



Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity Draft Report

Submission

Local Government Association of Queensland Ltd

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The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. It is a not-for-profit association setup solely to serve councils and their individual needs. The LGAQ has been advising, supporting and representing local councils since 1896, allowing them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities. The LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places that count; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and delivering them the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

1 General

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity Draft Report. Local governments in Queensland view biosecurity matters and invasive plants and animals as one of the most significant threats to productivity, human wellbeing and the environment. Local governments in Queensland play an important role in managing biosecurity risks. Collectively, Queensland local governments expend tens of millions of dollars of limited resources per annum to reduce the impacts of invasive plant and animal species. Local governments have the local knowledge and community networks necessary to continue to build weed management capability and commitment within communities. However, local governments' capacity is limited in terms of managing biosecurity obligations and therefore whilst welcoming clearly defined roles and responsibilities; the LGAQ strongly maintains that no further responsibilities are devolved to local government without detailed consultation and commensurate additional resources.

The LGAQ will focus its comments on the following sections of the draft report:

2 Knowing and owning our roles and responsibilities

For local government to meet their biosecurity obligations, roles and responsibilities within the biosecurity system need to be clearly defined. Currently the lines of responsibility within and between State and Federal Governments are unclear and lack oversight and coordination. The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources needs to provide strategic direction and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. This direction should be provided through the finalisation of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity as well as the development of a national biosecurity strategy and specific action plans.

It is vital to highlight the importance of supporting local governments in their role in the delivery of biosecurity outcomes. They are often the first point of contact for community and through the biosecurity planning process are well placed to articulate the concerns and management priorities specific to their local area.

3 Stronger environmental biosecurity

Weed impacts to areas of high conservation value, riverine and aquatic areas are considered a high priority for some local governments in Queensland. Whilst recognising the substantial impacts that weeds can have on agricultural productivity, consideration of the environmental impacts of weeds needs to be elevated, resourced and reported on at a national level. The precautionary principle needs to be employed when weighing up environmental outcomes against agricultural outcomes.

4 Building the national system

Feedback from local government in Queensland indicates there is currently a lack of coordination between existing Federal, State and local government programs. The LGAQ proposes a whole of government approach to appropriately manage issues of biosecurity. The LGAQ supports the development of a National Statement of Intent to guide the coordination of biosecurity action at a national level. The inclusion of the Australian Local Government Association as a member of the National Biosecurity Council is important first step to incorporating local government feedback. The LGAQ also believes that the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Biosecurity Queensland needs to be actively involved in this process to ensure the biosecurity needs of Queensland are adequately represented at a national level.

The Weeds of National Significance (WONS) program made great gains in achieving whole of government coordination to the management of WONS species, which had a flow on effect to other species. The demise of the program and subsequent loss of dedicated WONS Coordinators has seen much of the coordination dissolve.

5 Research and Innovation

The LGAQ supports the development of a stand-alone entity which would take on a national leadership and coordination role for cross-sectoral biosecurity research and innovation. This entity would be

responsible for addressing the new national biosecurity research and innovation priorities and should be equipped with a sustainable funding platform. It is vital that the national animal, plant and environmental pest and disease prioritisation process proposed by this Review informs the development of national biosecurity research and innovation priorities. The prioritisation process should be completed utilising a risk-based approach, consistent with that currently being utilised in state jurisdictions.

Industry groups contribute substantially to biosecurity research in Australia. It would be prudent for the stand alone national research entity to enter into strategic partnerships with industry bodies and other state agencies to maximise the use of the existing funding and to ensure duplication does not occur.

6 Funding our National System

There is a decade-long legacy of defunding core national weed initiatives as exemplified by the disbanding or cuts to the National WONS Program, Caring for Our Country, Biodiversity Fund, Landcare and the Weeds CRC. Elements of these programs have been recaptured in 'green' employment programs such as Green Army and 20 Million Trees which programmatically have more emphasis on social outcomes rather than delivery of natural resource management outcomes. To our knowledge, the actual impacts on national coordination of the cessation of initiatives such as WONS (coordinators and committees) and the Weeds CRC have never been formally evaluated.

Biosecurity programs are often funded in sync with political cycles not biological targets. One to three year funding programs very rarely address biosecurity issues in a sustainable way. It is consistently raised by land managers that continuity in resources commensurate to the biological timeline of the management task is more desirable than large injections of funds with short delivery timeframes. This has a flow-on effect of engaging and disengaging landholders in stop-start projects which have little chance at succeeding.

The management of invasive plants and animals is a perpetual task and needs to be funded accordingly. The withdrawal of Commonwealth and State funding has resulted in devolution to landholders and local governments because they are compelled to respond. Biosecurity is an issue of national importance and the Australian Government should be funding the core of the biosecurity work.

Emerging technologies such as eDNA should be utilised to maximise the impacts from existing funding as much as is practicable. Methods for improving the affordability of technology measures should be investigated at a national level.

The LGAQ seeks further engagement prior to the implementation of any changes relating to reporting of expenditure, the administration of levies by local governments, or suggested changes to reducing the rateable area to small parcels of land.

7 Measuring System Performance

The LGAQ supports the development of clearly defined performance measures with achievable goals and targets as an important next step in strengthening Australia's biosecurity system. There are a range of mapping tools in use across the levels of government in Queensland. The development of a national system for mapping/recording data that could be used by other levels of government and industry would be beneficial in terms of sharing data and measuring performance.

8 Community wide understanding and ownership of biosecurity

Local governments would be better supported in their compliance and enforcement work, if the public had a greater understanding of what biosecurity is and the role they can play. The State and Federal Governments are best placed to deliver a consistent public awareness campaign educating the community about the importance of biosecurity. The LGAQ supports the funding and implementation of such a campaign.