One of our great knowledge gaps is a definitive number of how many people are actually in these areas and engaged in agriculture. It's certainly significant and vastly higher than the number of recognised "traditional" farming establishments in Australia.

The other interesting factor about peri-urban landholders is the rate of turn-over or churn. Close to 14 per cent of small farms in Victoria change ownership each year or around 15 every day.

Large numbers in the segment seem to test the life-style and then sell up to return to an urban setting after a short-period or else over many years grow out of a life-style that no longer suits their purposes.

This again presents a major issue in terms of long-term engagement and highlights the need for ongoing education and awareness campaigns targeting a continual stream of new owners.

Examples of peri-urban biosecurity outbreaks

Recent pest and disease incursions highlight some of the biosecurity issues with peri-urban farming. Equine influenza impacted negatively on this group as they comprise the largest concentration of recreational horse owners in Australia.

The disease took off like a wild-fire in the Hawkesbury area north of Sydney, the Hunter Valley region, and south-west of Brisbane, all areas heavily dominated by hobby farming.

Many recreational horse owners did not appreciate the importance of sound biosecurity practices to limit the spread of the disease such as adherence to stock standstill measures and NSW police reported significant breaches in the first few weeks of the outbreak.

Tomato yellow leaf curl virus first emerged amongst Vietnamese market gardeners near Brisbane. This disease was entrenched before agriculture agencies were alerted to it and a subsequent survey found it on more than 30 small farms.

The viruses white fly vector has a significant range up through north Queensland, across the top of Australia, and down into the Ord where potentially it is now a threat to major horticultural interests.

The zoonotic disease, Hendra virus, has also been discovered on hobby farms in Queensland where feed and water troughs for horses were left under fruit trees that attracted bats.

Productivity

It would be a mistake to think these farmers are not productive. Research indicates that peri-urban areas contribute 25 per cent of the total Australian gross value of agricultural production from only 3 per cent of agricultural land – a figure widely regarded as conservative.

In Queensland, peri-urban farming is estimated to be producing 60 per cent of the gross value of agricultural production or around \$6 billion out of \$10 billion generated from the entire state.

In the Sydney Basin, peri-urban farmers are estimated to be generating production valued at approximately \$1 billion a year. This represents about 12 per cent of NSW agricultural production from only 1 per cent of the State's agricultural land.

Peri-urban farmers in the Sydney Basin are said to be meeting the entire vegetable needs for Australia's largest city and its more than four million residents.

Niche, specialist and organic produce

To determine the biosecurity risk from this sector, BRS was commissioned to undertake market research to better define this group and identify what production activities they are involved in.

Peri-urban “life-stylers” were found to keep a large variety of animals for purposes such as pets, recreation, lawnmowers, food, protection, and status symbols (alpacas are regarded as the new poodles).

They kept horses, sheep, cattle, goats, pigs, alpacas, poultry, native and exotic birds, rabbits, cats, dogs, camels, kangaroos, and freshwater fish.

In terms of plants, “life-stylers” grew a wide variety for food, self sufficiency, aesthetics, and conservation reasons. Plants included olives, citrus, stone fruit, nuts, vines, avocado, guava, passionfruit, herbs, mixed vegetables, and native vegetation.

At the other end of the continuum, peri-urban “farmers” also kept a large variety of animals. Production at this end tended to be intensive and of high value including unique, rare, exotic, and niche breed varieties.

These “farmers” raised livestock for breeding, live sales, slaughtered products, or value adding such as smoked fish, ham, wool, and honey. Animals raised included bees, snails, pigs, deer, goats, alpacas, emus, rabbits, ostriches, cattle, poultry, native and exotic birds, sheep, and freshwater fish.

On the plant side, peri-urban “farmers” were involved in medium to high level production that tended to be intensive and from medium to high value. They often produced unique, rare, alternative, specialty, and niche plant varieties such as Asian vegetables.

Intensive horticulture was dominated by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups and the production tended to focus on propagation, produce sales, and value adding such as cheese and olive oil.

A sample of what is grown by peri-urban “farmers” included vines, avocado, guava, mushrooms, passionfruit, aloe vera, olives, citrus, stone fruit, cherries, avocados, grapes, berries, lavender, nuts, flowers, herbs, vegetables, and tree crops.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background Farmers

An excellent example of some of the issues coming to the fore with peri-urban biosecurity is with CALD farmers.

Since the 1920s, a well established trend in rural Australia has been the emergence of islands of ethnicity as evidenced around regional centres such as Griffith, Mildura and Shepparton.

In 2003 to 2005, DAFF undertook a biosecurity education and awareness campaign targeting peri-urban farmers from non English speaking backgrounds.

Badged, ***Protect your produce and your animals!***, the campaign arose in recognition that industry and other biosecurity education and awareness campaigns were aimed at mainstream producers and did not address potentially high risk groups including CALD farmers.

Officially there are around 23,000 CALD farmers who predominantly live in the peri-urban areas, but some evidence suggests this figure may be on the low-side because of non-compliance with Census collection from this group.

The campaign targeted 10 major groups engaged in agriculture in Australia – farmers from Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Khmer, Macedonian, and Punjabi backgrounds as well as farmers from Vietnam.

Through our engagement we learnt most worked on small blocks of between 5 to 20 hectares. We came across one family entirely supported from a property one hectare in size which comprised three hot houses producing mint for specialist Asian retail stores.

Many CALD farmers in Australia do not have English skills and do not see a need to learn the language.

The vast majority grow horticultural crops but many also keep chickens, pigs and ducks for personal use. Only 22 per cent are involved exclusively in livestock farming.

Some farmers told us they knew of others who had smuggled in a small quantity of seed and cuttings, mostly plants that they couldn't access in Australia and for emotional and/or commercial reasons they took the risk of illegally bringing material into the country.

Market research indicated many did not recognise “biosecurity” as a high priority with “what’s in it for me” being a fairly typical response. The actual word “biosecurity” was meaningless.

We learnt that for many they could not afford for the farm to be out of production and if something was found to be wrong with a crop they would simply plough it back in and plant something over the top.

CALD farming practices were often influenced by their country of origin.

Many had a deep mistrust of government due to fear of being penalised and findings suggested it was unlikely CALD farmers would report pest or disease outbreaks to government agencies because they were unsure of the consequences of reporting and who they were reporting to.

This audience was not particularly receptive to government messages (many had lived under repressive regimes overseas) and they tended to trust only people they knew well such as someone they saw regularly, who provided help to them, and could speak their language.

This all points to the importance of extension officers, an area under significant funding pressure and where services are being cut back, not expanded.

Research also indicated that written material was not the most effective means of targeting this group as many were illiterate in their own language. Face-to-face

communications was more effective along with radio. Simply producing a brochure would not cut it with this group.

Research undertaken in 2007 found that there are new emerging ethnic groups that pose a potential significant biosecurity risk and could unknowingly spread pest and diseases.

Many seasonal fruit pickers come from overseas and follow a “National Harvest Trail” from South Australia, through Victoria, up into NSW and Queensland and on into the Northern Territory sometimes going as far as the Ord region. These itinerate workers are also often joined by “grey nomads” travelling around Australia.

Another consideration is newly arrived Sudanese immigrants replacing a Pilipino workforce in abattoirs.

Farmers’ Markets

A trend to emerge as a consequence of peri-urban farming is the expansion in mixed markets, farmers’ markets, roadside stalls and farm-gates sales.

These are proving very popular and very trendy. Consumers are able to develop a personal relationship with producers and cut out major retailers.

Peri-urban farmers use these direct selling methods and, potentially, these markets could distribute diseased produce.

Currently there are around 200 farmers markets selling fresh produce, poultry, eggs and other commodities in Australia with an annual turnover of more than \$100 million.

Butchered meat is also being sold through farmers markets and, while it is illegal to do so without a licence, this is not an area well policed by our food authorities.

Australia is also witnessing the emergence of live or wet markets where people buy an animal and have it slaughtered then and there. This is very much an imported practice.

Pork producers - Sydney Basin

A NSW study by a Sydney University PhD student has direct relevance to foot and mouth disease – livestock agriculture’s worst nightmare – and peri-urban farming.

Nicole Schembri’s study revealed around 69 per cent of pig producers in the Sydney Basin were hobby farmers and who lacked knowledge of illegal swill feeding practices, symptoms of exotic diseases, and the potential impact of keeping pigs near high disease risk areas.

Motivation for pork production varied from their primary source of income (20 per cent), extra income (47 per cent), family tradition, hobby or food for home consumption.

Forty per cent housed pigs in pens, 24 per cent fed their pigs commercial feed, and the remaining 37 per cent table scraps, vegetable and dairy products.

This points to the need for education relating to swill feeding, a well recognised potential route for the introduction of foot and mouth disease into Australia.

(When DAFF was engaged in the first round of the CALD campaign [see above], we came across some ethnic farmers wanting to know what was wrong with feeding table scraps to pigs and the attitude that it was a “bit of a waste” to do otherwise.)

Eighty per cent of the hobby farmers in the study involved in pork production had no vet visit their animals in the past 12 months.

Pork production on many of these small farms occurred concurrently with ruminant (80 per cent) and poultry production (30 per cent).

Around 70 per cent of these producers sold their pigs through saleyards for cash. Buyers who pay cash are currently not required to provide personal details.

While sales of this type represents only 4 per cent of the overall sale of pigs in NSW (around 13,000 pigs), it still presents a significant risk that goes to traceability. It is important to recognise that 20 per cent of producers sold their pigs privately with no formal tracing mechanisms.

Poultry industry practices – bird flu

There are 1.4 million bird owners in Australia or roughly 15 per cent of the population and it is an increasing trend for more people to keep backyard poultry.

As indicated, live bird markets are developing in Australia and the biosecurity concern is these markets can be a major means for the spread of avian diseases.

Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing research amongst CALD audiences found that many referred to their chooks as “my girls” and indicated they would hide them to protect them in an H5N1 outbreak.

DAFF commissioned further market research on small-flock poultry owners in Queensland, Victoria and NSW and identified three groups - pet owners, backyarders, and bird fanciers.

Pet owners had a strong emotional attachment to their birds. There were reports of birds sitting on a shoulder to watch TV and of a dead bird in freezer with the owner “too sad” to bury it.

Backyarders kept birds for the purely utilitarian purpose of meat or egg production.

Bird fanciers had a significant commercial investment in their birds and some of their breeds were quite unique. Invariably they were involved in long-standing professional associations and were generally anti-government.

Biosecurity practices varied greatly between the three groups and wild birds were able to mix freely. There was poor knowledge of bird flu in terms of symptoms or transmission and many thought bird flu was a media beat-up.

Generally most would comply with government directives in an outbreak, though some pet owners indicated they would hide their birds from being culled.

There was some evidence the bird fancier group might go underground and might not cooperate in a disease outbreak. This lack of cooperation was because they had a significant monetary investment in their birds and there was also a belief their particular breed was not susceptible to the disease.

Public communication aspects

Public communication efforts have a vital role to play in boosting awareness and understanding of biosecurity issues among this section of the rural population.

Current biosecurity awareness campaigns of state governments and other agencies are not necessarily targeted or tailored to peri-urban groups. An obvious point: peri-urban landholders are niche groups, they are disengaged from mainstream farmer organisations, and to get to them will require highly specialised, strategic campaigns.

The other major challenge from a communications perspective is how diverse hobby farmers are as a group. They range from doctors and lawyers proud to wear RM William boots and driving large four wheel vehicles on their weekend retreats through to alternative life stylers who take great pleasure in not being known to Government and only emerge from the hills to barter for goods at farmers' markets.

The problem with such a diverse group is in segmenting it and developing messages that resonate with various sub-groups.

One successful method being employed to engage this group has been adopted in Tasmania. There it has been found many hobby farmers have a genuine desire to know more about agriculture.

Tasmania's approach is to organise education days such as how to mend a fence and how to handle and inspect sheep. These education days are then used to link to biosecurity. Industry could play a vital role in this education process.

Western Australia also has a successful program through its Small Landholder Information Service to engage this group in education and awareness raising activities.

Stock-take

In 2005, DAFF was interested to clarify the extent of education and awareness activities and undertook a national stock-take.

With the exception of Western Australia, all the other jurisdictions did not have long-term biosecurity communication campaigns in place.

Industry organisations conducted very few independent biosecurity awareness activities and relied almost exclusively on government-industry groups such as Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia in this regard.

Some state farmer bodies did not conduct any biosecurity communication activities at all.

All the biosecurity awareness activities being conducted in Australia were heavily targeted at mainstream producers and very few activities were directed at CALD growers, hobby farmers or the general community

Recent work

Recent work in this area includes the completion of a risk assessment by BRS to better identify specific biosecurity risks associated with peri-urban farming that should be targeted both from a policy and education/awareness perspective.

DAFF has undertaken two mail outs of biosecurity information to small rural landholders in peri-urban areas, one associated with the equine influenza outbreak.

Small farm field days have been targeted to distribute relevant information through face-to-face contact and biosecurity information has been provided at farmers' markets.

Work has also commenced to build partnerships with service clubs such as Rotary, Lions, CWA and Landcare. These are existing credible sources of information in their communities through which biosecurity information could be provided.

DAFF has also scoped out additional activities targeting CALD farmers and seasonal fruit pickers but funding for these campaign activities has not yet been procured.

Where to from here?

DAFF has conducted education and awareness activities targeting peri-urban farmers since 2002-2003, but with limited funding.

As part of the new Government's election commitments on a national fruit fly strategy, this year we are initiating a new project with limited funding to lessen the impact of an exotic plant pest outbreak by engaging the horticulture sector.

The project is in its first phase, which includes research and stakeholder planning. Ultimately it aims to increase Australia's capacity and capability to diagnose plant pests and diseases.

A key step in this process is improving on-farm biosecurity and landholders' ability to recognise, act upon and plan for animal and plant pests through careful communication and engagement. This project is over multiple-years involving the collaboration of several agencies.

As part of phase one, the aim is to pull together a reference group to guide the project and formalise networks to come together during a national summit to be held before the end of the calendar year.

Pilot programs are also being considered to develop regional biosecurity agreements that will be assessed in the context of their broader application for possible national roll-out.

Currently all states and territories around Australia are involved in limited extension work involving small landholders and the peri-urban community. The problem is that no one knows what others are doing.

A National Small Landholders Extension Practitioners forum was held in Western Australia on 8-12 April 2008, is to share experiences, skills and knowledge relating to small landholders and their practices.

This was the first time all state and territory small landholder extension workers and researchers were in the same room to discuss the small landholder phenomenon.

The forum explored risks and opportunities for agriculture posed by small landholders in rural and peri-urban areas. It also looked at small landholder biosecurity practices, natural resource management and agricultural production issues on small landholdings at the local, state and national levels.

Recommendations

Peri-urban biosecurity warrants immediate attention from the perspectives of further research, policy development and public communications engagement.

Two critical areas regarding this target audience needs to be resolved: an on-going source of funding to continue education and awareness activities in order to achieve positive biosecurity outcomes; and, a nationally coordinated and cooperative approach in this area.

There is a clear need to clarify the responsibilities of different levels of government and industry in biosecurity communication and extension activities and to develop a long-term strategic plan in this regard.

The Australian Government, States and Territories and industry groups all have a legitimate interest in this issue so there is considerable scope to bring parties together to better identify issues and develop a national way forward.

(b) Pre-border capacity building

In the Nairn quarantine review (*Australian Quarantine: a shared responsibility*, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, 1996), the concept of a continuum was advanced with an emphasis on the inter-relationship between pre-border, border and post border activities.

A strong argument could be mounted that since Nairn if the disproportionate amount of funding directed at border activities had been more balanced across the continuum this may have better served Australia's interests.

Least emphasis has been focussed on pre-border activities and yet potentially this is Australia's greatest risk given diseases such as H5N1 remain on our door step in Indonesia and FMD is well entrenched in many countries in South-East Asia.

Strong ties with neighbouring countries are important; by assisting them to enhance their own biosecurity both benefit. Significantly increased effort is needed in working with Indonesia, East Timor and Papua New Guinea to detect, control and eradicate serious emergency diseases and act as a “firebreak” to minimise the risk of diseases entering Australia.

Strong regional biosecurity affords Australia greater protection from pests and diseases and it is undeniable that Australia’s first line of defence for pest and diseases is off-shore.

Australia is involved in developing international networks to better enable the identification of potential exotic plant and animal pest and disease threats. This aids in developing appropriate mitigation strategies, serves Australian interests in developing appropriate international standards, and facilitates trade.

Our pre-border activities include intelligence gathering, our involvement in SPS, Codex and WTO trade setting forums, undertaking import risk assessments, offshore quarantine arrangements, protection of our northern borders from pest and disease incursions, and capacity building in the areas of diagnostic capability, surveillance and more recently public communications.

Australia promotes animal and plant health issues internationally through our involvement in the International Plant Protection Convention, multilateral arrangements such as APEC, OIE and FAO, and through regional aid programs such as AusAID’s regional capacity building program.

Australia is ideally placed to support capacity building to our near north. It is in our direct national interest to address this challenge and there is also a moral dimension in a wealthy nation well able to support the needs of developing countries.

The aim of Australia’s pre-border activities is to reduce the threat of exotic pests and diseases emerging domestically. Principles relevant for the development of offshore activities include:

- Identify pest and disease threats
- Increase Australia’s knowledge of pest and diseases that may enter
- Implement appropriate preventative and control measures
- Develop appropriate preparedness and response strategies
- Undertake research on pest and diseases of concern, with mutual benefit to Australia and countries where they are endemic, and
- Increase offshore awareness of Australia’s quarantine arrangements.

Within DAFF, PIAPH is being asked to increase its international work in the region for capacity building in line with OIE/FAO and AusAID objectives. This work, along with other pre-border activities of the Department, should be regarded as core departmental business and not simply an “add on” to normal work.

Of late, PIAPH has been asked to undertake pre-border work associated with an OIE project to strengthen veterinary services in three key areas: animal health legislation; emergency preparedness and planning; and, public communication around crisis communications, evaluation and monitoring, and education and awareness skills.

With OIE and FAO priorities and funding focussed more at Africa than Asia despite its larger human and animal populations, Australia's bilateral efforts in the region need to be enhanced.

AusAID part funding for the SEAFMD 2020 roadmap is already showing results with both Indonesia and now the Philippines able to declare country freedom from this devastating disease.

Ongoing engagement with the 2020 SEAFMD initiative is an opportunity to create closer scientific ties to investigate control and eradication options for FMD. This would be a major advantage to Australian animal health specialists in terms of equipping them with practical FMD disease control experience not available here.

Australia is also able to report significant progress in the region on a number of fronts including laboratory capacity, quarantine and communications.

Recommendations

Pre-border biosecurity work by departmental officers should be explicitly acknowledged as a core DAFF activity.

This activity requires ongoing support and acknowledgement or future work in this area will remain under pressure and may not be realised.

The consequences of this could be increased biosecurity risks from our north with possible invasions of pests and diseases threatening the viability and sustainability of domestic agriculture industries.

(c) Public communication

Stakeholder communications during an emergency is a critical tool in limiting the spread of an incursion and providing producers and others with timely and factual information about biosecurity measures that can be immediately adopted.

Significant steps have been achieved in this area including the establishment of mechanisms to ensure public messages from official spokespeople are consistent so that public confidence in a response is maintained.

A major risk in responding to an exotic disease outbreak in Australia such as foot and mouth disease is in mounting an inadequate communications effort. An otherwise successful animal disease response could be undermined because of heightened public and media concerns.

The United Kingdom FMD outbreak in 2001, major training simulations including 2002's Exercise Minotaur and 2005's Exercise Eleusis, and responses to pest and disease incursions including equine influenza, have all highlighted that a successful communications outcome to a major outbreak in Australia requires substantial dedicated resources coordinated through a national approach.

Since Exercise Minotaur, a range of resources and arrangements have been developed to enable a sophisticated and coordinated national response to pest and disease emergencies that are unique to agricultural agencies throughout the world. These are fine-tuned as required by lessons learnt from our day-to-day responses.

Already in place and supported by the Primary Industries Ministerial Council are:

- An emergency national website (www.outbreak.gov.au)
- A call centre arrangement with Centrelink
- Australian Government TV, radio and newspaper advertisements for a major animal disease
- A national agriculture communications network involving all jurisdictions and industry
- A national pool of accredited government public relations staff to undertake a communication role in a major pest or disease emergency
- Interpreter services to support foreign media inquiries and the reporting of disease by CALD farmers
- A secure extranet site to share information amongst stakeholders during a response and as an ongoing repository for crisis ready material, and
- A rapid response capability that includes a public communication component.

While these arrangements are significant and proving effective in a range of animal and plant biosecurity responses, there is a need to ensure they remain viable into the future through adequate resourcing. Immediate priorities include:

- To ensure the pool of accredited PR officers able to undertake a communications role in a major pest and disease emergency is maintained and the skills enhanced through further training. The training should also be extended to the private sector to enhance the number of people that are available particularly in protracted biosecurity responses
- A whole of government mechanism needs to be developed to ensure that in a major national agricultural crisis, accredited officers from other agencies are available to DAFF to assist communication response activities
- The Australian Government would benefit from an all hazards communications approach to national emergencies that not only includes agricultural crises but also counter terrorism, human health pandemic and natural disaster incidents
- Developing a stream-lined mechanism in an emergency to ensure immediate clearance for Federal Government advertising to support national biosecurity messaging, and
- The need to incorporate alternative communication channels such as SMS messaging, vodcasts and podcasts into the existing national communication arrangements.

Critical to the success of post-border activities is a rural community that is well educated and aware of pest and disease risks and of biosecurity measures that need to be employed individually and nationally.

A prepared community will substantially limit the scope of a pest or disease incursion. The mechanism to generate a prepared community is through education and awareness.

Biosecurity education campaigns are currently conducted that separately highlight animal, plant, and aquatic animal health matters as well as quarantine issues. These are promoted by all governments, industry, Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia.

Biosecurity messages are largely generic in nature and differences only appear for specific threats. As such, there is considerable scope to achieve improved economies of scale and impact by better coordinating these campaigns.

Recommendations

There is an immediate need to find an ongoing source of funding to maintain the viability of existing crisis communication arrangements used in pest and disease responses and to ensure biosecurity education and awareness activities are continuous. Currently there is no such source and initiatives in this area fluctuate dramatically from one year to the next.

Critical gaps in on-going biosecurity education and awareness activities currently exist including groups such as small rural landholders, CALD farmers, and the general community. An ongoing resource stream will allow a knowledge base to be developed in these areas.

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