



28 July, 2008

Mr Roger Beale AO (Chairman)  
Quarantine and Biosecurity Review Secretariat  
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
GPO Box 858  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Beale,

**QUARANTINE AND BIOSECURITY REVIEW: WILDLIFE SOLUTION  
AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE HEALTH NETWORK**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your review panel yesterday to discuss the problems of wildlife and Australia's quarantine and biosecurity.

We discussed the problem of wildlife, emergency and emerging diseases and the need for surveillance and preparedness. We had little time to explore this area, though you will remember that we tabled, and briefly discussed a solution for consideration by the panel.

As a way of helping the panel develop its recommendations, I have taken the liberty of attaching a brief series of dot points that, I believe, capture the essence of our discussions and include: the importance of wildlife health; the need for a dedicated body for wildlife health and most importantly; the proposed solution – support for the wildlife exotic disease preparedness program (WEDPP) and the Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN).

Dr Chris Bunn (Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry, WEDPP and Chair of the AWHN), myself and many others have spent the last 10 years working towards an integrated solution for Australia in this area. There is no better time than now to address this.

**A dedicated budget of approximately \$5M/ year and 20 – 25 FTE staff managed wisely, under government control and administered through WEDPP and the AWHN, will largely address this important gap area in Australia's quarantine and biosecurity by allowing:**

- 1) extension from the current limited passive surveillance system for wildlife to undertaking targeted surveillance;**
- 2) Australia an ability to promptly investigate major wildlife incidents of concern and;**
- 3) the ability to also investigate and research any on-going or potential impacts on human health and agriculture.**

This is a golden opportunity to address this gap-area in Australia's biosecurity: failure to do so will leave Australia at an unacceptable level of risk to its trade, human health and biodiversity.

Good luck with this important work. I would be grateful if you could thank the other panel members for allowing our involvement.

Best Wishes,

Rupert Woods  
Manager, AWHN

## QUARANTINE AND BIOSECURITY REVIEW: WILDLIFE SOLUTION

### *General points — importance of wildlife health:*

- Wildlife health is an emerging issue worldwide.
- Emerging infectious diseases are increasing with climate change, people and product movements, land use changes.
- The most common source of emerging diseases is wildlife.
- Wildlife health is a critical part of ecosystem health.
- There is a need for a 'one world, one health' approach that is multidisciplinary (involving stakeholders from environment, health and agriculture).
- Feral animals are reservoirs for important diseases and disease with wildlife as part of their ecology impact on trade (eg foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever), human health (e.g. SAR, avian influenza, Nipah, Australian bat lyssavirus) and biodiversity (e.g. chytridiomycosis, Devil facial tumour disease).
- We need to consider Australia's international obligations with respect to wildlife health (impacts on trade, biosecurity).
- Prevention of disease outbreaks is the most cost-effective method. We need a national early warning, surveillance system in place. If wildlife health slipped through the current health/ trade/ environment system, the social, economic and environmental implications of wildlife disease could be enormous.
- Emerging disease is unmanageable unless it is handled quickly. There is a need to invest in monitoring and increasing capacity for rapid response.
- We should note the importance of wildlife as sentinels and indicators for human health (eg Esperance mass bird mortalities)

### *General points — need for a national agency for wildlife health:*

- It is imperative to have a lead organisation/ construct in wildlife health.
- Cooperative federalism should be advocated: a decentralised structure is needed involving a whole-of-government collaboration between public and private agencies — involving states in meaningful and practical ways is critical.
- There is a need to develop a national wildlife health system to support Australia's trade, human health, biodiversity and tourism - there are clear and demonstrated benefits of having a national wildlife health program/ structure in place.

- A wildlife health network/ program is supported by a wide range of stakeholders — wildlife health is a nationally important issue.

*In support of WEDPP/ AWHN specifically:*

- More funding is required for wildlife exotic and emerging disease preparedness to ensure Australia has the capacity to respond to an emergency disease outbreak. We have the existing structure to deal with wildlife health issues, but it is fragile and in need of ongoing and increased support. It makes sense to make use of existing systems and capacity.
- The Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN), a national initiative of the Commonwealth government has experience, a proven track record and contemporary awareness that should be embraced.
- A national wildlife health body such as the AWHN (or a development from the network - possibly with WEDPP involvement) would need approximately \$5 million per year and approximately 25 staff to function effectively.
- The Wildlife Exotic Disease Preparedness Program (WEDPP within the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) is the key body to facilitate research and training in disease preparedness in Australia. It must continue to be supported as a risk mitigation strategy.
- **These actions would allow: 1) extension from the current limited passive surveillance system for wildlife to undertaking targeted surveillance; 2) allow Australia an ability to promptly investigate major wildlife incidents of concern and; 3) investigate and research any on-going or potential impacts on human health and agriculture.**