

Australia's Biosecurity System – Fit for the Future?

I have read the IGAB and the discussion paper from the review panel and would like to raise the following points/issues/concerns?

It may seem a little haphazard but I will address points in order of them as they appear firstly in the IGAB and then the discussion paper – there could be some overlap as a result.

Preamble

Be very careful that the whole process does not get top heavy with multiple managers between federal and state departments actually doing the same job. We need to ensure that we have more Indians than chiefs so that the work can actually be done. There can be a federal controller to oversee all states and territories rather than each level of government having their own hierarchy!

Climate change and globalization are ongoing issues and need to be worked with in conjunction with overseas governments as a shared responsibility, the attitude currently seems to be that as Australia is only one of a handful of countries to care then why should things be done as a whole offshore to lessen risks!

The change in use of Australia's land mass as urban encroaches onto farming creates its own issues with the risk of disease being spread to the land or from the land to the population.

Purpose of the Agreement

Am all for a collaborative approach between levels of government but we must be very careful as I mentioned above that we have more chiefs than are actually required and therefore do not have funds available to have people on the ground doing the work.

As for clarifying roles, if we have not been operating under that context up until now it is little wonder that there have been incursions and problems, all of which create far more additional cost than is actually warranted.

If the agreement is not intended to create legal relations, then why the hell are we bothering with it? There is no strength or commitment unless there are legal guidelines put in place, otherwise back to square one and wasted funds! All states and territories MUST be part of the whole; otherwise we are again wasting funds and resources.

Principles

Common sense tells us that zero risk is not attainable, however, with more with foreign governments risks can be reduced at pre border and border. However, without a legally binding agreement we will find states and territories doing their own thing which potentially creates its own risks and wastes funds.

A lot of current activity is undertaken based on out dated scientific and risk management information and as for looking for areas of greatest return, are looking at the government or the community – it should be the latter.

As for costs and who contributes, how can a risk beneficiary be a contributor? Someone who benefits from a risk will be charging for their services to fix the risk, not giving services for nothing.

As for the phrase “governments contribute”, this is manifestly incorrect. Governments get their funds from the public and businesses of Australia and are then tasked with spending it on their behalf.

Key Components

Training and education is sorely lacking, especially that the departments that work with industry sectors do not actually undertake the training, and this is done by external RTO’s. There is also inconsistent training of staff within the government departments in different states. If we are to take a NATIONAL approach then training and education MUST be done in that vein and not left to individual states and territories.

Strengthening System Components

Be very careful not to create additional red tape or make the existing red tape any more complicated than it already is.

Working Partnership

Yet another body on top of other bodies to try and fix what should have been fixed in the first place, and at what cost? Funds going to “management” and not to the “coal face” where it is really needed?

Any consultations between authorities must have very tight time limits placed on them. All too often things are left to drag on indefinitely as there is no timetable that they must commit to.

The comment about consulting states and territories quite frankly scares me, after over 200 years we still have infighting between authorities and at the behest of what – actually doing something for the community as a whole.

Any disputes/issues that arise between the parties of the agreement MUST have time limits placed on them, again for the same reasons as above.

Why on earth is there an allowance for a withdrawal from the agreement? Does this not place Australia again at risk because we then have the possibility of inconsistency coming back along with the fights of who is responsible for what, where, when and how, and who pays the bill!

Dispute resolution

If the commonwealth has to step in after 6 months (probably should be 3 or 4), then there MUST be an equally equivalent timeframe placed on them to resolve the issue.

Advent of new FTA’s creates greater risk simply because they also contain provisions for agriculture to become a greater part of imports. FTA’s are good but more consideration has to go into this part of them.

In short:

Consistent approach across all states, territories and the commonwealth.

Mandatory timeframes for issues etc. that are also within commercial reality not political times.

Full update of all current risk assessments and their methods, many have not been reviewed since creation. For example, the levels of gamma irradiation treatment used on imports.

Do not get top heavy with managers repeating their roles across the various parties, we need people on the ground.

Remember funding comes from the community first, BEFORE governments get to spend it, stop wasting these funds.

Would it be cheaper to work with foreign governments to help fix the risk issues offshore rather than having to deal with them at the border, or worse still, onshore Australia!