

Review of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity

Comments by Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland

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Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (Wildlife Queensland)

Wildlife Queensland is one of the most respected wildlife-focused conservation groups in Queensland. With over 6500 supporters spread across numerous branches throughout Queensland, Wildlife Queensland is a strong voice for our wildlife and its habitat.

Wildlife Queensland is apolitical. Our aims include;

Preserve the flora and fauna of Australia by all lawful means

Educate the community in an understanding of the principles of conservation and preservation of the natural environment

Encourage rational land use and proper land planning of existing and future development, and the use of the natural environment and its management.

Wildlife Queensland acknowledges that considerable effort have been focused by Governments of all political persuasions on biosecurity in recent years both at the National and State level. The Queensland Government has recently undertaken a biosecurity capability review. However Wildlife Queensland has major concerns about biosecurity efforts and directions. It is an established fact that invasive plants and feral animals are second only to loss of habitat as a threat to our natural biodiversity. Statements abound that biosecurity refers to the management risk to the economy, the environment and the broader community. Unfortunately there is a considerable imbalance effort and expenditure both within sectors of industry but also when compared to the needs of our natural environment and the broader community. Wildlife Queensland acknowledges that biosecurity is everyone's responsibility but this shared responsibility is not fully understood. Wildlife Queensland appreciates that the review committee has provided guidance for submitters with a list of questions. However Wildlife Queensland has elected to address various topics of particular concern to Wildlife Queensland for your consideration.

Major issues of interest relevant to biosecurity and the IGAB include

- Biosecurity of our natural environment including the marine environment.
- Shared responsibility- what does it mean and is it fully understood by interested parties
- Prevention is better than cure and the precautionary principle.-foresighting capacity
- Adequate funding
- Need to embrace the findings of the 2015 Senate inquiry into biosecurity
- Queensland's role in national leadership

Should some of the matters raised may fall outside the terms of reference of this review it would be appreciated if such matters could be drawn to the attention of the relevant authorities.

Biosecurity of our natural environment including the marine environment

It is understandable that as the various sectors of primary industries contribute economically to biosecurity through various levies and the clean green image portrayed overseas that

historically that there has been a bias towards primary industries with regard to effort and the direction of resources available for biosecurity activities. There are also suggestions that there exists an historic bias among the various sectors of primary industries. Now is the time that this has to be rectified and a more balanced approach be adopted. Our natural environment as well as being essential to underpin ecological services providing clean air and fresh water is key to the vibrant tourist industry so beneficial to Australia's economy. Conservation organisations are not in a position to contribute financially but could play a greater role in communication and educating the broader community if given a role. Provision needs to be made in the IGAB for environmental ministers to be actively involved in biosecurity activities. Wildlife Queensland would support the establishment of Environmental Health Australia to mirror the established Plant Health Australia and Animal Health Australia. Furthermore it is our view that there is a need for a standing environment committee under the National Biosecurity Committee.

Wildlife Queensland appreciates that governments at all levels and of all political persuasions are conscious of the increasing demands needed to address the biosecurity challenges facing Australia and the various states, The recent review of Queensland's biosecurity capability highlighted among several concerns the significant shortfall or gap in marine biosecurity. Wildlife Queensland envisages that Queensland would not be alone in this situation and the capability and capacity to prevent, eradicate or at least contain potential and existing threats in the marine environment must be strengthened.

It is Wildlife Queensland's view that the IGAB can be an appropriate mechanism to underpin the biosecurity system subject to the modification so the primary purpose is for the public good rather than the agricultural sector.

Shared responsibility- what does it mean and is it fully understood by interested parties

Wildlife Queensland understands and endorses the concept of shared responsibility and collaboration in biosecurity. Governments have a leading role to play including on private land, in facilitating prompt and adequate attention to biosecurity aligned with overarching State and national policy objectives.

Wildlife Queensland is of a view that environmental stakeholders be involved throughout the hierarchy of stakeholder engagement from national to regional level. There has been insufficient involvement of people and organisations with environmental interests and expertise in the development, implementation and governance of biosecurity policy to date. This has resulted in inadequate and tardy attention being paid to environmental biosecurity threats, with resultant impacts both on the environment and on the public funds (when called on to attempt difficult and costly rear-guard actions to protect environmental assets).

On this point, the skewing of biosecurity effort towards agricultural ends due to the structural positioning of biosecurity responsibility within agriculture departments is a key point in stakeholder roles and responsibilities. Therefore a much stronger role in biosecurity decision making, regulation, and administration be given to the Environment Departments and that role be explicitly outlined in the IGAB. The roles for environmental and ecological scientists and community environmental interests also need to be clearly defined but obviously the IGAB is not the place.

Prevention is better than cure and the precautionary principle.-foresighting capacity

When managing pests, prevention is far better than cure, and early intervention is far more cost effective than managing pests that have become abundant. Prevention must be one of a government's key strategies but considerable effort must be directed to addressing current intrusions. To anticipate new and emerging pest problems a foresighting capacity must be encouraged. Foresighting could also help to identify and highlight emerging pests whose control is inadequate to avert tipping points where their range and populations may expand to become deeply problematic

The 2009 Hawke review of the EPBC Act identified the need to focus on future threats to our biodiversity and its habitat. The review recommended the establishment of a federal foresighting unit to identify potential and future threats and devise preventative strategies to address this gap at the national level.

Wildlife Queensland is of a view that the IGAB should embrace prevention as a principle that would ensure action must be taken to prevent or at least minimise environmental harm. Other principles including the precautionary principle, conservation of biodiversity principle and intergenerational equity should be considered for inclusion in the IGAB.

Adequate funding

It is stating the obvious but the need for access to adequate funding to underpin the effort and resources required cannot be stressed enough. Biosecurity challenges can be extremely expensive. Fire ants and the alleged \$350M is a prime example. The situation today in spite of such expenditure is a problem that has escalated. Had sufficient funds be made available initially to contain the problem and then eradicate the problem the short term initial expenditure undoubtedly would have been sufficiently larger but would have been much less than has been experienced over time.

It is interesting to note that in Queensland the LNP Newman Government halved the staff and slashed the budget of Biosecurity Queensland. To date while the Palaszczuk Government has committed funds to particular aspects of biosecurity staff numbers and resources have not been returned to the former levels.

Need to embrace the findings of the 2015 Senate inquiry into biosecurity

Wildlife Queensland urges the review committee to encourage the adoption and implementation of the 26 recommendations contained in the report of the Senate inquiry into environmental biosecurity. Many of these recommendations would assist in strengthening the IGAB.

Queensland's role in national leadership

Queensland should be providing a greater leadership role in national policy on biosecurity and invasive species. National biosecurity policy is dependent on a cooperative approach with other governments, largely guided by the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity.

Queensland should exert more influence to achieve much needed reforms, for example by accepting the recommendations to the 2015 Senate Inquiry into environmental biosecurity, supporting the proposal to establish Environment Health Australia, improving the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement, improving transparency and involvement of the environmental sector in biosecurity decision-making, and closing off pathways for high risk environmental invasive species.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Wildlife Queensland is of the view that the IGAB is essential to ensure biosecurity is appropriately addressed now and into the future. However the existing IGAB needs to be strengthened and the current bias towards agricultural industries which is enshrined in the current agreement rectified.

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