Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

Joint Interagency Taskforce: EAD Preparedness
Findings | 5 September 2022

Australia has a world-class biosecurity system:
it is strong and it is prepared

- Significant economic benefits have flowed from our disease-free status. **Preventing an LSD and FMD incursion remains the priority** for the Australian government.

- The **Joint Interagency Taskforce: Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness** has considered the level of preparedness of the emergency management system as a whole to respond to an EAD incursion.

- EAD response arrangements are comprehensive and well-understood by system participants.

- Response arrangements are regularly used, with success, in responding to biosecurity incidents.

- The report's recommendations address specific additional preparedness actions that can be undertaken now, before resources are diverted by an active incident.

- **The recommendations build upon the detailed, well-rehearsed animal health response plans already in place**, suggesting actions where national leadership or additional focus would benefit the system's ability to respond at speed and scale.

National leadership, accountability and coordination will allow speed to decision and action

Finding 1:

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 and the recent 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 and States and Territories are being explored through Exercise Paratus in 2022-23.

National crisis communications can be strengthened through the creation of a national strategy

Finding 2:

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 and recent fire and flood disasters, warrant a review of these arrangements.

National data and intelligence capability will enable more effective decision making

Finding 3:

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 in-principle agreement has been reached between all state and territory governments and the federal government on rolling out a mandated sheep electronic identification system.

National plans and policies should be regularly monitored, tested, reviewed and updated to ensure they remain appropriate for the scale of response that would be warranted by an incursion of an EAD

Finding 4:

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 AHA.

Workforce capacity should be identified for quick and coordinated deployment

Finding 5:

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.

Mission critical supplies will be affected

Finding 6:

Based on observations and comments through the scenario-based discussions, there are already mission critical supplies that are already 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.

Working with states and territories shows engagement

Finding 7:

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