



# Three Chiefs Newsletter

Edition No. 2022/4

## December 2022

Australia's Three Biosecurity Chiefs have had another busy quarter working within our country and region to strengthen our biosecurity systems. From international collaboration on sea containers and progress on feral species eradication to global agricultural leadership and Indo-Pacific engagement, each of the Three Chiefs have made important progress to share in this end-of-year edition. As you read about these positive developments, the Chiefs and their offices will be settling into their new location in the purpose-built CQ2 building in Canberra. Planned around the specific needs of the department, the facility will allow for modern, flexible ways of working that will help us meet Australia's biosecurity needs for the future. We look forward to working with you in 2023 and wish you all the best for the upcoming holiday period.

## Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer ([ACPPPO](#))

### Face-to-face engagement leads to progress on sea containers



Photo 1: From left: Mr Rama Karri, Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith and Dr Sophie Peterson at the first International Plant Health Conference. Source: Dr Vivian-Smith.

Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer, Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith recently returned from the United Kingdom where she engaged with the international plant health community in several meetings. The first International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Plant Health Conference in Westminster was a highlight, with Dr Vivian-Smith presenting the work of the IPPC Climate Change and Phytosanitary Issues Focus Group.

In September, Dr Vivian-Smith also led a delegation to an international workshop in London, focussing on reducing the introduction of pests through the sea container pathway. This was a milestone event for the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) partners who have spent many years considering this complex and challenging issue. Accompanying Dr Vivian-Smith were Dr Sophie Peterson, Director of Pacific Engagement and International Plant Health and Mr Rama Karri, DAFF Director of the Hitchhiker Working Group. Mr Karri spoke on the joint Australia/New Zealand Sea Container

Hygiene System as well as presenting several compelling case studies of innovations to improve the biosecurity of sea containers.

Industry and government representatives engaged positively over two days. Participants emerged with a sense of momentum to find practical and cost-effective solutions to this 'wicked' problem. A second sea container workshop will be held in Brisbane in July 2023 to consolidate the gains made in London.

"We are delighted to see both government and industry truly collaborate on this issue that is vitally important to protecting Australia's plant health as well as the Indo-Pacific region more broadly," says Dr Vivian-Smith.

In October, Dr Vivian-Smith attended the IPPC Strategic Planning Group (SPG) in Rome to meet with international counterparts for discussions, collaboration and strategic thinking, ahead of the Commission for Phytosanitary Measures (CPM-17) meeting early next year.

"Attending the Strategic Planning Group and meetings like it are important ways to ensure Australia's voice is heard in the discussions leading up to CPM where many decisions are made that have consequences for us," says Dr Vivian-Smith. "It's also vital for our region. Along with New Zealand, we seek to amplify the voices of countries from the Southwest Pacific at these meetings, when they can't be in the room."

Directly after SPG, Mr Rama Karri participated in the Sea Container Focus Group where members undertook to proactively collaborate with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) to create a single set of sanitary guidelines for the Sea Container industry.



Photo 2: Mr Rama Karri presented at the sea containers workshop attend by Dr Vivian-Smith. Source: Dr Vivian-Smith

## Achievements

### ACPPO

- Led delegation to Asia-Pacific Plant Protection Commission regional workshop in South Korea and the Biennium meeting in Thailand
- Attended the inaugural Sea Container Workshop and Plant Health Conference in London
- Led Australian delegation at the the International Plant Protection Convention's Strategic Planning Group Meeting in Rome, presenting work of the Communication Strategy Focus Group.
- Attended the Pacific Plant Protection Organisation ExCo in Fiji
- Attended Plant Health Committee, Orange NSW

### ACEBO

- Published the National Carp Control Plan (NCCP), the largest comprehensive and coordinated assessment of a biological control strategy in Australia.
- Held virtual workshop to build a national picture of the environmental impacts caused by pest animals and weeds, to support investment prioritisation.

### ACVO

- Opened the WOA technical expert meeting for avian diseases and African swine fever
- Attended a Friends of One Health group meeting in Geneva
- Attended WOA Council meeting in Paris
- Presented at the Australian Veterinary Association's Emergency Animal Diseases Summit
- Deputy ACVO attended the Lumpy Skin Disease workshop in Dubai

## Indo-Pacific engagement for improved plant health

In addition to meetings further afield, face-to-face meetings with regional partners are an important way that Australia's Chief Plant Protection Officer builds relationships and work to minimise the risk of plant pest and disease transmission between countries through trade. Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith travelled to Fiji in August for the Pacific Plant Protection Organisation's (PPPO) Executive Committee meeting and regional workshop, accompanied by Dr Sophie Peterson. Dr Vivian-Smith discussed regional priorities and future planning for Pacific plant biosecurity initiatives.

As with many of the other international meetings Dr Vivian-Smith has attended in this quarter, this was the first time the organisation had met in-person since 2019, with representatives from all countries delighted to be back together. The meetings were productive and focused on a central theme of being 'connected, informed and prepared'. The agendas for the two PPPO meetings included reviewing the draft international plant health standards from a Pacific perspective, and other topics affecting the South West Pacific region. These included emerging plant pest issues, the development of a regional standard on safe aid, facilitating enhanced knowledge sharing within the region and the impact of climate change on plant health.

In September, Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith and ACVO Dr Mark Schipp visited Timor-Leste with the department's Head of Biosecurity, Dr Chris Locke, to meet with Timor Leste's Minister for Agriculture, Pedro dos Reis and Director General Dr Maria Odete.

"It was an honour to meet and hear perspectives from our counterparts in Timor-Leste," said Dr Vivian-Smith. "It's so important for us to listen and understand what our near neighbours need so we can work together to stop the spread of plant and animal pests and diseases."

During the visit, Dr Vivian-Smith saw first-hand the effects of coffee rust and chromolaena (Siam weed) and discussed the impacts of fall army worm on local producers. She also visited coffee, pepper, konjac, rice and vanilla growing areas where she saw the intricate process of pollinating vanilla orchids.

For more information about Australia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region go to:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/campaigns/engaging-with-australia>



*Photo 3. Observing vanilla pollination by hand in Timor-Leste. Source: Dr Vivian-Smith*



*Photo 4. Head of Biosecurity Dr Chris Locke accompanied by Dr Mark Schipp and Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith and DFAT's Rachel Jolly, meeting with the Timor-Leste Minister of Agriculture Pedro dos Reis and Ministry of Agriculture staff. Source: Dr Vivian Smith*

## ACPPO staff at fruit fly ‘Olympics’

In November, ACPPO staff attended the International Symposium for Fruit Flies of Economic Importance at Macquarie University in Sydney. Only held once every 4 years, this event is like the fruit fly research community’s Olympics, where international experts from all over the world gather to share fruit fly knowledge, technology, and experience. In the past 40 years, a strong community of ‘tephritidologists’ has developed, contributing to environmentally friendly control methods and management strategies to minimise the negative effects of fruit fly pests worldwide.



Photo 5: From left Dr Bertie Hennecke, Keira Beattie and Mona Akbari at the information stall showcasing biosecurity educational material. Source: Mona Akbari

The Assistant Secretary for Plant Health Policy at the Australian Chief Plant Protection Office, Dr Bertie Hennecke gave the opening keynote address outlining Australia’s layered biosecurity system. He also spoke about the complexities of fruit fly surveillance and management in our vast landscape. Over the course of five days delegates heard from more than 60 speakers, on subjects ranging from physiology and genetics to Sterile Insect Technique and biological control.

During the week, ACPPO staff at the department’s stall spoke to attendees from over 40 countries. Many international delegates had met biosecurity detector dogs at Sydney airport and expressed interest in our procedures. Delegates also remarked on Australia’s strong emphasis on

biosecurity education, including the [STEM Professional in Schools](#) program supported by Dr Carol Quashie-Williams and took many of the educational resources and pest fact sheets.

A competition between delegates to “Name that fly!” (Where experts suggested names for a colourful fruit fly designed by one of the children in the program) was a highlight, and the department’s new fruit fly playing cards developed through the program were a huge hit.



Photo 6: Carol Quashie-Williams, Keira Beattie and Mona Akbari with Fijian delegate who was interested in the fruit fly playing cards, fact sheets and plush detector dogs. Source: Mona Akbari



Photo 7: International Fruit fly symposium delegates from 46 countries. Source: ISFFEI Symposium organisers

## Engaging with Asia and the Pacific on International Plant Health

Following three years of virtual meetings, Dr Gabrielle Vivian-Smith recently led delegations to two key Asia and Pacific Plant Protection Commission (APPPC) meetings. The APPPC consists of 25 member countries (and one observer country), including many of Australia's key trading partners. Engaging with the Commission is an important component of ACPPOs international engagement work.

In Incheon, South Korea, delegates met to discuss and prepare regional comments on draft International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs), specifications for ISPMs, diagnostic protocols and phytosanitary treatments. Key discussion topics included the revision of requirements for establishing pest free areas and revision of guidelines for irradiation as a phytosanitary measure.

Held in Bangkok, Thailand, the APPPC 32<sup>nd</sup> Session featured a full agenda, leading to the adoption of the APPPC Regional Standard Setting Procedural Guidelines. The Session approved the Regional Implementation Guidance for Phytosanitary Procedures for Seed Certification, guiding how APPPC members implement standards for the international movement of seeds. By being in the room, Dr Vivian-Smith and her team were able to shape and direct Australia's commitments in the APPPC Biennium Workplan and Strategic Plan, which were also debated and adopted at the meeting.



Photo 5: Asia Pacific Plant Protection Commission Regional workshop in Incheon, South Korea. Source: Dr Vivian-Smith



Photo 6: Meeting of the APPPC in Bangkok, Thailand. Source: Dr Vivian-Smith

## Australian Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer ([ACEBO](#))

### Pest and weed management during drought

The adverse effects of pests and weeds on Australia's primary production, environment and biodiversity are often exacerbated during drought. Prolonged dry conditions increase the detrimental impacts of pest species on water-stressed pastures, livestock and ecological communities. Pest animals and weeds compete with fodder and cause significant damage to fragile ecosystems, all while landholders face the significant challenge of managing crops and livestock during drought.

Recognising the need for support, round one of the *Communities Combating Pest and Weed Impacts During Drought Program*— *Biosecurity Management of Pests and Weeds* delivered \$15 million for 48 projects in 2018–19. Building on this, round two of the program delivered \$10 million for 23 projects in 33 eligible local government areas between 2019-20 and 2020-21.



*Photo 7: Agriculture Extension Officer, Andrew Cameron of Byron Shire Council presenting at a landholder workshop. Source: Byron Shire Council.*

Boosted by \$2.1 million of in-kind contributions from local councils, landholders and natural resource management groups, local councils utilised round two funding to support the community in reducing the impacts of pest animals and weeds on agriculture and the local environment. This helped stimulate local economies and generate employment.

By partnering with local industry to undertake pest and weed management activities at a time when capacity is often hampered and given low priority, the program delivered a range of on-ground activities and strategic approaches for

the management of established pests and weeds in drought affected areas. The program engaged over 1,900 landholders, saw inspections of 1,300 properties, and provided funding for 150 community events. This was a significant achievement given the restrictions of COVID-19 and the paradoxical change to wet conditions many projects encountered over the course of the project.

Many pest animals were removed through targeted activities, including trapping, baiting and aerial culling, resulting in the removal of 225 feral cats, more than 5,000 feral pigs, 158 foxes and just over 2,500 wild dogs.

Further on-ground work saw the construction of 135 kms of dog proof fencing, around 23,000 wild dog baits distributed and just under 10,000 rabbit warrens destroyed. More than two million hectares were mapped for weed distribution, accompanied by almost 120,000 hectares treated through herbicide application, stem injections and mechanical removal targeting weeds, such as tropical soda apple, serrated tussock, blackberry, lantana, African boxthorn and Chilean needlegrass.

Almost \$2 million was spent directly through local suppliers and contractors with seven ongoing positions generated and 33 people casually employed during the program.

The program improved landholder awareness of their responsibilities and increased their capacity to manage impacts through weed identification, chemical handling licences (e.g. herbicides and 1080), and skills in best practice methods. It also led to formation of strong collaborative partnerships between landholders, local councils and land managers offering access to financial support, resources and knowledge sharing.

Further to these positive outcomes, the program enabled the implementation of a highly successful rotational grazing model for long-term weed management by Byron Shire Council; improvements to farmer mental well-being generated from the success of exclusion fencing by Bennalla Rural City Council and Gecko CLaN; notable improvements to the relationship between landholders and Narrabri Shire Council during weed management activities for the Namoi River System; and invaluable benefits to threatened species across Wide Bay Burnett, where a consortium of local councils worked together to deliver management activities.

## Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer on the ground in SA



Photo 8: Kangaroo Island Feral Pig Eradication Program. From left, Dr Robyn Cleland, David Jirman, Matt Korcz and Brad Page. Source: ACEBO



Photo 9: Thermal camera as part of the thermal assisted aerial feral deer culling (TAAC). Source: ACEBO

In late September 2022, Dr Robyn Cleland and staff from the Environmental Biosecurity Office had the opportunity to visit two important feral pig and deer control sites in South Australia. The first was the Kangaroo Island Feral Pig Eradication Program, funded by State and Australian Government Disaster Recovery Arrangements. Feral pigs were a major pest on Kangaroo Island (KI), causing severe economic and environmental impacts to farms and native ecosystems. However, a massive collaborative effort means feral pigs are now almost eradicated.

Kangaroo Island Feral Pig Control Coordinator Matt Korcz together with Brad Page, General Manager Invasive Species from the South Australian Department of Primary Industries (PIRSA), and Brenton Florance and David Jirman from the KI Landscape Board, showcased the hard work and new technologies helping remove feral pigs from the island following recent bushfires.

Dr Cleland then visited a thermal-assisted aerial feral deer cull on the Fleurieu Peninsula that has removed more than 1000 feral deer from forests, farms and private conservation properties. The cull used thermal cameras onboard helicopters to improve the detection rate of deer in dense vegetation. Part of the State and Australian Government funded SA Feral Deer Eradication Program, the program operated across 55 farms and pine forests and was coordinated by PIRSA, with support from the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board, and ForestrySA.

Dr Cleland's visit also included a community meeting in Parawa where over 40 local farmers met the helicopter pilot and marksmen, facilitated by SA Feral Deer Control Coordinator Dr Myall Tarran and National Feral Deer Management Coordinator Dr Annelise Wiebkin.

## Department sponsors 22<sup>nd</sup> Australasian Weeds Conference

The department was a Gold Sponsor of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Australasian Weeds Conference, held at the Adelaide Oval in late September 2022. Originally planned for 2020, the event was the culmination of significant effort by the hosts, the Weed Management Society of South Australia and the Council of Australasian Weed Societies. Over three days, delegates participated in more than 140 presentations and workshops from researchers, policy makers and Indigenous and non-Indigenous weed managers.

'It was a privilege for me to join the group of keynote presenters who spoke on topics as diverse as the ecological context dependence in plant invasions, through to the social science behind weed management, the technical innovations for future weed control and the impact of weeds on threatened species,' said Dr Robyn Cleland, Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer.

'It was particularly encouraging to hear first-hand of some of the successes and innovations in the fight against weeds.'



Photo 10: Dr Robyn Cleland presenting at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Australasian Weeds Conference plenary session. Source: Philippe Frost

The conference also heard about a range of work funded through the Environmental Biosecurity Office. Dr K. Dhileepan, from the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, provided an update on the ongoing biological control research into Navua Sedge, a grass-like perennial which competes strongly with pasture in Queensland. Dr Patricia Lu-Irving, from the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, presented findings from a lantana population genomics project, which offered insights for improving the biological control of lantana and other weed species. Dr Lu-Irving's work revealed clear genetic clusters among and within recognised Australian lantana biotypes.



Photo 11: Environmental Biosecurity Office staff at the DAFF exhibitor booth at AWC22. From left, Philippe Frost, Dr Robyn Cleland, Shalan Scholfield. Source: Philippe Frost

The department, together with Wild Matters, held a workshop and presented on the National Established Weed Priorities (NEWP) Framework. The aim of the Framework is a revitalised, long-term, strategic approach to managing established weeds, building on the Weeds of National Significance initiative. For more information, go to [wildmatters.com.au/national-established-weed-priorities/](https://wildmatters.com.au/national-established-weed-priorities/).



## On the horizon: National Feral Deer Action Plan consultation



*Photo 12: Chital deer migrating under a fence in Queensland.  
Source: Luke Woodford*

Australia's feral deer problem is increasing. In the last 30 years, land managers in both rural and urban areas have reported that six feral deer species have changed from being novelty sightings to being widespread in many parts of the country.

In recognition of the current threat to the environment, agriculture and the community from feral deer, the Australian Government is supporting the development of a National Feral Deer Action Plan to provide a coordinated and strategic approach to managing Australia's feral deer problem.

The plan will be focussed on supporting farmers, communities, organisations and government agencies to limit further spread of feral deer into new areas and reduce the impacts of large populations on the environment, primary production and communities.

The plan is being developed by a working group, all members of which are working in partnerships or consultation with stakeholders across Australia. The working group is supported by the National Deer Management Coordinator, Dr Annelise Wiebkin.

A draft of the plan is expected to be put to the public for consultation by the end of 2022, to enable feedback to identify effective options and programs to strengthen feral deer control across Australia.

For more information on the National Feral Deer Action Plan and the public consultation process, visit <https://feraldeerplan.org.au/>.

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# Australian Chief Veterinary Officer ([ACVO](#))

## Global experts on animal health visit Australia



*Photo 13: From left: Dr Yoshihiro Sakoda, Dr Erik Karlsson, Dr Tiggy Grillo, and Dr Mark Schipp speaking at a panel discussion during the avian diseases meeting. Source: CSIRO/DAFF*

Dr Mark Schipp attended the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) global expert meeting on avian diseases and African swine fever (ASF) in Asia and the Pacific in November. This was the first time this meeting has been held in Australia. It was hosted by the CSIRO's Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness and ran concurrently to an FAO meeting on regional avian influenza surveillance.

Australia is free from both high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) and ASF. Nevertheless, this meeting was an important opportunity for international and regional technical experts to meet in Geelong and share scientific data and knowledge around surveillance, laboratory diagnostics, research and vaccines. Dr Schipp opened both the avian diseases and ASF meetings. He also joined discussions, including a panel on 'cost-benefit and resource allocation from the agriculture sector for integrated surveillance'.

HPAI and other avian diseases continue to cause severe losses in poultry in the Asia and Pacific region. ASF entered Asia in 2018 and has since spread to 15 countries across the region and continues to impact domestic pork production and food security. Occasionally mammals including humans may contract HPAI, making the virus a threat across the One Health spectrum.

### WOAH Director General's first visit to Australia

In November, the department hosted WOA Director General Dr Monique Éloit for her first visit to Australia, along with her colleague Ms Emily Tagliaro. Dr Éloit. They met with the department's leadership team – Secretary Andrew Metcalfe, and Deputy Secretaries Chris Locke and Nicola Hinder. They discussed mutual organisational objectives which will help grow Australia's agriculture industry by managing transboundary animal disease risks.

Dr Éloit met with staff across multiple departments to discuss topical issues including implementation of the Quadripartite One Health Joint Action Plan (2022-2026); One Health capacity building in the Asia Pacific region; leadership in international One Health, and pandemic treaty negotiations. The Minister for Agriculture, Senator the Hon Murray Watt, welcomed Dr Éloit to Parliament House for a meeting to discuss the role of WOA in international trade and Australia's support for the work of WOA.

Drs Éloit and Schipp met with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) to discuss the global burden of animal diseases project. With the CSIRO leadership, they discussed using big data, and artificial intelligence for data extraction and analysis. With Animal Health Australia CEO Kathleen Plowman, they discussed Australian approaches to industry-government partnerships in animal health and biosecurity. In a presentation to departmental staff, Dr Éloit presented her vision for WOA and outlined the challenges and opportunities for veterinary services in the years ahead.

## Indo-Pacific engagement update

Limited veterinary capacity, lack of disease surveillance, poor husbandry and farm management practices, along with the impacts of climate change and increasing risk of emergency animal diseases, all create a uniquely challenging environment in the Pacific region. The Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer continues to work closely with near neighbours to improve animal health in the Pacific region.

### Pacific engagement program for animal health



Photo 14: OCVO staff visiting the Solomon Islands. Source: DAFF

The OCVO Pacific Engagement Program for Animal Health marked its one-year anniversary in August 2022. This program aims to strengthen partnerships with the 22 Pacific Island Countries (PICTs) and Territories to improve animal health, biosecurity and food security outcomes for the region. In its first year, the program has established strong partnerships with key stakeholders in the Pacific region, including the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Heads of Veterinary and Production Services. It has also committed to establishing close bilateral relationships with PICT government agencies.

In October, the program team conducted a collaborative animal health survey with SPC and the Solomon Islands Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. The team met with farmers across Guadalcanal, and delivered field-based training for livestock officers on disease surveillance and important emergency animal diseases. Dr Mark Schipp also recently visited Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands with New Zealand Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Mary van Andel. They held high-level discussions with Vanuatu's Principal Veterinary Officer, Dr Ian Peebles, about the challenges faced by smallholder farmers and collaborative ways to support animal health and biosecurity outcomes in Vanuatu.

### Working with Indonesia

The recent outbreaks of foot and mouth disease (FMD) and lumpy skin disease in Indonesia highlight the increasing disease risks in the Indo-Pacific region, and the importance of adopting a regional approach to improving biosecurity outcomes for Australia. Australia has worked closely with the Indonesian government this past year to help support their management of the FMD outbreak. The ACVO collaborated with the Australia Indonesia Health Security Partnership, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Post to provide both funding and technical support. The office also assisted in securing funding for FMD vaccines and the provision of targeted technical support in diagnostics, epidemiological modelling and biosecurity training.

### South-East Asia and China Foot and Mouth Disease National Coordinators Meeting

Departmental officers including Deputy ACVO, Dr Beth Cookson attended the 25th South-East Asia and China Foot and Mouth Disease National Coordinators meeting in Bali, Indonesia in October. The meeting coordinates FMD control activities between its member countries, providing technical advice and support. The meeting provided valuable insights into the regional situation. Key deficiencies exist around resourcing and funding, biosecurity awareness by producers, and incentives to report disease outbreaks.

## Global Agricultural Leadership Initiative secondments



*Photo 15. From left: Dr Katherine Gregory, Ms Melanie Allan and Dr Raana Asgar.  
Source: DAFF*

The Global Agricultural Leadership Initiative (GALI) is focused on strengthening international standards around animal health, welfare, biosecurity, food safety and antimicrobial resistance, and providing support to build animal health capacity within our immediate region. OCVO is seconding four staff overseas as part of the GALI initiative.

Dr Raana Asgar will be based at the FAO Sub-regional Office for the Pacific in Apia, Samoa to enhance the delivery of scientific and technical support to Pacific Island countries through increasing institutional capacity and One Health expertise. She will also support the development of capacities of national livestock departments across the Pacific to respond to emerging animal health and production threats.

Three secondees are supporting the important work of WOAHA at their headquarters in Paris, in the areas of international animal health standard setting and the implementation of these standards. Dr Katherine Gregory will be working in a small team to implement the WOAHA Observatory project. Ms Melanie Allan will be providing support for the implementation of the WOAHA Aquatic Animal Health Strategy. Dr Luke York will provide support to WOAHA on foreign policy.

## Pandemic treaty negotiations

The Office of the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer has been working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Health and Aged Care, to provide input into Australia's negotiating position on a new global pandemic treaty aimed at better preventing, preparing for and responding to future pandemics. The treaty will be established under the constitution of the World Health Organisation (WHO). An Intergovernmental Negotiating Board has been established to lead the stakeholder engagement and negotiation process.

## Upcoming Events

**12 December:** Environmental Biosecurity Advisory Group meeting 10

**24 December:** Santa to be screened by Australian biosecurity upon entry on Christmas Eve. Officers will check to ensure the reindeers are not carrying any animal diseases and that cargo is free from all biosecurity risks, especially our top plant, animal and environmental pests. 😊

**2 February:** World Wetlands Day

**6-10 February:** CPM Focus Group on safe provision of food and other humanitarian aid, Fiji

**11 February:** International Day of Women and Girls in Science

**12-15 February:** WA Feral Cat Symposium

**13-16 February:** Pacific Plant Protection Organisation Full Board Meeting

**20-24 February:** Plant Health Quadrilateral Meeting, NZ

**3 March:** World Wildlife Day

**6-10 March:** Pacific Week of Agriculture

**7 March:** ABARES Outlook Conference

## New Canberra location

Canberra staff from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry are now located at 'Civic Quarter 2' 70 Northbourne Avenue, Canberra City

## Contact us

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OCVO advocated for the fundamental importance of taking a One Health approach to pandemic prevention. This approach should be in the binding and non-binding provisions of the treaty as well as explicitly recognising the drivers of disease emergence, and the risks that need to be mitigated at the environmental, human and animal interfaces to prevent future pandemics.

Australia is also advocating for the role of all Quadripartite agencies—WHO, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Organisation for Animal Health and the United Nations Environment Programme—to be explicitly stated in the treaty, particularly as their roles relate to prevention governance and mitigation of zoonotic disease spill-over risks.

## Pest profile - High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI)

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is a highly contagious viral disease of birds. It can affect most wild and domesticated bird species. Wild birds and waterfowl can carry low pathogenicity strains of the virus and usually don't show signs of the disease, but they can infect other birds and poultry. Avian influenza is designated high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) when it has characteristics that cause mass disease and mortality in infected poultry. H5N1 is the strain of HPAI which is currently causing the outbreaks of disease in the northern hemisphere.

Australia has been officially free of HPAI since February 2021, following an outbreak of the disease in Victoria in mid-2020. It was the largest recorded outbreak of HPAI in Australia. The risk of HPAI entering Australia is considered low, however ongoing outbreaks globally have increased our level of risk. With the return of migratory birds from the northern hemisphere to Australia from September to November, there is likely a higher chance for an introduction of HPAI viruses into Australia compared to previous years

The signs of HPAI in birds can be common to many other avian diseases, and can include:

- sudden death
- respiratory distress
- lethargy
- inability to walk
- no appetite
- unusual head or neck posture
- droopy appearance
- diarrhoea
- ruffled feathers
- swollen head, wattle or comb
- drop in egg production.



HPAI spreads quickly if domestic birds mix with wild birds and animals. The disease can also spread through close contact, in the air, or by people. It can spread through:

- movement of live birds
- contact between animals including bites and scratches
- droppings, mucus and skin
- clothing and footwear
- animal bedding, feed and water containers
- cages, vehicles and equipment.

Meat and eggs can become contaminated and spread disease. HPAI can also remain active in manure, water and carcasses for days or weeks. All bird owners have a vital role to play in stopping disease outbreaks and good biosecurity practices are the best prevention against HPAI. This includes undertaking good hygiene practices and keeping equipment and poultry yards or aviaries clean, quarantining new birds arriving into flocks, limiting visitors to backyard birds, and preventing contact between backyard birds and wild birds.

HPAI does not easily cause disease in people and there is low risk of getting HPAI through normal contact with birds. Human infection usually requires very close contact with sick or dead birds. Australia is well prepared to respond to an avian influenza outbreak and we have well developed and tested plans in place to respond to animal disease emergencies.

If any unexplained symptoms are noticed in backyard birds including sudden deaths, this must be reported immediately to local veterinarians, or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

**For further information, go to <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/pests-diseases-weeds/protect-animal-plant/bird-owners/avian-influenza-bird-flu>**