# Country Handle with Care

# Episode 7 – Biosecurity on Country transcript

Dirtgirl: North Australia is a vast gateway for pests, weeds and diseases coming in by wind, tide, human and animal movement from the north and from the south. If we keep our North safe and sustainable, all Australia benefits.

Costa: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been protecting food sources including significant animals and plants for millennia.

Costa: I love bees.

Scrapboy: Bees are the best.

Dirtgirl: Bees are amazing.

Costa: They have a power way beyond their size.

Dirtgirl: Did you know that pretty much everything we eat is thanks to bees?

Costa: As pollinators, bees visit our flowers and collect pollen. They take it back to their hive to feed their young and then their young become bees that go out and pollinate flowers which become our fruit and vegetables that we eat.

Scrapboy: So if we eat it or drink it, bees probably helped.

Costa: We’re totally interconnected with the lifecycle of bees.

Dirtgirl: Talk about partners for life.

Costa: The Asian honey bee.

Scrapboy: Asia. Our neighbour.

Dirgirl: Apis cerana.

Scientist: Apis Cerana.

Dirtgirl: Sounds friendly enough.

Scrapboy: They carry bee diseases and pests.

Dirtgirl: They compete with other creatures for our floral resources. Flowers.

Costa: They are 10mm long.

Scrapboy: 10mm short.

Costa: They’re less hairy.

Scrapboy: They have a pronounced abdomen. Pronounced abdomen.

Dirtgirl: Abdomen.

Costa: Their abdomen is pronounced abdomen.

Scrapboy: Pronounced abdomen. Pronounced abdomen.

Costa: That’s weird.

Dirtgirl: Black, brown with yellow spots, stripes.

Costa: Stripes. Stripes.

Scrapboy: Yellow stripes.

Costa: They live…

Scrapboy: Under tree hollows.

Costa: Under eves. An eve. You know that part of the roof that hangs over the side of the house. Eve.

Scrapboy: Under floorboards.

Costa: In letterboxes.

Dirtgirl: Table reals.

Costa: And even compost bins.

Scrapboy: Asian Honey Bee stings can cause anaphylactic reactions in allergic prone people.

Costa: The Asian Honey Bee is a natural host for varroa mites.

Scientist: Varroa mite.

Dirtgirl: Varro mite? Is that the stuff Scrapboy likes on his toast?

Scrapboy: They live wherever bee colonies are found.

Dirtgirl: There are two types of varroa mite.

Scientist: *Varroa destructor* and *varroa jacobsenii.*

Scrapboy: Varroa destructor.

Dirtgirl: Destructor.

Scrapboy: Asian honey bees have adapted to withstand varroa mite infestations and are now a natural host.

Dirtgirl: Asian honey bees and varroa mites together kill our bees.

Costa: And this affects honey production, pollination and above all else, food production.

Dirtgirl: That’s a terrible situation for our bees. It also has consequences for us people too. Without bees, we can’t grow food. We can’t let that happen, we have to do something. Indigenous Rangers, scientists and Top Watch! Are looking out for the Asian Honey Bee right now but you can help too.

Costa: Exactly dirtgirl. We need your help because if every Ranger and every scientist had their eyes out today, there’s not enough of them to look over the whole country. So get out there. Use your phone, take a picture, let us know where you see these things because as a citizen scientist your effort matters.

Farmer: Without the most amazing country, we’re not farmers. Like, that’s what we do, that’s our number one is to look after the country. We’re nothing without the soil.

Farmer: Sentinel herd is yeah it’s just like a small group of animals, say 25 to 30 head of animals. There’s two groups up in the Darwin area, there’s a couple more in Katherine and another one further out around the VRD and down the Douglas Daley area. So what their main sort of job is, is they get bled once a week or monthly and then bloods then go back to laboratory and they sort of keep an eye on what sort of insect borne disease we’ve got in the livestock up here.

Veterinarian officer: The blood tests themselves, for the central herds, is mainly looking at bluetongue virus.

Farmer: It’s carried by insects and biting midges. That’s the one we mainly test for here and touch wood there’s been no outbreaks and things like that.

Scrapboy: As Australia grows and more water, road and rail infrastructure is built, it’s important that we keep the remote and regional parts of our country safe. If we’re not careful, high risk pests and diseases could move, potentially destroying farms, communities and businesses. Biosecurity: It’s everyone’s business.

Costa: Standing behind me are some full time employees of the Department of Health. These chickens put their well-being on the line for ours.

Veterinarian: This is a sentinel flock of chickens and they are used by the Department of Health to monitor for endemic viruses that could affect the human population. The viruses are transmitted by mosquito bites. So mosquitos breed, they bite an infected animal and then they carry the virus in their body and then they transmit it to the next animal they bite. That could be a chicken, that can be a horse or a persona or any kind of animal. The consequences of any of those diseases getting into Australia would have a big impact on our domestic livestock and our export markets which would be very detrimental to Australian agriculture. In addition, some of those diseases could affect our native wildlife and obviously we don’t want that to happen.

Farmer: Extremely important to the cattle industry. For our export industry in particular, we need to be clean and to be seen to be onto these things and monitoring and have procedures in place. Their main job even though they’re only a small group of animals, they’re really important to the cattle industry up here and to our exports.

Barramundi farmer: At the end of the day, barramundi really is Australia’s fish. It’s you know got an Aboriginal name, it’s what people equate with Australia. We’re a fifth generation Northern Territory family and from our point of view you know the river behind us, the Adelaide River, has got lots of barra in it so if something comes in that causes a problem in the wild, it’s going to affect not just our business but it will also affect Indigenous communities, it’ll affect commercial fishing, it’ll affect tourism.

Barramundi fisherman: When people are going on or near farms, to think about their own impacts. You know, are they bringing foreign bait with them? Or are they going to be jeopardising the stock on the farms that they’re visiting? It’s something that we really need people to think about. What we can do as fishermen is when we’re going to go fishing, consider the bait that we use. You know, if you’re using something that’s imported, it’s likely come from a place where there are contagious diseases and they can be introduced into the Australian environment. Whether that’s using a prawn that’s come in from overseas or whether it’s using a head from an imported barramundi in a crab pot is a problem.

Barramundi farmer: I don’t know what the dollars are for tourism in the Northern Territory in terms of barra fishing but people to Dawrin, they want to catch a barra, they want to eat a barra. And so if that opportunity is not available to them then you know it’s massive.

Barramundi fisherman: We care a lot about the environment we’re working in. Our business depends on it. That’s where our heart is as well.

Dirtgirl: Dear Ocean.

Costa: Saltwater body.

Dirtgirl and Costa: Weather maker. Watery blanket that wraps around you, me, family, community, we are all girt by sea.

Costa and Dirtgirl: Dear ocean. Dear ocean. All around us. Your surround this island nation. Floatation. Transportation. Recreation. Immigration. Inspiration. You are home to creatures and plants of the deep. The turtle, the dugong, the dolphin, the fish. I wish, I wish and hope, and hope for your future. And although you yield wealth from above and below, and below, the undertow can also bring that which we do not know. Creature hitchhikers and wave riders that don’t belong here, that don’t belong here. But sneaking food into our flora and fauna from every corner together, together, we look out for you. Identify, rectifying, with many hands in unity, in unity, we can protect our biosecurity. It’s only fair that we handle our ocean with care.

Biosecurity officer: This is called bio foul Costa.

Costa: Bio foul? What’s this all about?

Biosecurity officer: It’s marine pests. They grow on the hulls of boats when they’re moored in the harbour or travelling around in the ocean. They like to attach to smooth surfaces and there’s all sorts of marine pests. These ones are like barnacles. They can come in on ships and ballast water. They can come in on drift nets, ghost nets they’re called or just in on floats or anything like that that come into Australia.

Dirtgirl: We are vectors. Intersectors. Pathways and super highways for pests and diseases. So please stop and connect with country. Know and then care, it’s only fair to protect the plants, the birds, the fish, the marine life, all the creatures of the sea. Those on land that you’ll see and those that you won’t so don’t think it’s no big deal and do be brave, connect with country with your heart and see the beauty of the land on which we stand. Understand the traditions and culture, bring nothing, take nothing, see and feel everything. Listen. Ask if you don’t know. And explore with respect. And always be willing to connect and care for country. Yeah.

Top Watch Biosecurity

To report and emergency pest, weed or disease call 1800 79 636 or visit [www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/australia/northern-biosecurity](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/australia/northern-biosecurity) for more information

Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

This is an initiative of the Australian Government’s Agricultural Competitiveness and Developing Northern Australia white papers, the government’s plan for stronger farmers, a stronger economy and a safe, secure Australia.

Biosecurity. It’s everyone’s business.