



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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31 July 2015

Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review
Biosecurity Queensland
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
GPO Box 46
Brisbane Qld 4001

RE: Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review

Dear Ms Brooks,

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of our State's intensive agriculture industries. We are a federation that represents the interests of 16 of Queensland's peak rural industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across Queensland.

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review panel on our experiences and ideas for improvement on Queensland's biosecurity system, and other matters discussed in the terms of reference.

The prime responsibility of the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) needs to be the prevention, suppression, and eradication of pests and diseases. The biosecurity work of government provides a significant public benefit, not just to the agricultural sector, but to the entire community. QFF contends that biosecurity requires a stronger focus from government, particularly on plant biosecurity, to protect our State's \$14.5 billion farming sector. Queensland's reputation as a clean and green producer of food and fibre is a strong market advantage and one that we will need to trade off in both global and domestic markets in the coming decades.

Queensland's capability

Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) is the agency of DAF responsible for the State Government's biosecurity obligations. The cumulative effect of underinvestment in biosecurity over recent years, has been an erosion in our capacity to combat biosecurity threats in Queensland. BQ currently has 495 staff, accounting for 25% of DAF's workforce. QFF contends that this workforce is insufficient for the size of the challenge currently facing BQ and that significant expertise gaps exist within the agency.

BQ has estimated that their response to the ongoing Panama disease Tropical Race 4 issue has required the diversion of 18% of their staff. This represents a significant strain on BQ's capability by a single major incident. With one of the two TR4 quarantined plantations now revealed to have been misdiagnosed, the importance of an adequately funded and resourced biosecurity capability is self-evident. QFF submits that BQ must be adequately funded and resourced to ensure they have the capacity to deal with multiple major biosecurity challenges simultaneously.

Queensland's new biosecurity legislation has had a long gestation period, started by the former Labor Government, passed during the LNP Government, and now in the regulation phase with a new Labor Government. QFF has been involved throughout this process and feels the new regulations will be a positive step forward for Queensland's biosecurity, achieving a reduction in compliance red tape for producers while strengthening biosecurity requirements. Biosecurity is

The united voice of intensive agriculture



an issue that impacts on all rural stakeholders all the way from small scale hobby farms to large agricultural producers as well as government. QFF has been supportive of the State Government's move towards a General Biosecurity Obligations (GBO), recognising the concept as the best available method to achieve effective biosecurity. The GBO puts the responsibility on each individual; be they a large scale producer or hobby farmer, to ensure they are minimising their biosecurity risk.

The national context

Although the Terms of Reference of the *Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review* limit the panel's scope to Queensland specific capability and responsibilities, a broader understanding of the national biosecurity situation is required to fully appreciate the challenges facing Queensland's biosecurity.

The national cost share funding mechanism is crucial to an effective biosecurity response to threats of national significance. This is of particular importance in Queensland, where our climate, crops and proximity to Australia's neighbours, results in an increased risk of being the initial incursion point for potential nation-wide biosecurity threats. Until recently, other jurisdictional governments have accepted that it should not be the lone financial obligation of the Queensland Government to combat biosecurity threats on behalf of the whole continent. The withdrawal of Western Australia from national cost share funding for Queensland's red imported fire ant (RIFA) effort, and reviews by the Commonwealth, have called into question this commitment and the reliability of the national system.

BQ currently has nearly a quarter of their staff engaged in the RIFA program. With the funding for the program now under serious threat, the ability for these BQ staff to treat and control incursion sites will be diminished. A withdrawal of funding has the potential for the RIFA situation to evolve from a manageable problem to an unmanageable one, with significant long-term impacts on agriculture, and the broader community. It is hoped that the current National Biosecurity Committee review into the best potential national funding system will provide more certainty for Queensland and will be the basis for greater investment.

Management of the Cape York area is a national biosecurity responsibility, with the increased risk of foreign incursions. Industry has witnessed a gradual decline in the Federal Government's biosecurity surveillance in our State's far north and believe this has resulted in an additional workload on the State Government and BQ, which has not been fully met. The lack of a permanent biosecurity surveillance program and permanent emergency surge capacity from the Commonwealth is of most pressing concern to industry.

The Federal Government's recently launched *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper* contains a number of commitments on biosecurity, which have been welcomed by industry. In particular, the \$200 million commitment to improve biosecurity surveillance and analysis nationally, with a particular emphasis on Northern Australia, is a positive step towards adequate biosecurity investment from the Commonwealth.

Overall, a gradual decline in Federal Government investment in biosecurity has put Queensland's biosecurity systems under greater pressure and magnified the impact of the State Government's underinvestment.

Partnering with industry

A combined effort is needed by both government and industry to effectively combat both plant and animal biosecurity threats. Industry is the best source of knowledge on industry specific biosecurity risks and how to combat outbreaks. QFF believes that industry should be given responsibility over their biosecurity obligations, however, if industry is to take on the ownership of this responsibility there must be a vested interest in compliance.

While, in principle, QFF agrees with government devolving responsibility for biosecurity to the individual producer, QFF would like to see government develop programs with industry that allows comprehensive risk assessment and management of biosecurity.

Both plant and animal Industries need to develop appropriate biosecurity management systems which can be implemented by all producers. This could be a requirement of any animal or plant cost sharing deed with Animal Health Australia or Plant Health Australia. These biosecurity management systems need to reflect the risks posed by both endemic and imported diseases. A collaborative arrangement between BQ and industry may in fact help leverage the current resource base for BQ by co-regulation.

Industry is playing their part in the biosecurity efforts with industry led research and development often having a strong biosecurity focus. QFF would also acknowledge that many industries may already have their own advanced farm registration systems, for example the Australian Pork Ltd has PorkPass, and as such the QFF would urge government to cooperate with industry to avoid duplication of data. Devolving responsibility of managing of databases for each industry to their peak bodies may result in significant savings for government.

Industry levies and fighting funds are a mechanism that some industries can, and have, utilised to partner with Government in proactively combating biosecurity threats. However, some industries such as the chicken meat industry have significant regulatory hurdles to implementing industry-wide levies, such as requirements for Senate Reviews.

A more balanced investment

With an increasing number of potential threats and diminishing financial resources, the need to find an appropriate balance to biosecurity investment is crucial. The most pressing need is for a better balance between plant and animal biosecurity investment. Although plant biosecurity threats are too often neglected in favour of animal industry threats, the balance needs to be redressed through a larger quantum of funding, rather than a rebalancing of existing funds.

Consideration needs to be given to measures aimed at making the governments more accountable for their biosecurity investment. Establishing BQ as a separate statutory authority would provide recognition of its importance as a whole of government responsibility. Having BQ's appropriation publicly accounted for in the State Budget could highlight underinvestment and ensure the Government meets its statutory obligation to effectively protect Queensland from biosecurity threats.

QFF has called for a five percent per annum increase to the DAF and BQ budgets to allow for greater investment in cooperative programs with industry and a proactive approach to biosecurity. The responsibility to financially resource emergency biosecurity responses should lie with the Treasury, rather than DAF and BQ. This shift would lead to more rapid, complete and well-resourced responses, with expenses apportioned at a late stage.

Queensland requires a biosecurity system that is not reliant on good fortune to protect our industries and communities from pests and diseases. Instead our system needs to utilise world's best practice, and be adequately resourced. Investment in biosecurity is an insurance policy and is the responsible course of action for all governments.

QFF notes that this submission is a complementary overview of our member's unified position and is without prejudice to any subsequent or additional views expressed by our members.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Murray

Chief Executive Officer

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