**Lunch with Beth Woods**

 **Facilitator: Chris Locke**
Welcome, everyone.
Chris Locke is my name from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. I've got the bio security and compliance group.
I'm doing your intro today and being your MC, so welcome. We might just give people just one more minute to join just because I can see that ticker is going up a little bit still and then we'll get rolling. In the interim can I just ask people to turn off their mics if they're not speaking and we'll get rolling soon. Thanks.

Alright. Well, maybe we'll get started. So again, for others who are just joining, my name is Chris Locke. I'm the Deputy Secretary for Biosecurity and Compliance in the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, I'm being MC for today. So welcome very much. Welcome to you all and thanks very much for attending on a Friday for what I'm sure will be another really interesting presentation and discussion. Just a bit of housekeeping before we start off, can you please make sure your mic is off and observe the normal etiquettes for teams meeting. Just note, as posted in the chat, the event's going to be recorded and that's going to be available on our website.
If you look on our website now, actually, you'll see we've already posted the last two events, that's Cathy McGowan and Paul Burke. I missed Kathy's one and watched the video and it was really worth the watch. So if you haven't seen all of those, I'd certainly encourage you to work through the ones on the website.
Can I also start by just acknowledging the traditional custodians of the lands on which we're all meeting? For me, I'm in Ngunnawal Country in Canberra, there's some strong connections here from other traditional custodians and other Indigenous families and I really just want to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life they make to the city and this region where I am but I extend that to all of the regions that we're connected on on this PC, and I extend that recognition to any Aboriginal Torres Strait Peoples that will be joining today's session. Also, just by way of housekeeping, there's going to be short survey at the end of the presentation for people to provide feedback on the sessions, what's working, what isn't, and any ideas for future speakers on topics. So please encourage you to jump into that at the end.
I'll apologize in advance that I have to jump off and chair another meeting right at the end. So if you don't see me at the end Anne will wrap us up, but please do that short survey if you can.
Alright, so with that in the housekeeping out of the way, I've been asked to give a brief introduction to me and talk a little bit about my own leadership experience and journey and several of the challenges or things that I faced and maybe things that I would like to have told my future self if I had the opportunity.
That sounds like a big ask from Anne, but I maybe just a little bit of intro. I currently lead the Commonwealth biosecurity function and that's something that I took on in July last year. That's a leadership role in the Agriculture Department in Canberra, responsible for about close to three and a half thousand people.
So that's a big chunk of our department and really goes to all our border operations and regulatory roles. People think that I've worked in agriculture all my life. I was originally trained in Agricultural Science and I've a PHD in Agriculture Economics, and that led me to join the primary industries department in Canberra about twenty-five years ago, twenty-six years ago. But in the way that things happen, I work very little in agriculture for twenty-five years, and I've spent most of my career in mining, energy, electricity, gas and industry policy. And I say that because on the website now, people make a virtue of my agriculture credentials but actually for a good part of my career, it's connections with people, not my CV that's driven me to be interested in lots of different things and created lots of opportunities for me to take on new challenges, including back in agriculture and I would characterize myself as a curious person, as in someone with a lot of curiosity not that I'm curious myself.
More than ambitious and I do feel like sometimes you need to follow your interests, the connections with people and take some leaps of faith at times.
So Anne did ask me how to send for a few tips about things I wish someone would have told me earlier in my career. I would encourage you to watch Kathy McGowan's video, if you haven't already seen her presentation. Because I thought that had some excellent tips, but maybe just a few things to round out the set.
For me, what I didn't realise at the start was leaders are definitely not the smartest people in the room. They typically can't do the jobs that most of the people who report to them do. It's just they have a different job, which is moulding and shaping a system of talent and capabilities to a corporate end.
So I can't do those three and a half thousand jobs in my group, but I know how to find people who know things and how to invest in them and sometimes my reflection would be the biggest contribution that a leader makes is to be calm, and create space for others to do their thing. But it's not what I thought when I started out.
I would also say an important bit of advice for future leaders is don't ever be complacent, it is always the thing that you think that is under control that’s not. When you're busy and focused on a lot of pressing things that go with all our day to day activities, the thing that you consciously think is not going to be an issue is probably the thing you take your eye off and it's always worth having a little bit of your brain turning over the things that you don't think are present issues at the moment.
The other thing that I would give as feedback to my earlier self would be you need to make a push against your comfort zone wherever you can. Most things that are interesting and different and fun and cause you to grow are things that don't come naturally. You've got to do things that feel a little bit scary to you, take on a few different challenges, and sometimes in new jobs you need to fake it until you make it as a way of stretching your capability and finding the opportunities to do things.
It's easy, particularly when you are a good at a job, to think that's where you want to be forever, but actually jumping into new things is really important thing to pursue. Probably related to that my other bit of advice would be about regret. Someone asked me once whether I regret some of my choices in the past and I don't really.
I think really your only job is to make the best decision you can in a particular space and time and set of circumstances. But I think where regret actually might apply is where you don't take up an opportunity that's offered to you because you'll never know what that looks like unless you take a bit of a leap of faith at times.And probably the things that I regret most in actually would be when I've said no to things which actually could have taken me down a different path.
And then, last thing that I would mention, but I'd probably say it five or six times because it's something that bears reminding is dedicate time and energy to your health and relationships. You can't do a high pressure job without having some physical resilience and having some good people around you who care about you.
Whether that goes to family and friends, getting a dog, going for a walk, or more professionally, finding people outside your direct sphere of influence who actually can help you reframe problems they understand, other types of leadership, leadership challenges you might be dealing with- that really matters.
And it's an easy thing to let go of when you're when you're busy on other things.
So that's my addition to the Cathy McGowan list, I would say, but I'm happy to talk about those as of interest.
But really, the main act here today is Beth. So welcome, Beth Woods.
You've seen Beth’s CV. Beth retired in 2021 as Director General of Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. It's an incredibly important portfolio in our space, of course, where Beth led the development of initiative to deliver an individual productive and sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector and then some issues, I would say. Beth has come out of the University of Queensland and she serves on many important boards and committees which you can see listed in the CVCV and being a driver of thinking and policy in the Cattle Council Australia and provided her expertise as a member of the Queensland Government, Native Vegetation, Scientific Expert Panel and there's currently Commissioner for the International Agricultural Research with ACIAR in and chair of the Australian Institute of Marine Science Council. All very dynamic, big, challenging, and interesting jobs.
Uh, Beth, we're really looking forward to hearing from you and putting you on the spotlight. It's a great, great opportunity and if I can hand over to you to take us through your talk.

 **Beth Woods**
Thanks very much, Chris, and hello everybody.
I'd like to begin by also acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which I am today, the Turrbul and Yuggera people.
I pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging and to the ancestral and spirit, their ancestral and spiritual connection to these lands. About two hundred metres behind where I'm sitting today, is a small pond. It was a traditional meeting place for the Aboriginal people who lived in this area both before and after white settlers came to this area.

I also would like to acknowledge elders and members of First Nations communities who are with us today. Anne, I want to congratulate you and the members of your team for putting this series together, and I'd also like to just congratulate each of you who are on the link today for taking time to reflect on your role and to think about what plant biosecurity leadership in northern Australia actually needs.

I looked down the list of people who were going to be talking and I thought I'm probably about the most government person who is on the list.

So I've actually moved away from a talk that Anne had heard previously and thought I might use, to think about my role in the sense of sitting inside a government agency. I hope that's going to be relevant to most of you, but I just wanted to say also before I start that I'm really relying on all of you to address the big plant biosecurity issues and I wanted to tell you from my perspective why I'm so interested in your future.
I'm really interested in Australia avoiding in or, if we have to managing plant biosecurity incursions and their impacts.
I'm really interested in the opportunities to use new technologies and approaches to create better lives for the people who are in the unfortunate situation of being where an incursions detected. I think there's no worse place to be than the proud owner of a plant biosecurity problem.

I'm also really interested in minimising the impacts of pests and diseases because we've got global challenges of food security. Plants for food matter and pests, and diseases that might threaten their future are really important.
And lastly, responding to climate change. Healthy plants remain one of our best options for short term changes to the carbon that's currently circulating in the system. We can't afford to lose options because we haven't properly managed pests and diseases.
So, you've heard a few words of introduction from Chris and you'll have already figured out that I'm clearly old. So what I'm aiming to do is to share my insights about what it takes to be a successful leader and the ideas that I use throughout my years in government.

As you've heard, I've retired from full time work a couple of years ago, I was Director General here in Queensland and that followed a lot of years in basically moving between the government sector and the university sector.
I started work in the department way back in 1976 in Atherton, in Tropical North Queensland, as an extension agronomist in field crops, pastures and heavy vegetables, and I worked in Atherton twice as a field officer and also in the Fassifern in South East Queensland - a really different working environment.
Before they appointed me, there was a great debate about whether it was feasible to have a female extension agronomist. I was the first in doing that role and they decided they better put me in a safe place because I wouldn't know what to do if my vehicle broke down.
Of course, the first week that I was in the field, I managed to get bogged and I did what any good young female does, I smiled sweetly at the farmer and he pulled me out. So they were right, probably to have some concerns.
After I'd done those years in the field, I managed statewide farming systems, extension and horticulture field teams on my way to senior management, where I also spent a few years managing science strategy and infrastructure as well as various aspects of agriculture, biosecurity, fisheries and forestry service delivery.
I even had an acting stint where, like Chris, I looked after mines and energy for a little while. I fitted in a few years as a professor at University of Queensland - two goes at that, and as Chris has said, I've been involved in lots of boards and international organizations in national reviews and done heaps of speeches, and I still don't think that giving speeches is a very easy thing to do.

Along the way, I've had lots of involvement with plant biosecurity. In my early days in the field, I was an inspector under the old Queensland diseases in Plants Act.

I've worked a lot with the science and innovation that plant biosecurity management strategies are based on, and of course I've also been involved in the policy arrangements and the regulatory frameworks that underpin our biosecurity roles. So, I've not been a plant biosecurity officer or employed in a plant biosecurity program, but I've got a reasonable appreciation of the sorts of things some of you do.

Again, as Chris said, since I retired from full time work, I've chaired the inaugural Australian Cattle Council Policy Council finishing in August last year, I’m a Commissioner for International agricultural research with DFAT and I'm involved with the Australian Institute of Marine Science, which looks after marine country and marine resources in northern Australia.
So you might have picked up the common thread in all the things that I'm doing post-retirement is that they have a focus on northern Australia.
That's how Anne managed to twist my arm for this gig.
I really enjoyed the fresh and different insights that come from looking at Australian agriculture and environment systems from new vantage points in my retirement, and I really echo what Chris said that you really learn by taking on a variety of opportunities. I've tried really hard in my career not to say no to things.
Sometimes I've regretted saying yes, but I didn't want die wondering. I wanted to have a crack and I've discovered that you can often make things work if you just put your toe in the water.
So having given those few introductory comments, I wanted to really give you a bit of a structured talk for the next little bit, because thinking about my role as a leader, I really found it useful to put a little bit of structure behind what I was doing.
You get very busy in the moment and I think that's an incredible risk for biosecurity people. As a leader, it's just important to have a little bit of structure so that at the end of the week or the end of a busy period, you can reflect on whether there are things that you need to catch up on. Hopefully you'll see what I mean when I get through the next few bits.
So I tend to think about my role as sort of four main pillars of leadership. The first one for me is about clear direction or vision that links to the strategy of the team.
In all the years I worked, there was never enough money and never enough time to do all the important things. So you want to make sure the most important things get done. And I think as a leader, it's your role to ensure that there is a clear direction and that every person in your team knows where the organization is heading and has a clear sense of purpose for their team and that every individual person actually has a really clear sense of how the things they do on a daily basis make a difference. I always called it line of sight. I wanted to be sure that everybody in my team had a line of sight to what we were trying to achieve.
Of course, you don't get that line of sight. And you know you can tell I'm an old person because of course I forget to press the right button and have to rescroll.
So excuse me if I look away a few times.
Developing that line of sight isn't something that you go and sit on a rock on a mountain to do. It's got to be a collaborative team based activity.
So you build the relationships inside your teams. You link in all the stakeholders who you think might be important to your work and that includes land owners and managers, staff in other parts of your organization, people in partner organisations and customers, clients, community members. You create the opportunity to work together to understand the context and the environment in which your teams operating. Everybody needs to understand why the program or the team formed and what it's there to do and the corollary to that is always what it's not going to do.
And then once you've got that sort of sorted out amongst your team and amongst the people that you work with, then I think it's your role as the leader to be the advocate for it, the champion to tell people about what the team does and to remind people when they head off on tangents or on things that are important to them that particular day, what we've agreed that the direction needs to be.
I found a useful way to do that is to try to link everything that I said or everything that the team did back to that clear direction. And here just a little quick story, one of the best ministers that I ever worked with had four points in his strategy for what he was going to deliver during his term of government as Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries in Queensland. He was an absolutely terrific public speaker, you never had to worry if he was asked to speak and there was no speech notes, he would just hop up and he would speak very convincingly. Every single speech I ever heard him give in the whole term of government covered those four points. He brought everything back to what he was aiming to achieve and the consequence of that was that everybody in industry, everybody in our department knew exactly where we were headed. Everybody could tell you those four points and not in a cynical way, but in a way that that said, we're confident about the minister knowing where we’re headed.
Incidentally, I also heard John Howard used much the same technique.
So what can get in the way of that sort of setting direction and vision?
Well, sometimes you get captured by various stakeholders and that's where you and your staff will need Cathy McGowan's courage muscle. Because you'll need to give the explanation of why it's the direction that you've set, not whatever they have happened to think about.
In my experience, the classic one for biosecurity people to face is a suggestion that all the effort, all to focus on the pests and diseases that are already here and we're wasting time and energy worrying about the ones that are heading our way.
I don't agree with that, there is lots of other players in agricultural communities who can work on the pests and diseases that are already here and there's lots of other programs that pick up those things.
One of the key roles of biosecurity is to worry about and to protect our Australian resources from the things that haven’t arrived. But you've got to actually argue that case if you're challenged.
Sometimes you can get captured by members of your team. They get pressured in their location and they for various reasons would feel more comfortable with going a different direction and they can pull work and focus away from where you need to head. So once again, it's courage, muscle time, it's redoing that whole debate about why we're doing what we're doing.

One of the reasons that I've seen that occur is because most field-based staff actually live in relatively small communities, the kids go to school with all the stakeholders kids, they’re part of the local community, and if there's a bit of a head of steam up to do something different, it impacts on the individual officer and on their family.
So that's again, we're a point where a leader really needs to give some back up.

Sometimes there's capture by local beliefs, and one of the things that I've really noticed since I retired in some of my northern Australia focused roles is just how strong social media has become, particularly in remote communities.
And it can be enormously destructive.
I've seen that happen within Aboriginal communities that I've been working with.
I saw some of that happening in the northern beef industry when I was working with Cattle Council and I just think it's an important role for leaders to jump in and say that is not acceptable. If that's the best you can do on social media, then my team won't be using your channel anymore.
Finally, of course, there's a really nasty one that leaders have to take some responsibility for, and that's corruption or fraud.
And again, I've seen that happen both in the field and in an industry sense, it doesn't happen often, but if there's any sniff that you think something's not working the way it should, your role, I think as leader is to say something. To initiate whatever investigation might be required.

Using your judgment is really critical. You need to partner with people who are going to help you focus on things that are urgent and important, and I think it's also important to think that as you set that direction, it's not just about biosecurity threats, though I hope I've made it really clear that I think that's important, it's also about making sure that the industry or the Community can actually prosper in the future. The solutions we find have to keep people able to function, and that's a really important end game as well. That's my first big pillar that setting direction one.

Second one for me is about delivery and performance. Are we on track to deliver the things we said we were going to do? Course the first question in this is always do I have the right people and do they have the right skills? Are they in the right places? The second one is are you making the best use of your people? Have you actually had the discussion with members of the team about what they see as important and what they would like to do and to grow with in their role? Do the members of your team feel engaged and supported and motivated in their roles?

Right back when I was, I'm still a field extension officer I ran a big project about providing extension information in South East Queensland which was clearly a peri-urban place with lots of blockies and backyard farmers wanting information.
I was rounding up all the various specialists that I needed to input into this and my director at the times I said I was going to engage the guy from beef cattle husbandry. “He is a waste of space, says my boss.”
I thought, well, he might be a waste of space in your mind, but he's the only beef cattle husbandry officer that I've got access to so I'm going to talk to him and see what we can do. He ended up being one of the best contributors to that project and I was able to match something that he was interested in with what we were trying to achieve in the project. I think it's really worth that thinking about that match between the individual people and your team and the jobs you're trying to do.

That all brings me to culture. It's so important. It determines how well things work everyday and in the good times, but it's absolutely critical when trouble comes around the corner, when you are under the pump. It's how you know that the people in your team will rise to the occasion and that they will have you back if things go wrong. I really encourage you to work on it every day, you need to think about what is the culture you want in your team and what can you do to reflect it.
I used to drive people in my old organisation crazy, cause they'd say to me how are you today? And I'd say “Happy in the service.” Mainly because I wanted people to know that I loved my job. I was happy to be there, I believed in it and I believed in the service component of it. I guess I thought that having that really, in a way silly little catch cry was a good way to reinforce the culture that I wanted to see across my teams and my organisation. That won't be right for you, but you've got to figure out what is the culture that you would like to work with and how you're going to support it.
Then there's capability, you know, do you have the right vehicles, infrastructure, tools, systems, etc to support the work? I guess what I'd like to focus on here is IT. I think it's just critically important. I'm sure all of your systems and processes are based on IT, all your record keeping is based on IT. My question to you really is - does everybody who needs to have access, actually have access?
We made a big effort in my last few years in the Department to try to increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our workforce. When we could get people together, we found that they were enormously positive and happy to be engaged. But it was hard to make any significant progress.
Eventually we realised that lots of those people were in roles where they didn't have everyday access to a computer. So the things that we were sending out as messages, the invitations that were going to them were not necessarily seen in a timely way.
Maybe absolutely everybody in your organisation and every team, every casual worker you bring on board has access - but it's worth checking.
It's also worth checking whether the quality of your records and the data that people are entering actually meets your requirements. When push comes to shove, it's that data that's going to underpin the integrity and quality of your work.

Another thing to think about is innovation. I, like Chris, I have been really interested in and curious about learning things. I've tried to take lots of opportunities and to make sure my staff had lots of opportunities to learn things. That ability to think about doing things differently, underpins the ability to change. Making sure your team is comfortable with change and can do it well is another muscle in the organisation that really needs practice.
And then finally, communication. When you're the leader, how you talk about your team and how you talk about its role is actually your story. It's the narrative of what you do and the story of your successes and failures. It reinforces that line of sight that I talked about for individual staff members, and it tells the rest of the community or your organisation what you do and why. So I think that's really important to make sure that you think about what's the tone you want in the story, what's the message you want, what impact will that have for people inside your team and the people that you're looking to work for?
If you can get all those things right, you've got the stakeholders lined up, you're delivering, you've got a positive culture, you're in great shape when an incursion happens or when there's suddenly a decision that the control of a particular pest or disease is not as good as you want.
Practicing doing things together and surviving through those tough times really breeds respect in my experience. It gets everybody ready for the next time that something happens. I know in Queensland I think we did a really good job of pulling together at the agricultural community around our COVID response and that was really based on the fact that we've practised it so many times before when we had floods or droughts or cyclones. We had a history of everybody coming together on teleconferences. Pretty standard agenda, everybody participating, feeling comfortable that people said, OK, this isn't really affecting me, we won't be coming anymore, but listening carefully to what people said were the really pointy bits that were causing people discomfort that particular day or week.
I've just got one more thing to say in this and that's about diversity.
As I said, we were doing some work in the Queensland Department to try to increase our numbers and our level of participation and success of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members. We needed to do a lot more work to for people with varying abilities. I think we've done quite a good job over my career of women.
You know, I said I was the only one around when I started, “the bloody place has been taken over by women” would be what many people in the department would say, but we have a much more diverse workforce and it's a better place for it.
Similarly, we have an amazing multicultural set of people, and again it's a better place for it. So finding a way to get all those different perspectives really engaged, not just there, but actually contributing, I think is a critical part of being a leader.

Okay, now I'm flying ahead. The third of my pillars is accountability.
When you're the leader, in a government organisation or a government program, you're the person who needs to ensure that you're actually doing the things you promised the government you would do through the budget process.
There's normally a formal plan that’s ticked off and a budget that's matched against it, so making sure that you're meeting that sort of accountability is important.
You also need to make sure that all the work you're doing is lawful. That it is meeting the expectations of traditional owners in terms of impacts on land or sea country. That it is meeting the laws of any other countries. If you happen to have staff who are working overseas, as many northern biosecurity staff have in the Asia Pacific region. You need to make sure that the work that you're doing is meeting the standards and the requirements for product quality and safety for IP management, for privacy, for heritage values and botanical resources, and then absolutely, critically for staff health and safety. From my perspective, these are just must haves.
I decided, I think on about day three as a government employee that bucking any of these things was just a recipe for disaster and that I would learn to understand them and to be good at them and just be able to do them everyday in a quick and efficient manner. That way I would never be in the situation where I was lying in bed at night worrying about something coming back to bite me.
So I just put my head down,I spent time trying to understand the principles and the requirements. I went to training programs whenever I could and I modelled the behaviour that I expected. If you watched what I was doing, I'm pretty confident you saw someone who was operating within the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks.
It's worth noting that some of our customers haven't read the training manual on this and that there are times when our customers or community members, treat members of staff in a completely unacceptable and unsafe way. And again, I just highlight it because I think it's the job of the leader to respond and to intervene and to make sure that everyone knows what behaviour is expected. I really committed to the idea that everyone has a right to feel safe in their workplace.

That brings me to love, fourth pillar and that's what I would call your persona.
What do I mean by that? I mean, when people look at you as a leader, what are the behaviours they see? What's the style? The responsibility that your modelling?
Often as the leader, you're the actual face of the program in the community that you're working in. Your behaviour and your performance reflects on the organisation and eyes will be on you. They won't just be on you during working hours, they'll be on you in the rest of your life if you behave in ways that are not consistent with what your program is promoting.
As I said, I was the only woman around in a field role when I started, so all eyes on were on me and the possibility that I would be hopeless. I just had to get used to that and to, I suppose what it encouraged me to do was think about what I could do and what I could contribute, and to be quite comfortable about the things I couldn't do and to try to promote the contribution I wanted to make as part of a team.
For you, it might be being a leader as a First Nations person or a young person, or a person with a disability or a person from a different culture, or even as a leader with a particular interest in focus on safety. But whatever it is that you realise is your persona as a leader, you need to live up to it and use it in a positive way. You need to walk the talk.
I've already mentioned the importance of making sure that everybody has opportunities to learn and say yes, so I won't go back to that one again but I think that's often a very helpful way to develop that persona, and it's important for other people in your team to see that you value learning and improving your capability as a member of the plant biosecurity workforce.

I've talked about my 4 pillars for leadership, the direction and vision, the delivery and performance progress, accountability and being seen as a leader and a good role model. I have really just covered them - I know they are fairly boring, but when you're busy and the job is demanding, it's useful, I found, just to every now and again just stop and think. ‘Okay, I've been busy doing this, have I ticked off the four pillars? Are there likely to be things that I need to go back and chase up?’

Now I have just got a few finishing points. I've sort of made this a fairly structured and if you like a sort of a discipline sort of talk, but that's not really how life is.
I guess I would just like to say that at the end of my career, I hadn't changed my view that all work is basically a people game. It's the challenge of identifying and considered consistently applying not just your pillars and your plans, but also your passions and your values.
I've really tried to take opportunities to work with people who have fantastic values and who are passionate about what they're doing. It makes life so much more fun and you learn so much working with those sorts of people.
My work has been interesting, rewarding, exciting, but ultimately it's been shared with absolutely great people that I have worked with. Kathy McGowan would come into that category, by the way.

The question is for you, ‘what are the passions and values that you're taking forward and are you doing what you can to share those with the people that you're engaging with in your work life?’
I've also just quickly touched in the capabilities and deliveries section on innovation, but I wanted to just say a couple of additional things on innovation. I made a comment earlier about the importance of new technologies and I think they offer all sorts of new opportunities for plant biosecurity and I'm pretty sure you're all aware of those. But of course, no team and no organisation can have all the capabilities and all the technologies that they need. I am really keen for you to think about the opportunities to partner. Partnering across organisational boundaries, partnering across jurisdictional boundaries. Partnering with other services.
In COVID, our biosecurity officers worked with people out of Fair Work Queensland, who are the normally the workplace health and safety people and they did a great job because we just needed to find people with regulatory experience who could do a range of things. There are all sorts of opportunities if you're creative about partnering, but that's in my mind the best way that we're going to be able to access all the technologies and skills we need.
And finally, I just want to say a really brief word about working with political decision makers. I think one of the nice things about northern Australia is the population is reasonably thin so you do get the opportunity to interface with your local member. If ministers come to the north, you're likely to be able to talk with them.
So I just wanted to make a few quick comments. When there is really a biosecurity problem, it almost always requires a national view, and the reality in Australia that mean is that that means it requires a number of ministers to work together and to adopt often, a bipartisan approach to dealing with the particular biosecurity decisions in front of them. In my experience that is easier said than done, but it's a really important goal of biosecurity leaders to provide knowledge and guidance to build bridges between decision makers.
When you have an issue or an incursion, that is just not the time to use your Minister to fire bullets or use your Minister to compete for resources. We actually need a solution. Looking back as an oldie I can identify so much time and money that was wasted when politics has delayed or prevented timely investments and stopped a really decisive response to an incursion.
So I think as a biosecurity leader, you need to focus on communicating clearly and accurately the facts about what's actually happening on the ground. The facts about the likely risks that need to be faced. They include cheerful things for ministers like unhappy voters or bad press, or the need for a big budget. They may also include the need for some further research that might inform the long term strategy and the response. But those are the things that the Minister needs to hear and that will provide trust in your advice and provide hope for a sensible decision.
A more troubling tendency in my mind is the white charger senior politician, they come riding over the hill with a solution that doesn't bear any relationship to what's actually happening and then you get stuck in a puddle trying to find a way out.
You haven't got any choice in that circumstance, you just play a straight bat and do the best you can. You try to give the Minister some words that make sense for the next time that he's talking to the press, he or she, and then your work like crazy with your well established team and stakeholders to try to find support for a way forward. From fruit fly to fusarium wilt in bananas to grain and pulse diseases and insects.

I can think of heaps of examples where a broad set of community members who understood the plans and were determined to be part of a solution helped us to get there despite the odd deviation from script by Minister.
Now I've probably talked for way too long and I'll get myself into trouble if I say anything more about ministers, but that's it for me, I hope it's been useful for you.

 **Chris Locke**
That's absolutely awesome, Beth. I think we're all fairly captivated by that really generous talk and I really like the lines about the sort of authentic leadership.
You know the context of your role wasn't, none of the jobs you were doing are ponderous, they're not like you had lots of time to reflect every minute of the day about how you got to present yourself. I really like that anchor around the vision, delivery, accountability and role modelling behaviour. I think that's really a great

take out for me, and clearly your passionate value for your work. I'm going to let Anne do the traffic monitoring for questions just as we kind of wrap up and again, I'm going to slide out some slightly the end. Can I just say how valuable that was to me, and I'm sure to everyone who's joined and just ask people to make the opportunity to have a bit of time now to ask them questions using the chat and putting hands up in the normal way. Thanks, Beth.

 **Anne Walters**
Thanks so much Chris, really appreciate your time today and also thank you, Beth, that was amazing. Really fantastic to hear your thoughts and insights. I'm going to open it up to questions.

There is a comment in the chat from Megan while we await for anyone else to put their hands up or to come forward with the question.
Megan made a comment, “Very good points, Beth. I find that urgency we're expected to respond to sometimes means that we don't get time to think and consider and provide quality advice. Just wondering, Beth, if you had any comments around Megan's thoughts, there or reflections.

 **Beth Woods**
Megan, I hear your pain, I really do.

**Megan Wyllie** Thank you.

**Beth Woods**

I think the only way I found to cope with that was to, as I said, the reason I tried to sort of think about the pillars a little bit is just to put a little bit of structure when I did have a moment, but also thinking about what is the Minister going to need next or what is the situation going to need next? Even if it's just on the back of the piece of paper in front of you, having three or four dot points, because in the end you've just got to keep putting 1 foot in front of the other. But in the most sensible and thoughtful way that you can so.
I once saw John Howard write a really effective speech. He was just walking by, he sat down, he listened to something and he had a little piece of paper in his hand and he wrote down four dot points and he jumped up and gave a speech.
I thought well, if he can do it like that, then I'm going to have a crack too. I just happened to be in the right place where I could see what he was doing that particular day. I've mentioned him twice, but I, you know, didn't do a lot of work with John Howard I just happened to note some interesting behaviours when I saw him in action. Others Cathy McGowan might have seen him more than me, I think she's on today, she might be able to comment too.

 **Anne Walters**
Thank you so much, Beth, and thank you for that comment, Megan. I do have a question for you while we're waiting for anyone else to put up their hands as well. Beth, you mentioned persona, which I was really interested in, and I guess I was really wondering how you went about deciding what persona you wanted to reflect and then how you actually rolled that out?

 **Beth Woods**
Thanks Anne, well as I said, it was clear that I was going to have the woman one because I was an oddity when I first started in my career. And I I guess I just accepted that that was going to be the reality and that I wasn't going to get offended by it.
I'll just give a very quick example. When I was pregnant with my first child,
I said to my husband, I think half the workforce has spent their time telling me about the terrible waste it is that I'm giving up my career to have children and the other half of the workforce have told me that my children will be terribly disadvantaged because I'm not giving up my work role to have children. So it's sort of was just a good demonstration that you can't please everybody all the time. You've actually got to spend a little bit of time inside your head. Working out what is important to you, what you are passionate about and as I said, I went into agriculture because I was passionate about feeding the world basically. Those very fundamental ideas, I think helped to drive you.

I'm really interested in security so I didn't want to be the person who lost my job over some stupid thing I should have done and didn't do, or some trivial thing that I did that might be judged as stealing from the system or misleading, something that where I should have been truthful. So I just decided I wasn't doing any of those things, it would be easier not to. As I said, I made the decision that learning is important. I was seen as a nerd anyway because I had a PhD. so, in a sense, I tried to turn what people might have seen it as points of weakness into points of strength. I do like people, and I like working with people as I said so it was easy to make that part of my persona.

 **Anne Walters**
Thanks so much, Beth. Kathy has actually put something in the chat. I don't know, Kathy, if you'd prefer to turn on your mic or not?

 **Cathy McGowan**
Yes, I've got my mic on, I'm not going to put my picture on because I don't look very beautiful so.

 **Beth Woods**
Oh, Kathy, come on.

 **Cathy McGowan**
I could do that, but I just want to reinforce what I heard. Gosh, Beth such wisdom. I particularly liked the thing you just said now about deciding that you didn't want to wreck your career by just doing something stupid. So you made the rules that in the beginning. I must admit, I was really, really similar and I decided that I would never steal from the workplace and that included, stamps back in the old day. I had all these sort of rules for myself, but after a while it just became the way the way I was.
But I actually had to start with my own rules about how I wanted to be.
So I just had a quite chuckle to myself when you were saying the same thing. And about public speaking, I tell you, the more you do it truly, the easier it does get. I loved you having your little rules. That's what I've got. I've just got a sheet of paper and it tells me my six things that I've got to do and I bring that out every time I have to make a speech. So I apply the same recipe and it's great.
Like, what's my purpose? What's my end result? Whats three stories I'm going to tell? What are the examples? How am I gonna finish? What's the call to action?
So I do that as well. Okay, camera off now.

 **Anne Walters**
Thanks so much, Kathy. I see that Sonu has her hand up.

 **Sonu Yadav**
Hi Beth, really great talk. I am Sonu, I work as principal molecular scientist here in Darwin, and my question is around saying yes. So, you know, being already a caring researcher, I do that a lot more times than I should. Like I say yes to a lot of things because I agree that if you say yes, you learn a lot and you kind of, you know throw yourself into these challenges and learn more. But there's also, like a risk of overcrowding yourself and overloading your brain with all these things.
And I think especially like I see that a lot in people like me who started a career like, you know in the last decade or something. So I was just wondering if you have any advice on that, like how to draw a line and say I have said, enough yes and now I should say no. And then what is the best way of doing this? Like saying no without really saying no to like future opportunities.

 **Beth Woods**

Thanks Sonu. Yes, I understand the risk that you're talking about, and it is a real risk and I have to say I'm still not very good at saying no. But one thing I did find that was usefu,l was that sometimes if I didn't have time to do something, I could turn it into an opportunity for somebody else in my team. It turns out that I don't know what it is, You must have a line on your forehead that says ‘I'm happy to help’ because some people seem to get asked a lot more than others do. But actually some of those people who don't get asked would do a really good job. So that's one thing that I found to be really useful to say. ‘Look, I'm really sorry, I just can't do that and I've got too many other things on for the next week or two, but have you thought about X or Y. Then if X or Y gets asked, you can actually offer to help them.
I tend to be quite sort of inclined to be well prepared for talks so you know, I basically wrote out what I wanted to say today, and sometimes it's useful just to - I was never precious about it, just pass over my notes and say here's what I said when I was doing something similar, you might want to use my notes or you might want to do your own thing but it's fine by me, so that's just a couple of ideas. I also found it was really useful to encourage members of my teams to take up those opportunities.

Of course, you have got to prepare the ground for that. When you are going to do a job, if you've got a member of your team or a student or somebody and take them along so they can listen in - great way for them to pick up ideas about how to take on the role themselves.

 **Sonu Yadav**
Wonderful. Thank you. Think I've got a lot of advice.

 **Anne Walters**
Thanks so much for the question, Sonia, and thank you, Beth.
I note that it's time for us to finish up, so I just wanted to again thank you so much for your time and for your insights, it was absolutely fabulous to have you. We had a lot of people join us today, which was really amazing to see. For those people who have five minutes to spare, if you could just click on that survey, does that only about five questions and it would be amazing to get your feedback in terms of the program and where you would like to see it go from here.

So thanks again, Beth, and to everyone else online, have a wonderful rest of the day and weekend.

 **Beth Woods**
Thanks and bye.