



Refreshed National Biosecurity Terms of Reference (October 2025)

Purpose

The National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) is formally established under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB), first signed on 13 January 2012 and revised in January 2019. The Commonwealth and all states and territories are Parties to IGAB, which was developed in response to the recommendations of the 2017 [Priorities for Australia's biosecurity system](#) report.

The NBC reports to the Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee (AGSOC) on national biosecurity matters, including the implementation of the National Biosecurity Strategy (NBS), and is primarily responsible for the management and oversight of the IGAB. AGSOC reports to the Agriculture Ministers' Meeting (AMM).

Roles and Responsibilities

The goal of a national biosecurity system is to minimise the impact of pests and diseases on Australia's economy, environment and the community, with resources targeted to manage risk effectively across the continuum, while facilitating trade and the movement of animals, plants, people, goods, vectors and vessels to, from and within Australia.

The IGAB authorises the NBC to provide strategic management and oversight of the national biosecurity system and intergovernmental relationships. The NBC oversees the operation of the IGAB and the adherence of Parties to the Principles of the agreement. The NBC is responsible for managing a national, strategic approach to biosecurity threats relating to plant and animal pests and diseases, marine pests and aquatics, and the impact of these on agricultural production, the environment, community well-being and social amenity.

The NBC oversees implementation of Australia's NBS which sets out six priority areas established to achieve the vision for Australia's future biosecurity system.

The NBC promotes cooperation, coordination, consistency, and synergies across and between Australian governments, to advance the national biosecurity system by:

- providing oversight of the biosecurity system, including identifying strategic opportunities, threats and risks to the effective functioning of the national biosecurity system, with a focus on significant system reforms;
- establishing national strategic direction for the national biosecurity system including oversight of delivery of the NBS;
- prioritising and coordinating biosecurity investment to the areas of greatest return, in terms of the mitigation of risk of incursion and outbreak of exotic pests and diseases;
- providing assurance to Responsible Ministers that the biosecurity system is effective, robust and resilient;
- engaging, partnering and communicating with all relevant stakeholders reflecting the shared responsibility for biosecurity, including collaboration with First Nations people in aspects of the biosecurity system.

It achieves this by:

- delivering against a rolling three-year work plan, reviewed annually, which clearly identifies the objectives, having regard to the AMM work plan, the NBS and the prevailing risk environment;

- reporting annually to AGSOC, and through AGSOC to AMM, against the objectives of the NBC work plan, including assessment of progress against agreed measures of success, and to publish a public report;
- undertaking annual strategic planning activities, to inform management of threats and risks and to identify opportunities for improvement;
- actively and routinely considering risks to the effective functioning and sustainability of the national biosecurity system, including adequacy of measures to manage those risks;
- undertaking assessments, reviews and exercises to assess performance of aspects of the national biosecurity system and NBC operations, to provide assurance to AMM of the health of the biosecurity system and efficacy of the NBC in delivering oversight of that system;
- delivering clear and regular communications which informs all stakeholders about the decisions and actions of the NBC, increasing transparency and accountability;
- engaging and collaborating with all stakeholders, including First Nations people, to reflect shared responsibility in biosecurity;
- establishing and providing clear direction to sectoral and thematic sub-committees as appropriate, to provide advice to the NBC on key technical, strategic and policy issues and to progress specific projects at the direction of the NBC;
- appropriately managing biosecurity strategic policy issues in the national interest.

NBC behaviours

Members are responsible for maintaining behaviours that reflect the collaborative and collegiate culture of the NBC. It is a forum of peers, where all members are expected to uphold the highest standards of integrity, impartiality, respect and accountability. The NBC values open communication and transparency, and demonstrates a commitment to action.

Responsibilities of the Chair

The Committee is co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary, Biosecurity, Operations and Compliance Group of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (or their delegate) and a jurisdictional representative (e.g. State or Territory member) nominated by the Committee for a 12-month term.

The co-chairs are responsible for:

- chairing meetings of the NBC, including facilitating discussions and confirming NBC decisions.
- ensuring that the NBC delivers on its responsibilities under the IGAB, including driving a strategic approach to oversight of the biosecurity system and work plan, and reporting to AMM as required.
- retaining an independent perspective from their jurisdiction but may participate in discussions on matters before the NBC.
- upholding the NBC behaviours, and to ensure that members do likewise at all times.
- ensuring meetings are run efficiently and effectively, and in accordance with the ToRs.

Responsibilities of individual NBC members

In their capacity as a member of the NBC, jurisdictional representatives are expected to:

- represent a whole-of-government position for their respective jurisdiction;
- ensure they have the authority to make financial, policy and strategy decisions on behalf of their jurisdiction, to the extent it is appropriate for officials to do so;

- bring a strategic approach to oversight of the national biosecurity system, including monitoring performance, managing risk, ensuring strong communication with stakeholders, astute financial management, and sound governance practices;
- act in the best interests of the national biosecurity system;
- intend to implement agreed decisions and actions in their home jurisdictions;
- provide strategic guidance and support to a sectoral or thematic sub-committee as an NBC Champion.

Membership

The NBC is comprised of a senior official from each of the Lead Agencies, identified by each Party to the IGAB, and New Zealand. New Zealand is a key strategic partner and provides significant strategic value and insights through the perspectives of like-minded trading partners. However, where there are sensitive items of national significance for discussion, an Australian Members only session may be convened, as advised by the sponsoring jurisdiction.

Members may have up to two representatives present at an NBC meeting to ensure appropriate coverage of responsibilities but must bring a single and whole-of-government perspective on matters for resolution. Members are to advise the secretariat of the name and position of any additional representatives prior to the meeting.

Jurisdiction	Department
Commonwealth	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Australian Capital Territory	City and Environment Directorate
New South Wales	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Northern Territory	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Queensland	Department of Primary Industries
South Australia	Department of Primary Industries and Regions
Tasmania	Department of Natural Resources and Environment
Victoria	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
Western Australia	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
New Zealand	Ministry for Primary Industries

Observers

Plant Health Australia (PHA) and Animal Health Australia (AHA) representatives are observers of the NBC and may also participate in several of its sub-committees. As custodians of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed and the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement respectively, PHA and AHA provide context and advice to the NBC on the application of the Deeds and biosecurity outcomes from the perspective of their members. Where there are sensitive items of national

significance for discussion, an Australian Members only session may be convened, as advised by the sponsoring jurisdiction.

The NBC may invite any other party to observe NBC meetings as appropriate.

1.1 Meeting arrangements

The NBC holds formal meetings twice a year face-to-face or by videoconference and interim meetings by videoconference / teleconference as required. Standing agenda items considered at each formal meeting will be agreed to ensure that key strategic issues are addressed, and may include:

- Strategic risks
- Communications
- Emerging opportunities and threats
- Finance and cost-sharing
- Industry perspectives
- NBS and system assurance
- NBS monitoring and evaluation
- People and capability.

Routine issues may be considered out-of-session by agreement of the co-chairs.

1.2 Strategic Workshop

NBC will hold an annual Strategic Workshop and Planning Session. The purpose of the session is to conduct an annual review of NBC operations against the NBC work plan (measure progress), identify strategic priorities and opportunities and to revise the work plan for the following year. This session will be held after the second NBC meeting as a separate session.

1.3 Record of meeting

The secretariat will prepare a summary record of each meeting, including decisions and action items. Summary outcomes and actions will be provided by the secretariat at the conclusion of meetings, or as soon as possible but no later than two weeks, for consideration and endorsement by members.

A summary record and updated decision register will be prepared and, following approval by the NBC co-chairs, circulated to all members for comment and approval, generally within six weeks.

1.4 Meeting papers

Papers must be submitted to the Committee secretariat within the deadlines provided. Papers that are provided outside the set timelines may be rescheduled to the next scheduled meeting or may be accepted as late paper(s) at the discretion of the co-chairs.

The secretariat will circulate the finalised agenda and supporting papers two weeks prior to the meeting date.

Papers put forward for NBC consideration should clearly articulate the issues, have a specific action required of the NBC, and identify alignment with the NBC work plan and NBS.

The final agenda and all papers will be circulated via a document sharing platform two weeks before the meeting.

The NBC will consider routine issues out-of-session where appropriate. Routine issues include for information, noting, or non-contentious issues for endorsement.

1.5 Decision-making, quorum and dispute resolution procedures

Decisions of the NBC are to be made by consensus and implemented accordingly. In this context, consensus means that no members actively dissent from an agreed outcome or decision. There is no requirement for a formal vote on a matter, and not all members are required to actively support the agreed outcome.

There is no formal quorum for an NBC meeting. Members are expected to attend all meetings or send a proxy, and NBC decisions may be made in the absence of a member.

The NBC is committed to prompt and fair resolution of any disputes, conflicts or disagreements that may arise from time to time. Disputes may arise where one or more NBC member actively dissents to a proposed decision and a consensus decision cannot reach, or in other circumstances. In the event of a dispute arising, NBC members will participate in the dispute resolution process.

Where there is clear dissent or disagreement on a matter by one or more affected members:

- the matter may be discussed further by members to see if the issue can be resolved or the dissent retracted
- the matter may be revisited at a later stage once efforts have been made to remedy the issue, or
- the co-chairs may determine that the committee has made the decision not to support the outcome being sought, noting that there is dissent in relation to the matter.

The co-chairs are responsible for confirming the decisions made by, or the apparent position of, the NBC at the conclusion of each agenda item. This includes clarification where there may be uncertainty or disagreement between members as to an agreed outcome.

1.6 Conflict of interest

Members may represent jurisdictional positions on matters before the NBC without a declaration of a conflict, noting NBC operates in the national interest.

Members must maintain the highest possible standards of integrity in relation to their committee membership and related operations. In working to advance Australia's strategic biosecurity interests, members have a responsibility to be aware of their obligations to avoid conflicts of interest where possible, and to actively manage those potential conflicts of interest that cannot be avoided.

Members must promptly disclose any conflicts of interest and these are to be incorporated in the minutes.

1.7 Financial expenditure

It is the responsibility of members to ensure they are in a position to represent their governments at meetings and make decisions requiring a financial commitment to the extent it is appropriate for officials to do so.

1.8 Confidentiality

NBC meeting material is not for distribution beyond the committee, except on a 'need to know basis' to the extent required for the committee's operation. However, outcomes will usually need to be communicated more widely to progress NBC business and to maintain communication with stakeholders. Where information is designated as sensitive or for restricted circulation, it must be annotated and handled accordingly.

1.9 Work plan

The NBC will develop and adopt a rolling three-year work plan that is reviewed annually and updated as required. The work plan is to be developed by the NBC to deliver against the identified strategic objectives and to support the objectives of the AMM work plan. The work plan will be developed in

conjunction with the policy, technical and strategic advice of the sub-committees and will be provided to AGSOC for agreement.

1.10 Reporting

A report will be provided to AGSOC and AMM by 30 September each year on NBC progress against its work plan and other priorities addressed by the committee.

1.11 Sub-committees and expert groups

The NBC is supported by five ongoing sectoral sub-committees, comprising officers from the Australian, state and territory governments. Sub-committees will work with the NBC to deliver on its work plan, and to progress priority projects at the direction of the NBC. Sub-committees will maintain their own work plan which supports the NBC work plan and will also progress strategic policy and technical issues in the national interest.

Current sub-committees are:

- Animal Health Committee
- Environment and Invasives Committee
- Marine Pest Sectoral Committee
- National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network
- Plant Health Committee.

The NBC will establish thematic sub-groups as it sees fit to address particular priority issues from time to time. The NBC will provide sub-groups with clear guidance to define the purpose, responsibilities, and operating procedures.

The NBC will establish expert and task groups to facilitate effective operations. The NBC currently has two groups, comprising officers from the Australian, state and territory governments:

- Biosecurity and Agricultural Emergency Network
- NBS Implementation Committee - which will support the NBC with implementation of the NBC. NBC members are represented on the implementation committee.

Sectoral sub-committees will undertake a review of their structure each year to align with the strategic focus areas of the NBC and provide a draft work plan for NBC's consideration by May each year. If expert or task groups are established, they will have specific reporting timeframes.

All expert and task groups are to be time-limited or reviewed annually, unless otherwise provided in their terms of reference.

1.12 ToR review and amendment

These ToR will be reviewed every two years and may be amended from time to time at the request of a member. Agreement to amendments will be in accordance with the NBC decision-making requirements.

1.13 Administrative support

Secretariat support is provided by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Jurisdictional co-chairs may offer additional resourcing assistance to the NBC secretariat.

Each member is responsible for meeting their own costs of attending meetings.