



Australian Government  

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Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry

# Joint Interagency Taskforce: Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness

Final Quarterly Report – June 2024



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### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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# Summary

On 8 August 2022, the former Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and Minister for Emergency Management, Senator the Honourable Murray Watt formally requested the establishment of a time-limited Joint Interagency Taskforce: Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness (the taskforce).

The taskforce was to:

- Ensure that all biosecurity plans are integrated with the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) and with state and territory emergency management arrangements.
- Undertake a series of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and lumpy skin disease (LSD) incursion scenarios to determine respective roles and responsibilities and identify additional actions necessary to ensure we are in a position to quickly contain and/or eradicate the disease and mitigate the consequences should an outbreak occur.
- Provide advice to Government on additional efforts or measures that might be necessary, including additional regulatory or legal measures or additional personnel if applicable.



The taskforce considered the current level of national preparedness and made seven findings and 14 recommendations for action that would build on existing planning and capacity and increase the preparedness of the national system for the speed and scale of response likely to be needed should Australia face an incursion of an Exotic Animal Disease (EAD).

Work continued between April and June 2024 to deliver the various strategies and plans that contribute to enhancing preparedness across the national biosecurity system. Much of this work also complements and contributes to the recommendations of the taskforce.

Since December 2022, significant progress has been made in addressing the recommendations of the report and strengthening Australia's preparedness arrangements for exotic pests and diseases. This included extensive consultation with key stakeholders to identify relevant actions set out in the complementary strategies and plans. Many of the recommendations have now been embedded into ongoing initiatives such as the implementation of the National Biosecurity Strategy. Capability uplifts made as a result of the taskforce recommendations have improved preparedness across the biosecurity system, including for cross-sectoral threats, such as H5 high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI).

The published progress reports demonstrate that the taskforce established by the then Minister for Agriculture, has resulted in tangible improvements to Australia's preparedness. While this will be the final quarterly progress report published, planning and preparedness activities for biosecurity emergencies continue as a priority across the Commonwealth and states and territories.

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Legend:  Ongoing |  Completed |

# Finding 1: National leadership, accountability and coordination

There is strong support for Australian Government national leadership in preparedness, planning and response. This was highlighted through the scenario discussions and engagement with stakeholders, noting that states and territories are the first responders to any incident that occurs within their jurisdiction and have primary responsibility for emergency management activities, including for biosecurity; and noting the shared responsibility of industry.

Lessons from COVID-19 and fire and flood disasters have elevated public expectations of national leadership when a crisis or disaster is of national significance. Lessons from the UK 2001 FMD outbreak also highlighted the importance of national leadership and speed to action and decisions.

The roles and responsibilities of the Australian Government, states and territories were explored through Exercise Paratus.

## Recommendation 1

That Government consider updating the national coordination architecture to ensure closer integration of the National Coordination Mechanism and the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) led National Coordination Centre.

## Recommendation 2

That Government consider negotiation of a new instrument to replace the 2002 Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on FMD, to align with contemporary crisis management arrangements, to operate beneath the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity.

## Actions to 30 June 2024

In relation to **recommendation 1**, throughout the quarter, further work was

undertaken to advance the Coordinated Preparedness and Response priority action under the National Biosecurity Strategy (NBS). The National Biosecurity Committee (NBC), NBS Implementation Committee and NBS Implementation Working Group met several times to develop and refine activities for inclusion in the first National Biosecurity Strategy Action Plan (NBS Action Plan).

In relation to **recommendation 2**, in May 2024, an independent review of the 2019 Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB) began. IGAB is a collaborative agreement between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to enhance the national biosecurity system. The review aims to identify necessary adjustments to ensure the biosecurity system remains effective, efficient, and responsive, supporting market access for Australian products, minimising production costs, and promoting a healthy economy, environment, and community. The findings and recommendations will be reported to relevant ministers, with the final report expected in early 2025.

## Actions ongoing

In December 2024, the [NBS Action Plan](#) was endorsed by Agriculture Ministers and publicly released. It sets out a collaborative and strategic approach to bolster Australia's biosecurity system and will help guide nationwide activities, planning and investment priorities in a coordinated manner. The Action Plan includes 52 activities for implementation that work towards a more connected, resilient and shared national biosecurity system.

The department continues to progress activities to strengthen emergency management arrangements across all-hazards. A specific performance measure (BI-05) is included in the department's [Corporate Plan](#) to monitor the effectiveness of these activities. This includes updating emergency management arrangements to reflect recent changes to the AGCMF, launched in September 2024.

## Finding 2: National crisis communications

The Commonwealth, states, territories, and industry have established communications frameworks and pre-prepared messages to be deployed during a biosecurity incident. The National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN) has commenced work on national communications and engagement plans. These communications frameworks and NBCEN have been proven effective for smaller scale incidents. The speed and scale of a response to an EAD, and lessons learned from COVID-19 and fire and flood disasters, warrant a review of these arrangements.

### Recommendation 3

Building upon the work of NBCEN, that Government considers engaging a crisis communications consultancy to accelerate the development of a national crisis communications strategy and 'playbook' to set out strategies, decision-making frameworks and pre-prepared content for initial actions across key time horizons (one hour, six hours, twelve hours, twenty-four hours, three days and seven days).

### Action to 30 June 2024

This recommendation has been fully achieved following finalisation of the Crisis Communication Playbook in 2023.

NBCEN continues to promote biosecurity awareness through social media, website updates, webinars, podcasts, education program content and border signage; participating in training exercises; and updating communication tools, manuals, guidelines and resources during peacetime.

### Actions ongoing

Communication action plans are subject to continual review – either through exercises, real time deployment or via scheduled reviews.

# Finding 3: Establishing a national data and intelligence capability

National coordination would be required to provide a common operating picture to enable rapid, coordinated decision-making. There are a range of systems, data streams and processes at the state/territory and industry level, which are not able to be quickly or easily integrated at the national level. States and territories identified that having a national dashboard was a critical aspect of managing an EAD incursion.

It is important to use modelling to understand where the highest risk regions are to inform targeted surveillance and managing a response. There is a need for a holistic and integrated national traceability system. The taskforce notes that an in-principle agreement has been reached between all state and territory governments and the Australian Government on rolling out a mandated sheep electronic identification system.

## Recommendation 4

Building on the recommendations from the Matthews and Craik reviews, that Government consider establishing a national biosecurity data and intelligence capability that informs the national collection, processing and dissemination of intelligence to inform decision making on biosecurity preparedness and responses at the federal level. This capability would integrate data from various sources to develop national current (e.g., situation dashboards) and estimative intelligence products (e.g., strategic indicators and warning problems) that inform crisis response, contingency planning and decision making.

## Recommendation 5

That Government consider commissioning modelling to determine likely weather events that could transport Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) virus infected vectors to a

location where they could infect livestock, to enhance surveillance to increase the chances of early detection of an incursion.

## Actions to 30 June 2024

In relation to **recommendation 4**, work to [uplift the National Livestock Identification System database \(NLIS\)](#) and its supporting systems is ongoing, with steps taken to modernise Australia's data capture, storage, and distribution system for tracking livestock and their movements.

The first implementation plan for the [National Agricultural Traceability Strategy 2023 to 2033](#) has been released. It offers a nationally coordinated strategy with industry, governments, and supply chain stakeholders to enhance agricultural traceability, supporting trade, biosecurity, and food safety, while considering First Nations, sustainability, and climate action.

**Recommendation 5** is complete following publication of the '[Quantitative Risk Assessment for the Introduction of Lumpy Skin Disease Virus into Australia via Non-Regulated Pathways](#)'.

## Actions ongoing

In relation to **recommendation 4**, the NBS Action Plan prioritises the enhancement of data systems and sharing of intelligence under priority area 6: Integration supported by technology, research and data. Specific activities include agreeing foundational datasets, developing a cross-jurisdiction data-sharing framework and determining suitable platforms to share information publicly.

## Finding 4: National plans and policies

The taskforce's scenario discussions have revealed a high level of expertise and understanding within and between jurisdictions about animal disease prevention and mitigation. Industry is also well-connected into this system.

The speed and scale of a national LSD and/or FMD response would be greater than that for other, more routine, incidents. This is illustrated by the heuristic model. Integration between biosecurity and emergency management agencies continues to mature. It is important that the system as a whole has confidence in and visibility of this preparedness. We note that the review of the AUSVETPLAN FMD response strategy is in the process of being completed by Animal Health Australia (AHA).

### Recommendation 6

That all jurisdictions review and rationalise with a purpose of modernising and maturing key response plans and policies more than three years old (for example standard operating procedures and response manuals) to ensure they are contemporary and incorporate lessons from COVID-19 and recent hazard events, i.e. Black Summer Bushfires.

### Recommendation 7

That action on recommendations in this report, accepted by the Minister, be reported to the Minister quarterly.

### Recommendation 8

That Government consider expanding upon its work through Exercise Paratus to:

- include a tabletop exercise which explores the application of state and territory and Commonwealth biosecurity legislation in respect to an LSD or FMD incursion.

- support AHA to fully exercise the system and processes for vaccine import, and exercise with the states and territories for the distribution of both LSD and FMD vaccines to ensure there are no critical delays should vaccines need to be quickly imported and distributed.
- develop an ongoing schedule to review and exercise plans and documentation beyond the life of Exercise Paratus, with responsibilities assigned to specific roles. These exercises could include the Minister and include a focus on resource modelling.
- re-exercise the International Animal Health Emergency Response (IAHER) manual, including follow-up with international partners, and include the Department of Home Affairs to pre-determine and exercise the processes for securing international assistance under the IAHER, including the most efficient visa process. IAHER is a formal arrangement that provides participating countries access to additional human resources in the event of an emergency animal disease outbreak.

### Recommendation 9

That Government consider expanding on current work across government to conduct modelling of potential economic impacts and develop a just-in-case policy response for support and recovery to respond to second and third order consequences in the event of an EAD outbreak.

### Recommendation 10

That National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and DAFF work with the Department of Defence (Defence) to develop contingency plans to support nationwide biosecurity response activities in an EAD outbreak. Envisaged roles include planning and operational support for logistics, movement control and liaison functions, although this has not been consulted with Defence.



## Recommendation 11

That DAFF work across government to consider options for creating more opportunities for First Nations people and Traditional Owners to participate in and benefit from biosecurity activities including surveillance and feral animal management.

### Action to 30 June 2024

In relation to **recommendation 6** (and as mentioned at recommendation 1), work continues to implement the first NBS Action Plan. This includes activities in support of priority area 4: Coordinated Preparedness and Response. Draft activities include co-designed national exercises and horizon scanning with stakeholders to test response plans and procedures; strengthening animal and plant traceability; and northern jurisdictions collaborating on emergency animal disease surveillance and preparedness activities.

Northern Australia Biosecurity Strategy (NABS) staff met with the Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis (CEBRA) to discuss the potential development of hazard risk maps to enhance targeted surveillance activities in northern Australia. Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) plant and animal staff are developing parameters for a potential project that would be funded under NABS.

**Recommendation 7** relates to the production of this quarterly report and is now complete as this will be the final report.

In relation to **recommendation 8**, the department has incorporated an ongoing suite of exercises and lessons management processes into the department's emergency management capability development program from June 2024 onwards.

In relation to **recommendation 9**, the department continues to engage in several recovery and response forums, including via the Australian Government Planning Group (AGPG). The AGPG is a forum that provides cross-government expertise on

best practice crisis response, relief, and early recovery arrangements. It serves as a platform for agencies to develop and provide advice on plans for national response, relief, and early recovery.

In relation to **recommendation 10**, the department developed a MOU with Defence. A Schedule under the MOU captures the roles and responsibilities of DAFF and Defence in relation to vector monitoring, biosecurity surveillance activities and biosecurity risk detection preparedness and response on Defence estate.

In relation to **recommendation 11**, the department is embedding First Nations voices through policy frameworks, engaging with First Nations experts, communities and agri-businesses. The department's First Nations branch ensures opportunities are considered in broader strategic policy discussions and are embedded into policy and program work across the department.

The Northern Australia Biosecurity Strategy (NABS) is continuing to fund a range of initiatives under the Northern Australia People Capacity and Response Network (NAPCaRN) that will directly help to attract, retain and create employment opportunities for First Nations people. Examples include engagement with schools to attract First Nations students to consider careers in biosecurity and thereby develop a pipeline of biosecurity employees. NAPCaRN is also funding a First Nations Board Intern program.

In this quarter, Biosecurity Fundamentals training was completed with 103 rangers attending from 37 Indigenous Ranger groups from NT, QLD and WA. The workshops include practical training on biosecurity surveillance activities from DAFF scientists as well as skills such as photography tips for identifying observations, using the ranger app and sessions on current biosecurity threats. This training will continue to be held annually.

The Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Round Table was held in June 2024 with 46 representatives from partner Indigenous ranger organisations. The Round Table provides an opportunity for participants to hold strategic discussions that help shape a shared, collective vision for the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program.

## **Actions ongoing**

The NBS Action Plan acknowledges the considerable work already underway across the biosecurity system. The plan complements the collective efforts of Australian, state and territory governments, industry, First Nations communities, landowners and managers, environmental groups and the community. The Action Plan solidifies our unified commitment to a holistic, collaborative, and strategic approach to strengthening Australia's vital biosecurity system.

## Finding 5: Workforce capacity

All jurisdictions will need to be able to quickly identify and deploy capability in the event of an EAD incursion. Australia has plans for quickly acquiring specialist skills such as veterinarians and epidemiologists from overseas. Jurisdictions have indicated their capacity to rapidly scale-up is likely to be limited by workforce shortages across the system.

An initial 72-hour stock standstill will be a critical period for resources. The next phase of the response will require concurrent response and will include assess and approve stock movement permits, biosecurity orders, testing and quarantining of properties. A strategic and coordinated approach to the deployment of workers in an incursion is warranted. Unions should be consulted in the development of such a strategy, where appropriate.

### Recommendation 12

That Government consider working with jurisdictions to develop a system-wide strategy for national animal disease response workforce capacity and training, noting DAFF's previous Vet Reserve program could be used as a guide.

### Action to 30 June 2024

A Virtual Real Time Training (VRTT) course on FMD and other transboundary animal diseases was delivered to jurisdictional veterinarians and technical animal health staff in May 2024. In addition, the department has undertaken a project to sponsor private veterinarians to attend the Emergency Animal Disease (EAD)

Symposium, being held at the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness to increase EAD awareness and capability.

The NABS is funding subsidies for veterinary students' practical placements in northern Australia and continuing to fund Northern Australia Biosecurity Surveillance Network (NABSnet), enhancing EAD response effectiveness. NABS is also funding training initiatives under the Northern Australia People Capacity and Response Network (NAPCaRN) to enhance capacity and capability in responding to EAD incursions in northern Australia.

NABS is also funding various training initiatives under NAPCaRN that will contribute to enhanced capacity and capability building and enhanced ability to respond to an EAD incursion in northern Australia. Training has been delivered in self-awareness, negotiation, and risk and governance.

Public consultation on the draft Action Plan will start in July 2024, with endorsement expected in November 2024

### Actions ongoing

The NBS Action Plan includes activities such as a national biosecurity skills needs analysis and broadening biosecurity training. Priority area 3: Highly Skilled Workforce, seeks to develop and sustain the pipeline of biosecurity skills needed for the future, within government, industry, and the community. The aim is to provide targeted capability and capacity building, education, and training to ensure people can be deployed when and where they are needed, and that they have the right skills.

## Finding 6: Mission critical supplies

Based on observations and comments through the scenario-based discussions, there are already mission critical supplies that are impacted by current supply chain issues. This will be further exacerbated in the event of an incursion. This would impact the ability to operationalise response plans.

### Recommendation 13

That DAFF, jurisdictions and industry should work together to develop a resource plan, including identifying the mission critical supplies needed to operationalise response plans.

### Action to 30 June 2024

The Commonwealth sought information from jurisdictions, through the Animal Health Committee (AHC) on mission-critical supplies that may need to be

stockpiled for EAD responses. This includes consultation with relevant agencies and industries within their jurisdictions to provide a national picture of critical supplies needed for EAD response and identified gaps.

The Vaccine Operational Task Group under the Sub-Committee on Emergency Animal Disease continues to meet regularly and has progressed the operational plans required to roll out the approved LSD vaccine for use in an outbreak.

### Actions ongoing

DAFF continues engaging with NEMA on their [National Emergency Management Stockpile \(NEMS\) project](#), and with the Office of Supply Chain Resilience to identify and monitor critical supply chain vulnerabilities and supply chain disruptions.

# Finding 7: Working with states and territories

The taskforce experienced strong engagement from state and territory biosecurity and emergency management agencies, including through the three scenario-based discussions.

## Recommendation 14

That Government consider further work with the jurisdictions on:

- a national approach to interstate border control and permitting to ensure efficient and effective interstate border security movements as part of the enforcement of a livestock standstill or movement controls.
- continuing engagement by biosecurity agencies with relevant emergency management agencies to ensure that there is alignment and integration of incident management structures.
- reflecting the common definition for prohibited pig feed (PPF) and the feeding of PPF developed and endorsed by AHC in state and territory legislation.
- review and update of plans for carcass disposal sites, and where relevant establish agreements for the movement of carcasses between local government areas for disposal.
- accessing remote or isolated livestock, particularly in northern Australia, including during adverse weather or flooding, for surveillance, testing or other activities.
- cold-chain management of vaccines.
- options to utilise personnel from workforces that would be stood down as a consequence of an FMD or LSD outbreak.

## Action to 30 June 2024

The [third Animalplan 2022 to 2027 Progress Report published in May 2024](#) describes several projects that bolster Australia’s emergency preparedness and ability to response to emergency animal disease, including the EAD Crisis Management Planning project; Carcass Disposal Destroy and Let Lie project; Disposal Priority project focussing on pyrolysis and composting as methods for large animal disposal; Enhancement of One Biosecurity System; Building EAD preparedness in domestic abattoirs; Exercise Milky Way; and the National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) Database Uplift project. This and other exotic disease preparedness work will continue to be progressed under the auspices of Animalplan and through engagement with sectoral committees including the NBC.

## Actions ongoing

The Australian Government continues to work with states, territories and industry stakeholders to improve emergency management responses nationally. This important work is underpinned by actions set out in the NBS Implementation Action Plan.

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