



## **AIAST Submission to the Quarantine & Biosecurity Review**

The Australian Institute of Agricultural Science & Technology (AIAST) is the peak professional association for scientists involved in agriculture and natural resource management. AIAST is based in Canberra and its primary role is to promote the adoption of new technologies and practices that will make agriculture and natural resource management more sustainable in Australia.

AIAST has over 900 members who range from rural consultants to lead scientists within government, academia and research institutions such as CSIRO. A considerable number of members would be directly involved in quarantine & biosecurity work.

AIAST is pleased to make the following submission to the timely review of the current quarantine & biosecurity systems and practices in Australia:

### **Overarching comments**

- Current quarantine & biosecurity infrastructure and systems have served Australia comparatively well. The recent Equine Influenza outbreak, although a regrettable system management breakdown, did provide a timely opportunity to test Australia's preparedness to deal with a significant exotic disease outbreak. What will be required is new thinking about continuous improvement, not a total re-structure of the current system in place.
- The balance between being pro-active (new thinking about preparedness) and reactive (managing an outbreak) requires readjusting. More development and reliance on pre-border intelligence will be required, especially given the critical role that both China and India will play in Australia's future. (This also refers to C4 – intervention targets).
- The geo-political shift from US to Middle East/Asia as well as new agricultural technologies and the gradual relocation of food growing areas (climate change etc) will require strategic analysis of quarantine & biosecurity standards and practices.
- The higher risk of intentional biosecurity terrorism will need more focus on pre-border control (=quality assurance). This in turn will require more sophisticated intelligence gathering from all overseas trade and tourism partners.
- Similarly, the proposed FTA with China must have a stronger focus on quarantine & biosecurity. It is predicted that by 2020 the majority of new tourists entering the global travel market will come from within China.

### **C2 – Legislative framework**

- The Quarantine Act 1908 (as amended) should be re-written and modernised, simply because the dynamic times we live in have outpaced the Act's scope and reach. Given that a more formal and overarching governance structure to quarantine & biosecurity is being considered as an option, the

legislation in the UK and NZ should be looked at in detail. (This also refers to C3 – jurisdictional and institutional arrangements).

- It may be worthwhile to refer to the strategies and methodology used for newer legislation on complex issues such as the Gene Technology Act. The resultant legislation was sufficiently forward looking to capture all the existing and emerging trends in the GT industry. The Quarantine Act must also be forward looking to accommodate some of the trends that will impact and/or threaten the biosecurity of Australia.

### **C3 – Jurisdictional & institutional arrangements**

- A revision of the structure of AQIS and BA is recommended such that qualified plant pathologists and veterinarians, which adequate practical experience in managing exotic diseases, should be in control of the policies of these organisations. At the moment, these units are run by people whose expertise is organisational management. The current practice of separating policy from operations does not foster strategic thinking and therefore is in need of review. (This also refers to C4, C5 and C7).

### **C4 - Culture, efficiency and resourcing**

- Stakeholder engagement could be improved by requesting quarantine & biosecurity to be part of business plans of all related government funded entities. The questions to be answered are: what are the quarantine & biosecurity risks in your business and how will you manage the risks for what outcomes?

Food retailers should equally inform government what measures they have in place to manage quarantine & biosecurity issues with imported foods. (This also relates to C3 – division of responsibilities and C2 – local government role).

- Quarantine & biosecurity will only become more complex in the future. Success will depend on vision, leadership, technology, resources (infrastructure, funding and people). Does Australia have a human resource plan stretching across all disciplines of quarantine & biosecurity? What kind of skills will be required in the future and how will these be sourced? Should curricula of all science courses cover quarantine & biosecurity?
- In terms of leadership, the demands on managing a national quarantine & biosecurity system will become too complex for one leader. The corporate trend of establishing senior leadership teams (rather than one CEO) may be the way forward for government agencies and departments involved in quarantine & biosecurity. (Relates to C3 – interaction between entities and jurisdictions).
- A culture of continuous improvement needs to be nurtured in order to meet the agricultural sector's expectations of better performance and greater overall security. A deeper understanding of other industries that contribute to quarantine & biosecurity threats would help promote the cultural change. Such industries include the airline, shipping, tourism, postal, food, feed and fertiliser sectors. International benchmarking would assist. (Refers also to C1 – wider implications).
- Where there is an Australian industry which might be affected by exotic diseases, the importers of products which might damage that industry through the escape of an exotic disease should be required to indemnify the Australian industry for losses which could be attributed to those imports.
- Where failures of quarantine can be attributed to the actions of representatives of the Australian government, the government itself, not the industry, should bear the cost of controlling the disease outbreak.

## **C5 - Communication and consultation**

- Regular roundtables or similar mechanisms should be held with industry and community leaders to increase awareness and create a broader pool of 'plotters and spotters'. This would be most applicable to post-border activities such as education, monitoring and surveillance.
- Retirees from the health, agriculture and natural resource science fields could easily be engaged on a voluntary basis to assist with consultation and communication programs, as well as with emergency responses to incursions. This captures a valuable resource (similar to SES) that otherwise is dormant. (This also relates to C2 – local government role).

## **C6 - Research**

- Climate change is predicted to offer a boon for new pests and diseases. The valuable research capability of centres of excellence like the CRC Weeds (to be discontinued from 1 July 2008) need to be absorbed by other existing centres as a matter of priority. This obviously will have resource implications that will have to be addressed by the federal government.
- Similarly, the Bureau of Meteorology must be properly resourced (+20-30 staff) in order to be able to measure climate change and provide the required data for policy and operational decisions by government and industry.
- Government funding must be made available to source critical research capability shortages such as in Taxonomy (about 30 specialists are required) and Pathology.

## **C7 Review**

- It is important not to have too many reviews, especially if they overlap and take valuable operational time for little value add. Reviews and audits should be strategically planned over a three-year period, similar to an Audit plan for any commercial entity.

Audits and reviews must have business and governance improvements as the primary purpose, not political blame!