



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

Joint Interagency Taskforce: Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness

Quarterly Report – December 2023



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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, 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 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).

Recommendation 7 tasked the department with undertaking a quarterly update on action taken on each recommendation.

This is the fifth quarterly progress report.

Work continued between October and December 2023 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.

These strategies and plans include:

- National Biosecurity Strategy
- Commonwealth Biosecurity 2030
- Animalplan 2022 to 2027
- National Lumpy Skin Disease Action Plan
- National Agricultural Traceability Strategy 2023 to 2033
- Northern Australia Biosecurity Strategy 2030.

The department has developed an implementation 'roadmap' to progress the taskforce recommendations. This has included extensive consultation with key stakeholders to identify relevant actions set out in the complementary strategies and plans. The intent of the roadmap is to holistically consider preparedness activities across the national biosecurity system to ensure that the implementation of taskforce recommendations supports ongoing initiatives and does not duplicate effort.

This report summarises the high-level actions and outcomes against each of the recommendations.

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 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, States and Territories are being explored through Exercise Paratus.

Australian, state and territory governments and industry to strengthen and contemporise preparedness and emergency management arrangements across all-hazards, including biosecurity. This has included working with Australian Government agencies to enhance understanding of the biosecurity emergency risk profile and further integrate biosecurity hazard and consequence management into national emergency management architecture.

The department has established an enhanced emergency management collaboration program with the Department of Health and Aged Care to support interagency capability and capacity development, as well as strengthen systems interoperability to enable rapid information-sharing and decision-making across agencies during cross-sectoral emergencies.

Work continues on the implementation of the National Biosecurity Strategy (NBS), which identifies six priority areas for collective action including ‘coordinated preparedness and response’. The ‘shared biosecurity culture’ and ‘stronger partnerships’ elements of the National Implementation Plan and draft National Action Plan were endorsed by Agriculture Ministers in December 2023. The full National Implementation Plan will be published in early 2024 and the National Action Plan is scheduled to be released for public consultation during April 2024.

The plans were developed in consultation with the NBS National Implementation Committee (NIC) and NBS Implementation Working Group members and their constituents.

Recommendation 1



That Government consider updating the national coordination architecture to ensure closer integration of the National Coordination Mechanism and the 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 on FMD, to align with contemporary crisis management arrangements, to operate beneath the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity.

Action to date:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry’s (DAFF) Crisis and Emergency Management Branch (CEMB) continues to lead engagement with

Legend:  In progress  Planned activity

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

Recommendation 3 [REDACTED]

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 date:

The Crisis Communication Playbook, developed in consultation with NBCEN and the Animal Health Committee (AHC), was finalised in September 2023. The Playbook sets out a framework to make announcements and undertake communication activities during the first twenty-four, thirty-six and seventy-two hours of an emergency animal disease response. The playbook will be used in exercises with continual refinement an ongoing priority.

DAFF has worked collaboratively with the National Biosecurity Communications and Engagement Network (NBCEN) to improve producer and community awareness about lumpy skin disease (LSD). The LSD prevention and preparedness communication plan has also been finalised.

Biosecurity awareness-raising activities are ongoing and remain a priority. To date these have included social media and website updates, webinars, podcasts, education program content and border signage. These activities will continue as a part of DAFF's ongoing business.

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 federal 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 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.

Action to date:

In relation to **recommendation 4**, work is ongoing to implement the [National Agricultural Traceability Strategy 2023 to 2033](#) to provide a nationally coordinated approach to enhancing traceability for biosecurity, trade, food safety and other outcomes. The second (and final) public consultation of the strategy will open in mid-January 2024 on the departments [Have Your Say website](#). The draft implementation plan is expected to be finalised by mid-2024.

Government and industry are working together to implement national mandatory individual electronic identification (eID) for sheep and goats, working towards 1 January 2025. This will further improve the accuracy and efficiency of our already robust systems. The updated [National Implementation Plan](#) was released on 27 September 2023.

Work is ongoing to [uplift the National Livestock Identification System database](#) and its supporting systems which will help modernise Australia's data capture, storage, and distribution system for tracking livestock and their movements. The project is being delivered by Integrity Systems Company in consultation with Australian government and industry stakeholders.

In relation to **recommendation 5**, DAFF has published the '[Quantitative Risk Assessment for the Introduction of Lumpy Skin Disease Virus into Australia via Non-Regulated Pathways](#)'. This detailed modelling helped us better understand potential entry pathways of vectors and inform the design of surveillance in northern Australia.

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 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 Animal Health Australia (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 NEMA and DAFF work with 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 date:

In relation to **recommendation 6**, the National Biosecurity Strategy (NBS) has several actions that focus on developing and enhancing working relationships across government and industry with a view to improving the national coordination of response activities. Activities include reviewing governance arrangements to ensure they include relevant stakeholders and undertaking national and regional level exercises to test plans and strategies. Elements of the draft National Action Plan (agreed by Agriculture Ministers in December 2023 and open for consultation April 2024) outline agreed actions to work towards stronger partnerships which involves strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks between all stakeholders at local, regional, national and international levels.

Various AUSVETPLAN response strategies and guidance documents are also being updated:

- The Lumpy skin disease manual was reviewed and updated with AHC endorsing the updated manual in October 2023.
- The review of the AUSVETPLAN Response Strategy: African swine fever (ASF) is progressing. This includes implementing recommendations from Exercise Razorback—a series of exercises held between 2019-2021 to practice application of Australia’s emergency animal disease response arrangements in a simulated outbreak of ASF.
- The AUSVETPLAN Guidance Document: Declared areas and allocation of premises classifications in an emergency animal disease response underwent a major review and is [available on the AHA website](#). The AUSVETPLAN Destruction manual has also undergone a major review and is in the early stages of the approval process.

In relation to **recommendation 8**, planning for the delivery of Exercise Paratus phase 2 continues. A national exercise, incorporating lessons identified during the midpoint review will be delivered in the coming months.

The promotion of regular national exercises to enhance preparedness and response capability has been considered in the NBS draft National Action Plan following consultation with key biosecurity stakeholders.

Also relating to **recommendation 8**, the Quads Alliance International Animal Health Emergency Reserve (IAHER) Network, comprising Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States met in December 2023 and agreed to establish a process to capture insights and lessons identified following activation of Reserve arrangements.

In relation to **recommendation 9**, DAFF has continued to engage with ongoing disaster funding reviews across the Australian Government. Further development of recovery policy for biosecurity events is ongoing and remains a priority for DAFF. Periodic reviews of the LSD recovery strategies will be undertaken to ensure consistency and currency.

Further to **recommendation 9**, Biosecurity Commons ([an online biosecurity modelling platform](#)) is being updated to include a ‘Resource Allocation’ workflow, which uses simulations to estimate how long it will take and how much it will cost to eradicate or control a pest or weed. The management of the platform and the team transferred to the Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis (CEBRA) at the University of Melbourne.

In relation to **recommendation 10**, the department consulted with a range of internal stakeholders to ensure their business needs were captured in the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Defence. The MoU is in turn supported by seven schedules that further set out roles and responsibilities of both parties. It is anticipated that the overarching MoU and schedules will be finalised by mid-2024.

In relation to **recommendation 11**, the Northern Australia Indigenous Biosecurity Ranger Forum took place between 17-19 October 2024, bringing together almost 300 indigenous rangers, coordinators and biosecurity staff. Participants took part in a range of biosecurity activities to stimulate discussion including mock aquatic pest and avian influenza detections, plant host games, virtual reality activities and live insect displays. This forum provides valuable opportunities for indigenous rangers managing biosecurity across northern Australia to share their knowledge and gain further hands-on biosecurity training.

An approach to market is underway to engage a new Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to deliver the Certificate IV Tropical Biosecurity course.

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 date:

The Northern Australian Coordination Network (NACN) is working to deliver training, awareness and surveillance activities across northern Australia to help further develop capability to protect Australia from EADs including LSD. NACN jurisdictional coordinators have been appointed within the Northern Territory (NT), Queensland (Qld) and Western Australia governments, and Industry Liaison

Officers have commenced with the Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's and NT Cattlemen's Associations. A training workplan has been developed for 2024.

The first Industry Biosecurity Readiness Response Training was held by NACN in Cloncurry, Qld during October comprising a range of pastoralists and industry and government representatives.

AHC's task group relating to the National Framework for the Engagement of Private Veterinary Practitioners released revised [Frequently Asked Questions on the DAFF website](#) in December 2023. The aim of this work is to improve arrangements for the engagement of private veterinarians during an EAD response. A plan for further communication and engagement activities in 2024 is being developed.

DAFF has commenced preparations with the European Commission for the Control of FMD (EuFMD) to deliver a second Virtual Real-time training course on FMD and LSD. The course will be delivered during May 2024 to a further 40 operational government and livestock veterinarians. In addition to this training, James Cook University has commissioned a project exploring the emergency response surge capacity of veterinarians and para-veterinarians across northern Australia. The project is expected to be completed in mid-2024.

The NBS draft National Action Plan includes specific, agreed shared actions to deliver a national biosecurity workforce strategy.

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 date:

The Australian Animal Disease (AADIS) LSD model has been developed and a series of case studies (informed by jurisdictional input) are being undertaken to

assess the potential spread of LSD in Australia. The model will compare the effectiveness of control measures, including the use of vaccination under different incursion scenarios in northern Australia. The project is due for completion in 2024, with findings informing the Vaccine Operational Task Group and other preparedness work.

DAFF has engaged a consultant to develop an LSD Vector Management Options Guide for the prevention and control of LSD in the Australian context. The guide will inform operational policy making and is being developed in consultation with jurisdictions through the National Vector Management Advisory Group (NVMAG) under AHC. NVMAG has also collated a list of available chemical control products for LSD vectors.

The department continues to engage with NEMA's National Emergency Management Stockpile (NEMS) project.

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 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 Animal Health Committee (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 date:

Engagement with jurisdictions on biosecurity priorities continues through the National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) and associated subcommittees. Biosecurity stakeholders have been consulted on the NBS priority action for coordinated preparedness and response to develop specific, agreed shared actions under the NBS National Action Plan.

The first update of projects linked to Animalplan 2022 to 2027 was [released in November 2023](#). The Animalplan Steering Committee, comprising representation from government and industry, is overseeing implementation of Animalplan activities.

The Prohibited Pig Feed Compliance and Awareness Program Working Group is continuing to monitor progress of amendments to jurisdictional legislation to align with the national definition of prohibited pig feed (PPF).

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