



To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity Review Draft Report.

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, membership-based organisation representing and supporting the work and interests of 138 Local Governments in Western Australia. The Association provides an essential voice for over 1,200 elected members and approximately 14,500 Local Government employees as well as over 2 million constituents of Local Governments in Western Australia. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that provides financial benefits to the Local Governments and the communities they serve.

This submission focuses on issues which are relevant to Local Government in Western Australia and therefore does not provide feedback on every question asked in the draft report. The Association met with the IGAB Review Panel in July 2016 and made a submission to the IGAB Discussion Paper. This submission focused on the important role of Local Government in post border biosecurity and the operation of the biosecurity system in Western Australia.

Comments on the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity Draft Report

Request for feedback 1: The Review Panel seeks feedback on the draft roles and responsibilities of national biosecurity system participants.

Response: The Association supports the clear identification, negotiation, allocation and communication of roles and responsibilities for Government (Federal, State and Local), industry and the community in the area of biosecurity. As the community's closest tier of government, Local Government is a key stakeholder in biosecurity management. Local Government has an important role in biosecurity as a community representative, service provider and a regulator. The Association supports the list draft roles and responsibilities of Local Government in the draft report as it provides a good overview of what Local Government does in the area of biosecurity.

It is the Association's view that in Western Australia the State Government does not currently fulfil all of the list of draft roles and responsibilities outlined in Table 1 of the report. In particular, the Association considers that changes and improvements are required in the Western Australian Government's delivery in relation to the following listed draft roles and responsibilities:

- Biosecurity within their borders, including enforcement actions and regulatory interventions;
- Undertaking biosecurity activities on public land under certain circumstances;
- Supporting landholders and the community to manage established pests and diseases; and
- Managing established pests and diseases on land under its responsibility.

Over the last two decades there has been a continuous decline in post border management of invasive species by the Western Australian State Government lead agency, the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA). Following the introduction of the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act) and associated regulations, Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) were introduced as the key mechanism to deliver a community coordinated approach, and to manage widespread and established pests in WA. Local Governments have become increasingly concerned about the RBG governance arrangements, which have resulted in a piecemeal approach to addressing declared pests and cost shifting to Local Government. Indeed the WALGA State Council, at its March 2017 meeting, resolved to amend its long-standing policy position on biosecurity to make it clear that Local Government are not supportive of Recognised Biosecurity Groups.

In December 2013, the Office of the Auditor General assessed the BAM Act's efficacy to manage plant and animal pests in WA. A key finding of the audit was that the BAM Act was failing to achieve state-wide pest management, due to the lack of a state-wide integrated approach, no clearly defined roles and responsibilities for government agencies, limited monitoring of pests and no enforcement of the regulations.

In response to the Auditor General's report, DAFWA developed an 'Invasive Species Plan for Western Australia 2015-2019 and a draft State Biosecurity Strategy. However, over the 2015-16 financial year, DAFWA lost \$6.2 million and 100 full-time positions, with a further 180 full-time positions to be lost in the next two years. Due to these resource constraints, DAFWA's focus has shifted from post border to pre-border biosecurity management.

The Association also believes that the State Government should also set state wide biosecurity priorities and provide a framework for addressing these priorities. In Western Australia under the current RBG model there is little relationship with State post border biosecurity priorities and little coordinated governance, between RBGs, state government agencies and other stakeholders.

In addition, the Association considers that greater investment should be made in capacity building and knowledge transfer to ensure that the broader community is properly supported in determining and undertaking of whatever aspects of shared biosecurity responsibility is necessary in its region.

In light of these issues, the Association considers there is an urgent need for a review of the BAM Act to consider the effectiveness of the current approach to post border biosecurity in Western Australia.

Request for feedback 3: The Review Panel seeks feedback on the following options for a new entity for cross-sectoral biosecurity R&I:

- Option 1: Establishing a new stand-alone entity for cross-sectoral biosecurity R&I
- Option 2: Addressing cross-sectoral biosecurity R&I within an existing RDC (for example, the Rural Industries RDC).

The Panel also seeks feedback on the funding options and would welcome alternative suggestions.

Response: The Association has identified the lack of apparent ability for RBGs to input into research and development priority setting as one of the significant issues with the current RBG model. A cross-sectoral biosecurity R&I entity or the addressing of this within an existing RDC would need to allow for RBGs to contribute to R&I activities and provide the opportunity for RBGs to input into R&I priority setting. Also related to this is the lack of a clear pathway for coherent and strategic monitoring and reporting on the temporal or spatial distribution of declared species that can reliably inform investment decisions and on-ground works.

Request for feedback 4: The Review Panel seeks feedback on the proposed Terms of Reference for the National Biosecurity Council.

Response: The Association agrees with the draft report's recommendation to include the Australian Local Government Association Chief Executive Officer on the NBC. The Association also appreciates the acknowledgement of the importance of Local Government's role in biosecurity and the importance of including Local Government in the NBC for a more inclusive structure.

The draft NBC terms of reference are closely linked to the WA Biosecurity Council terms of reference. In Western Australia, Local Government has a position on the State Biosecurity Council, which provides independent advice to the state Minister for Agriculture.

The Association supports the formal establishment of the NBC Terms of Reference outlined in the draft report.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Biosecurity Review. The Association considers that this review provides an important opportunity for the role and challenges facing Local Government in addressing post-border biosecurity to be recognised.

For further information, please contact Ms Nicole Matthews, Policy Manager- Environment on (08) 9213 2039 or at nmatthews@walga.asn.au

Yours sincerely



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