

## ***Biosecurity Policy Paper***

### **Introduction / Background**

Australia's geographic location and isolation from other agricultural production and trading countries has meant that we have been free of many of the pests and diseases which trouble other producing countries. This has given us a competitive advantage both in costs and reduced complexities of production processes and in the world market place.

Biosecurity embraces the processes adopted to prevent the incursion of pests and diseases and the management of the situation if their presence is identified. The biosecurity continuum involves pre-border, border and post-border activities, with shared responsibility for these activities as agreed from time to time by the stakeholders, including the Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments as well as the various participants in industry. It is important that these agreements be reviewed from time to time especially considering new technologies.

### **Problem Statement**

Australia's reputation as an exporter of 'clean' agricultural products will be a risk if a high level of biosecurity is not maintained. The consequences of reduced biosecurity include exclusion from international markets, reduced export commodity prices, increased production costs and the devastation of rural industries. This would not only negatively impact farm gate prices, the Australian economy and future new market opportunities, but could also have significant negative environmental, social and health consequences for Australians.

### **Objectives**

At the Commonwealth level, the *Biosecurity Act 2015* commenced on 16 June 2016 and is complemented by biosecurity legislation in each state and territory. The aim is for a national approach of intelligence, evidence and science based decision making that will have the following benefits, and therefore the support of all stakeholders:

- For the Australian farmer, a robust biosecurity system helps keep out exotic pests and diseases and also helps to reduce the impact should they enter Australia. Ensuring that goods being imported meet Australia's high biosecurity standard protects the productivity and sustainability of our farms.
- For the Australian economy, it means an increased likelihood of sustained domestic production and international exports leading to a competitive and profitable agricultural sector.
- For the Australian community, it means more chance of greater contributions from agriculture and so enjoying national prosperity and the amenities they are accustomed to.

### **Options**

Recognising the importance of biosecurity to Australia, the Ag Institute's policies for use of such technologies and approval of product releases include the following:

1. Sufficient resourcing by governments
2. Evidence-based import risk assessments
3. Country of origin quality assurance
4. Cost sharing
5. Regulatory consistency across Australia
6. Industry preparedness

## **Analysis of Options and Policy Recommendations**

The Ag Institute's biosecurity policy is for the continuance of efficient and effective biosecurity operations including the following, recognising a nil-risk outcome is unlikely:

### Sufficient resourcing by governments

An agreed Commonwealth and state/territory governments program should include sufficient staffing, including back-up staff, and technological resources for all elements of biosecurity. The level of resources should be determined following quantification of risks and an agreement amongst stakeholders of appropriate risk-based responses, including surveillance activities for livestock and plant industries.

There must be ongoing investment in education and research and development to ensure trained staff and equipment will be available for future challenges. Part of their task would be to provide some materials to the wider education system.

### Evidence-based import risk assessments

The acceptance by the community to ensure that all biological imports are excluded from entry to Australia unless products have been subject to evidence-based, transparent risk assessments and import conditions that minimise the risk of entry, establishment and spread of exotic pests and diseases.

### Country of origin quality assurance

It must be accepted that part of the work of biosecurity is to provide sanitary and phyto-sanitary quality assurance processes in importing countries that meet standards which provide confidence to Australian authorities that the claims being made can be substantiated.

### Cost sharing

The funding of a national biosecurity system should be on the basis of beneficiary pays, recognising the roles of the various stakeholders. Both the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) and Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) need to be monitored to ensure governments and industry groups can increase Australia's capacity to prepare for—and respond to—emergency pests and disease incursions. They must also constantly review technologies and systems.

### Regulatory consistency across Australia

Regulatory consistency and least restrictive regulation is essential to ensure a more effective and efficient implementation of biosecurity outcomes. The present situation of continuing decline in

government resources to address biosecurity, with each state/territory responding differently in the allocation of resources for surveillance and extension activities, must be improved. Otherwise the outcome leads to confusion within national industries and places variable burdens on industry sectors. At the same time, evidence-based regional differences principles may justify variations in biosecurity regulations between States and Territories in response to differences due to biological factors affecting risk, presence/absence of pests and diseases and varying levels of consequence.

#### Industry preparedness

The early identification and management response to a disease incursion will reduce the costs and time of eradication and enable faster re-establishment of access to important export markets. The presence of Industry Liaison Officers and Grains Biosecurity Officers located in regional areas is a vital part of preparedness, as is their involvement in response operations. Ideally, preparedness requires a partnership approach between governments and industry and includes the promotion and adoption of assessments as outlined in published biosecurity manuals.

#### **Recommended Readings**

- Nil for this Policy Paper

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