

## Quarantine and Biosecurity Review

### Animal Health Australia – Supplementary submission

Animal Health Australia's (AHA) initial submission to the Quarantine and Biosecurity Review included 29 recommendations of varying strategic significance. At a subsequent meeting with the Review Panel, the AHA Chairman, CEO and Director Programs were invited to submit any supplementary proposals/options that might assist in understanding how the major reforms could be achieved. The following notes are a distillation of an informal AHA workshop and Board discussions, and were the basis for the AHA Board's meeting with the Panel in Melbourne on 29 May.

Many submissions to the Review (including AHA's) have identified common issues of concern and suggested similar remedies; a recurring theme is the need for fundamental change in organisational culture and mindset. In considering the extent and complexity of the changes needed, we wish to propose a broad high-level concept that can provide a fresh strategic direction to national biosecurity and quarantine. This concept builds on the theme of '*shared responsibility*' (and accountability) across the whole quarantine and biosecurity continuum, focusing on a number of underpinning principles for a new organisational model, rather than a single prescriptive solution.

This submission suggests an approach to arrive at a new national collaborative framework under which a range of necessary reforms could be effectively implemented. The suggestions are put forward in the context of the

- current socio-political climate (national agenda of 'modern federalism'),
- current financial environment,
- need to use existing and new partnerships to best effect,
- need to provide appropriate protection (safeguards) for the Australian community.

### **Re-defining what we want to achieve from the national biosecurity and quarantine system**

The primary objective of the national quarantine system is to **allow** the movement of live animals and plants, genetic material, animal and plant products, people, activities and services to and from Australia **safely**. Previously, there has been a disproportionate emphasis on the **prevention** of harmful organisms and pests entering Australia and the protection of the border, with insufficient effort directed at post-border activities – to the detriment of the biosecurity system as a whole.

In a 'shrinking world' we have an obligation to encourage international trade, providing industry with the 'freedom to operate' responsibly, but with appropriate accountability and robust safeguards in place. In response to globalisation, an objective of the quarantine system must be to allow freer international movements while maintaining effective protection at the border.

### **Biosecurity continuum – concept of 'multi-layered' safeguards**

The objective of the quarantine system to allow freer yet safe movements into the country carries an inherent acceptance that a zero level of risk at the border is no longer an acceptable or realistic

goal. The focus (and balance of investment) should then be logically shifted to the whole biosecurity continuum, including effective surveillance/monitoring and early response capability. A system of ‘multi-layered’ safeguards offers the opportunity to effectively control and eradicate an exotic disease or pest at various points along the continuum, at the border and beyond.

An increased level of post-border biosecurity would provide additional guarantees that any disease/pest incursion could be more readily contained and eradicated. This should then lead to a more moderate approach to the restrictions applied to legal imports, with subsequent benefits to industry (access to improved genetic material) and the community (wider choice of products), and a reduction in the level of illegal imports (with their inherently greater disease risk).

### **Achieving real cultural/organisational change**

A major concern identified in many submissions has been the perceived ‘disconnect’ between key elements of the current quarantine and biosecurity system. In our view, only a major structural change will provide the impetus and environment to encourage significant and sustained cultural change across the system.

The concept of a new collaborative *national biosecurity system* or *network* offers a number of potential benefits for all stakeholders. The system could be modelled on the collaborative structure of Animal (and Plant) Health Australia, that has brought together governments and industry in a series of constructive partnerships. This innovative model has been embraced by all parties, enabling a more effective use of combined resources, achieving joint management and responsibility and offering considerable flexibility in the delivery of outcomes.

Within the broad AHA/PHA model, there are several structural options that need to be explored in more detail. It is envisaged that leadership would be provided by a ‘National Biosecurity Council’ with representation from key stakeholders. Answering to this governing body could be a range of reference groups with specialist representation and knowledge, as appropriate. Importantly, the model would not preclude the establishment of a body having statutory responsibility for any particular aspects of the system within the biosecurity network, for example meeting Australia’s international treaty obligations.

### **Defining the attributes of a preferred business model**

An essential objective of the new model should be to better integrate and coordinate the activities of AQIS, BA and PIAPH, and to strengthen their relationships with other jurisdictions and the key industry stakeholders. The organisational details will require careful development and widespread consultation to recognise the legitimate interests of the wide spectrum of relevant Australian industries and the wider community.

The preferred collaborative model requires a more ‘mature’ approach that is reflected in the AHA/PHA model. This has evolved beyond the traditional government/industry separation of responsibility to an arrangement of joint ownership and management – putting ‘*shared responsibility*’ into practice. The new model necessarily involves:

- Joint ownership and management – including a whole-of-government approach (led by the Australian Government).

- Appropriate involvement of stakeholders in development of policy.
- Clear definition of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.
- An appropriate legislative framework.
- Establishment of robust mechanism(s) to test performance.
- Clear definition/description of structures, relationships and processes.
- Collective responsibility that is defined, accepted and understood.
- Agreement on shared funding arrangements, particularly where direct beneficiaries can be identified.
- Operation under a 'national umbrella' which provides a capacity for national leadership.

It is considered that policy development should not be separated from operational activities; both should operate under the same planning framework.

## **Resourcing**

There is a range of issues related to resourcing, including options for utilising existing funding more strategically, identification of public and private benefits, investment to aid new industries, technical resourcing, training, staff mobility, etc. In particular, we believe that there should be a re-assessment of the levels of investment along the biosecurity continuum, consistent with the level of risk.

## **Next steps**

Some of the immediate actions that would need to be taken include

- Implement appropriate structural change to encourage a fundamental, sustained cultural change and a 'paradigm shift' across the biosecurity continuum.
- Develop individual components of a system that is 'fit for purpose', technically and financially.
- Identify gaps that need to be addressed, based on submissions received and further consultation with stakeholders.
- Commission appropriate economic analysis/research.
- Map the biosecurity continuum, to show pathways and relationships.

The development and explanation of the proposed collaborative biosecurity network or framework is not a straightforward task, given the scope of national biosecurity issues. If the Review Panel considers this approach worthy of further development, we would be happy to assist the Review in the further refinement and definition of the model, where appropriate.

Roly Nieper, Chairman AHA  
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