



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

Joint Interagency Taskforce: Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness

Quarterly Report – September 2023



© Commonwealth of Australia 2024

Ownership of intellectual property rights

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights) in this publication is owned by the Commonwealth of Australia (referred to as the Commonwealth).

Creative Commons licence

All material in this publication is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) except content supplied by third parties, logos and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.



Cataloguing data

This publication (and any material sourced from it) should be attributed as: DAFF 2023, *EAD Preparedness Taskforce, Action on recommendations September 2023 update*, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, CC BY 4.0.

This publication is available at agriculture.gov.au//biosecurity-trade/policy/emergency/exotic-animal-disease-preparedness-report.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone 1800 900 090

Web agriculture.gov.au

Disclaimer

The Australian Government acting through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has exercised due care and skill in preparing and compiling the information and data in this publication. Notwithstanding, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, its employees and advisers disclaim all liability, including liability for negligence and for any loss, damage, injury, expense or cost incurred by any person as a result of accessing, using or relying on any of the information or data in this publication to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank contributors for their input.

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.

Contents

Summary	iv
Finding 1: National leadership, accountability and coordination	1
Finding 2: National crisis communications	2
Finding 3: Establishing a national data and intelligence capability.....	3
Finding 4: National plans and policies	5
Finding 5: Workforce Capacity	8
Finding 6: Mission critical supplies	9
Finding 7: Working with states and territories	10
References	11

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 fourth quarterly progress report.

Work continued between July and September 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
- 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.

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's recently established Crisis and Emergency Management Branch continues to lead engagement with Australian, state and territory governments and industry. A key role of the branch is to identify and build upon opportunities to bolster and contemporise biosecurity emergency management arrangements. This has included working with Australian Government agencies to enhance understanding of the biosecurity emergency risk profile and to establish collaboration arrangements with industry peak bodies. Active contribution to a range of reviews ongoing across government has sought to further integrate DAFF arrangements with the national coordination architecture.

Work continues on the implementation of the National Biosecurity Strategy (NBS). The NBS provides a shared vision for a strengthened national biosecurity system and a strategic roadmap to guide its evolution over the next ten years. The NBS is being implemented through a collaborative approach with industry, research organisations, peak bodies, governments, and a range of other stakeholders through the formation of a National Biosecurity Strategy Implementation Working Group. The focus of the Working Group is to engage with stakeholders to develop a plan for implementing the priority actions from the NBS for consideration by the National Biosecurity Committee in 2024. This work ties into a number of findings and recommendations from the Joint Interagency Taskforce, including specific actions to enhance coordination of preparedness and response arrangements.

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:

Following feedback from the Animal Health Committee (AHC) in July, the [National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network \(NBCEN\)](#) has established a working group to integrate information from the *Crisis Communication Playbook* into the [Biosecurity Incident Public Information Manual \(BIPIM\)](#). The revised BIPIM will then provide a consolidated, best practice guide for enacting the communication functions and activities needed to support an emergency animal disease response.

At its September meeting, the National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) approved the transition of the NBCEN from an NBC network to a formal NBC subcommittee, recognising the important role of streamlined communications in a response. NBCEN will continue to help coordinate a range of material to support response agencies, including the continued development of the [outbreak.gov.au](#) website and will report progress to the NBC.

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**, [The National Agricultural Traceability Strategy 2023 to 2033](#) was launched on 13 July 2023 by Australian Agriculture Ministers to provide a nationally coordinated approach to enhancing traceability for biosecurity, trade, food safety and other outcomes.

The strategy was co-designed by Australian government and industry stakeholders and will support modernising and further strengthening Australia's tracking and tracing capabilities. This in turn will further strengthen national-level data gathering, intelligence and analysis capabilities. The draft implementation plan is expected to undergo another round of public consultation in January 2024, prior to being 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 underway 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 (ISC) in consultation with Australian government and industry stakeholders. The first stage commenced on 1 July 2023 with project establishment and scope definition.

In relation to **recommendation 5**, the Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) model is being further developed using the Australian Animal Disease Spread (AADIS) platform. The model will assess areas in Australia where LSD may spread and establish and

compare different control strategies which include the use of vaccination. The model will inform response plans and preparedness activities for LSD, including estimates on vaccine doses used under different outbreak scenarios. An extract of the process used in the quantitative risk assessment and the outcomes from the work was published in the September 2023 edition of the Journal of Preventative Veterinary Medicine.

A National Vector Management Advisory Group has recently been established under the Animal Health Committee (AHC). The group is tasked with developing an LSD vector management guide to assist state and territory governments and industries to develop vector management plans in the event of an outbreak.

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**, national laboratory and diagnostic preparedness is being assessed by the delivery of [Exercise Waterhole](#). The exercise consisted of a series of workshops and exercises from July to November 2023 to test and evaluate how prepared Australia's animal health laboratory network is to respond to a large-scale emergency animal disease outbreak. One of the exercise's objectives was to practice the application and assess the potential impact of regulations and legislation pertinent to animal health laboratory services in the event of an EAD incursion across the country. Another objective was to assess the effectiveness of communication and information management arrangements within and between Australian animal health laboratories. The final report on Exercise Waterhole will be made available on this departmental [webpage](#) in early 2024.

Policy issues associated with the outcomes of the 2022 Lumpy skin disease exercise (Exercise LSD2) conducted by Animal Health Australia, and lessons identified will inform the review of the Lumpy skin disease AUSVETPLAN Response Strategy which is underway.

A review of the AUSVETPLAN Destruction manual is progressing. Members include representatives from DAFF, the jurisdictions, the Australian Veterinary Association and industries. The Destruction, Disposal and Decontamination task group is also currently compiling a list of mission critical supplies for poultry depopulation in consultation with jurisdictions and industry, to identify priorities for investment in new equipment and technologies and assist with logistics planning. This work also contributes to Finding 6 – Mission Critical Supplies.

In relation to **recommendation 8**, a midpoint review of Exercise Paratus has been completed to assess outcomes of the nine activities delivered to date. This has identified a number of lessons across multiple emergency management capability domains, including people, processes, governance, systems and resources. These will inform the next phase of the Exercise Paratus program (together with

relevant recommendations from the JIT report) to be delivered by mid-2024, which will involve three exercise activities designed to escalate in scale and complexity.

Further 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, resumed its monthly meetings in September. IAHER is an agreement enabling countries to share additional human resources across countries during emergency animal disease outbreaks. New Zealand currently chairs the network, and an online workspace has been established to coordinate IAHER activities among signatory countries, promoting efficient and secure information sharing. The IAHER Operations manual is being updated to clarify roles during physical and virtual activations. Signatory countries are also reviewing veterinary registration conditions to accommodate foreign veterinarians.

In relation to **recommendation 9**, as set out in [Animalplan 2022 to 2027: Australia's National Action Plan for Production Animal Health](#), a workplan has been finalised and work has commenced on building forecasting models, conducting further epidemiological analyses, and developing workflow arrangements for rapid decision making in the early phases of an exotic animal disease response. As per objective 8 of [the LSD Action Plan](#), work is continuing with jurisdictions on LSD policy options to assist in response and recovery arrangements and ensure the Commonwealth and jurisdictions have a consistent and complementary policy approach. Jurisdictional government input is being sought on LSD control and vaccination strategies for modelling purposes in the Australian Animal Disease Spread (AADIS) platform.

Testing of the model with the incorporation of cattle movements and the implementation of control measures is underway. This will lead to more robust data being developed to inform future policy development.

In relation to **recommendation 10**, the department is undertaking a review of the current Memorandum of Understanding that it holds with the Department of Defence. The MoU sets out how the two departments will interact to support each agency's respective objectives. The review is expected to be completed by January 2024.

In relation to **recommendation 11**, in July, the department produced the First Nations Platform for Shared Benefits in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (First Nations Platform). The First Nations Platform is the department's comprehensive plan articulating the principles, priorities, and actions we will undertake as a department to realise shared benefits with First Nations people.

The department is committed to working with First Nations people, including Land Councils and Traditional Owners, to sustainably develop our agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries and create significant economic and job opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. The First Nations Platform will deliver on our commitment to realising shared benefits with First Nations people in the delivery of our objectives, priorities and what we do every day. It sets out a 2-year transformational program of working with First Nations people to activate the economic value of land, water and sea resource rights, and strengthen the crucial role of Indigenous Ranger groups in Australia's biosecurity protection.

As part of the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program (IRBP), 13 rangers are continuing to progress through the units of competency of the '*Certificate IV in Tropical Biosecurity*' training. An approach to market is being drafted to engage a new Registered Training Organisation to deliver the training.

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 AHC's National Framework for Engagement of Private Veterinary Practitioners Task Group commenced phase two of work in July 2023. This element of the project has a focus on communications, contracting arrangements, training needs and employment conditions. A communications strategy was endorsed by AHC in August 2023. Frequently Asked Questions for the [national guidance document](#) are in progress and will be published on the DAFF website once finalised.

The scoping report on a Southern Australian Biosecurity Surveillance network was considered by the AHC. Members noted the need for additional work which is underway.

A range of different FMD/LSD awareness/training activities took place in this period including for producers across northern Australia via the Northern Australia Coordination Network.

To further strengthen early detection capabilities, an agreement between DAFF and [EuFMD](#) delivered a Virtual Real Time Training (VRTT) course to 40 jurisdictional government veterinarians. The VRTT course has been updated for Australia to include training on LSD, sheep pox, goat pox and FMD. This course will be reviewed and delivered again in 2024.

Queensland Government Biosecurity Officers also completed training to upskill in disease investigation procedures and techniques to increase current capability and capacity for an exotic animal disease response. Queensland has also conducted EAD investigation training for private veterinarians in collaboration with the University of Queensland (UQ) School of Veterinary Science. Plans are in place for this to be held twice yearly in an ongoing capacity, in collaboration with both UQ and James Cook University.

Elements of the National Biosecurity Strategy (NBS) National Action Plan make specific reference to developing a skilled and capable workforce. The NBS Implementation Committee expect that an NBS Implementation Action Plan will be released for public consultation in early 2024.

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 Vaccine Operational Policy Task Group (VOTG) has been tasked with developing operational plans for using vaccination against a range of important

livestock diseases and will prioritise LSD for further work through to June 2024. The VOTG will develop implementation plans about how LSD vaccination could be used in the event of an LSD outbreak using the most plausible scenarios which will be modelled through the AADIS-LSD model and other work (Activity 5.1.b of the National LSD Action Plan).

The Australian Government has signed a contract with MSD Animal Health to ensure that an initial supply of 300,000 doses of LSD vaccine will be available for Australia, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea (PNG), if required.

The department continues to engage with NEMA's National Emergency Management Stockpile (NEMS) project. Further information on the NEMS project is available at the [National Emergency Management Agency website](#).

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
- 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:

Work with all jurisdictions on biosecurity priorities continues via NBC and associated subcommittees.

Since 1 July 2023, the focus of NBS Implementation Working Group has been to engage with stakeholders to develop the actions for the National Action Plan including priority areas such as shared biosecurity culture; stronger partnerships; highly skilled workforce; coordinated preparedness and response; sustainable investment; and integration supported by technology, research, and data. The working group consists of representatives from the Commonwealth, the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, South Australia's Department of Primary Industries and Regions and Western Australia's Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. A range of industry bodies are also included.

The Animalplan Steering Committee held its 13th meeting in August and discussed recommendations on the development and structure of its quarterly progress reports, planning for the commissioning of projects and the continued implementation of [Animalplan 2022 to 2027](#). Several of the plan's projects relate to bolstering emergency preparedness/readiness.

References

DAFF 2022, National Biosecurity Strategy, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, August. CC BY 4.0.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2022, Commonwealth Biosecurity 2030, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra, May. CC BY 4.0.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2022, Joint Interagency Taskforce: Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Department of Home Affairs, Canberra, September. CC BY 4.0.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2022, National Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) Action Plan, Canberra, March. CC BY 4.0.

DAFF 2023, National Agricultural Traceability Strategy 2023 to 2033, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), Canberra, July, 2023. CC BY 4.0.

DAFF 2022, Animalplan 2022 to 2027: Australia's National Action Plan for Production Agricultural Animal Health, Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, November. CC BY 4.0.