

National Biosecurity Strategy Action Plan

Submission

August 2024



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National Biosecurity Strategy Implementation Committee

National Biosecurity Strategy Integration team
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 26011

Thank you for the opportunity for the Plant Industry Forum to provide a response to the **National Biosecurity Strategy Action Plan outlining the first set of activities that will be delivered under the National Biosecurity Strategy.**

About the Plant Industry Forum

The Plant Industry Forum was established in 2006 for plant industry members of Plant Health Australia to collaborate and prioritise biosecurity actions and initiatives across plant industries. It seeks to strengthen, support and provide a collective voice for plant industries by fostering partnerships and advocating across the biosecurity spectrum for positive change.

The members of the Plant Industry Forum are signatories to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD). The Plant Industry Forum represents a combined annual value to the Australian economy in excess of \$43.2 billion and growth in the sector is tipped to contribute significantly to the goal of exceeding \$100 billion in farm gate output by 2030.

Plant Industry Forum member's growers pay various levies which are invested by Hort Innovation and Plant Health Australia (PHA) into specific biosecurity and research, development and extension activities into extensive preparedness projects, which add up to tens of millions of dollars annually. Many industries also use general revenue from (growers membership fees and in-kind contributions) to manage their industry biosecurity issues and roles and responsibilities as signatories to EPPRD.

Biosecurity workforce and capacity to respond

Many Plant Industry Forum members do not have specialist biosecurity staff to work on biosecurity preparedness and responses which places further stress on the system in the event of an incursion. Pest incursions that impact Plant Industry Forum members have significant impacts on individual people, owners, employees, suppliers and communities. During a response, the entire supply chain, production, input and service providers, processing, transport and marketing are all impacted. When a plant pest cannot be eradicated, the cost of recovery is borne by the individual grower and the industry. Whether that is through ongoing management of the pest, or the loss of a particular crop entirely. The cost of ongoing management of a new endemic pest is borne by the grower alone.

Contributions to biosecurity

Plant biosecurity is vital to Australian plant industry's productivity and to our ability to access domestic and international markets for our products. Ensuring plant biosecurity is also a function where many of

the actions, currently, can only be undertaken by government. Management of plant biosecurity systems is a complex process which often requires high-level oversight as biosecurity incidences often occur concurrently.

PHA members include representatives from major agricultural industries, research and associated industries, representatives of the Australian Government and all state and territory governments. PHA membership is unlimited, inclusive, and available to peak plant industries, research and development agencies, and government. It is an oversight and missed opportunity PHA was not included and consulted in an ongoing and meaningful way as a part of the National Biosecurity Strategy and Action Plan processes. Plant Industry Forum would expect this to occur in the future to ensure the coordinator of Australia's rapidly changing biosecurity system is at the forefront of this body of work.

Plant Industry Forum members have worked constructively with the Australian Government over the past 10 years, investing approximately \$33 million in cost sharing emergency responses and a significant amount of in-kind support. Responses requiring this type of collaboration have addressed issues such as citrus canker, brown marmorated stink bug, chestnut blight, banana freckle, khapra beetle, giant pine scale, tomato potato psyllid and Torres Strait fruit fly.

Most recently, 16 Plant Industry Forum members have been impacted by the detection and response to an incursion of Varroa mite, which has ultimately transitioned to management processes. This is the single biggest biosecurity response to a pest incursion in Australian history, with an estimated cost in the vicinity of \$100 million. These costs will be shared between the 16 Plant Industry Forum members directly affected by Varroa, which is expected to cost around \$20 million, with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments expected to contribute an estimated \$80 million.

In this example, additional cost to industries has included, but is not limited to, time and resources devoted to acting in the response, impact on crops reliant on bee pollination. Furthermore, industry will bear the ongoing costs of varroa into the future and while no public finding has been made, it is plausible to assume that the Varroa mite, as with previous incursions, was introduced via border traffic. This includes cargo ship, tourism, or freight, which are areas of the biosecurity continuum with significant economic clout that are underutilised in terms of economic contributions to biosecurity risk management for the good of the whole country.

Plant industry biosecurity investment

The agricultural industry and specifically, the members of the Plant Industry Forum make significant contributions to biosecurity preparedness and response. This is for the broader economic and social benefits of strong biosecurity for all communities across the country and in awareness of the significant risk posed by common imported consumer goods and passenger movement to the food and environmental safety of the nation.

The greatest beneficiary of biosecurity and food security is the Australian Government and the people of Australia. Food security is hugely undervalued and Australia's food security is under constant threat from drought, extreme weather events, climate change and the introduction of invasive species.

Members of the Plant Industry Forum are signatories to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, many

(9) have their Emergency Plant Pest Response levies set at a positive value. Many (24) pay Plant Health Australia levies and coordinate research and development activity to prepare and protect their industries.

Plant Industries Forum members and others collect and invest Biosecurity levies to fund biosecurity projects such as:

- CitrusWatch
- Australian Grape and Wine Industry Biosecurity Project
- AUSVEG Farm Biosecurity project
- Avocado industry improved capability project
- Banana management of Panama TR4
- Forestry E-learning project
- Nursery Industry Biosecurity Program
- Grains Farm Biosecurity Program
- Implementing the Biosecurity Plan Review processes for the Melon Industry
- Mango on-farm biosecurity and surveillance program
- Melon Industry Biosecurity Project
- Australian Sweet Potato industry biosecurity program
- National Bee Pest Surveillance program
- National Bee Biosecurity Program
- Forest Watch Australia Program
- National Forest biosecurity manager
- Support for a PhD candidate - native psyllids associated with citrus orchards
- Support for study tours etc. to increase biosecurity awareness and capability
- Support for the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Committee
- Urban Biosecurity Coordinator - Citrus

Biosecurity funding contributions

A key factor in the need to increase funding to biosecurity activities is a lack of engagement of contributions by risk creators. The intent of the Biosecurity Protection Levy proposed by the Federal Government ignored numerous reports which identified other risk creators as the recommended focus for Governments to seek out additional funding sources. For example, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity Review Final Report (Craik 2017) identified the need for a container levy to offset the risk of the enormous increase in sea and air freight movements.

Biosecurity workforce under pressure

Australia is exposed to an average of 40 exotic plant pest incursions annually, compared to less than one for animals. Due to the volume and frequency of plant pest incursions, pest management and trade requirements plant industries more closely with biosecurity agencies than any other sector. Plant Industry Forum are therefore aware of the high workload our plant biosecurity agencies are exposed to on a day-to-day basis.

Despite the obvious need for increased capacity and capability the opposite is occurring, and our plant biosecurity agencies are constantly overloaded due to restricted resourcing levels. Government's history of investment in biosecurity for plant industries demonstrates a systemic lack of support for our sector.

Under current resourcing levels, incursions place Australia's plant biosecurity status at further risk because 'business as usual activity' is reduced. There are not enough state or federal plant biosecurity staff to continue to do surveillance on other pests, which weakens our position. There are currently multiple plant pest responses being managed across the country and high levels of concern for animal pests in neighbouring countries. There is a very real danger of industry fatigue at the current level of funding of responses, with some questioning the current system and the level of response funding being asked of growers when investment in adequate risk mitigation is questionable and those on the risk pathways are not contributing fairly.

Plant Industry Forum cannot overstate the importance of a sustainable, fit for purpose, appropriately resourced, inclusive national biosecurity system to underpin the agricultural industries and communities it protects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Nathan Hancock', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Nathan Hancock

Plant Industry Forum Chair

Citrus Australia Chief Executive Officer