Nick Housego:

Welcome to this second webinar in the biosecurity series hosted by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. My name is Nick Housego, and I'll be facilitating today's forum. And it's a 60 minute forum with, I think at this stage 850 people registered. So very large numbers. Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians on the land on which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal people of the Canberra region. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and I'll wish a warm welcome to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander who are joining us today. You're welcome.

Nick Housego:

Today you'll hear from three very experienced leaders about their focus for our biosecurity system. To start with Andrew Tongue, deputy secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. He will talk about Australia's changing biosecurity risk profile and how we are adapting and managing these risks. Second is Malcolm Letts, deputy director general and chief biosecurity officer Biosecurity Queensland will provide a case study for meeting the challenges for the banana industry and the Panama TR4. And Katherine Clift, executive director, Biosecurity Services, Agriculture Victoria will talk about the emerging insights into building a collaborative biosecurity system. I would like now to welcome Andrew Tongue, to talk about the changing risk profile for our biosecurity system. Andrew.

Andrew Tongue:

Thanks very much Nick, and hello everybody. And a shout out to my team across the country and to all of you in lockdown. I know it must be wearing for you, but really respect what you're all doing. My task is to give you a bit of a Commonwealth sort of centered view, and then I'm going to hand over to my colleagues Malcolm and Katherine to give you their perspective informed by their deep experience in state and territory government.

Andrew Tongue:

I wanted to start and we'll pull some slides up here, just about how from a Commonwealth perspective we see the world. In our current environment, we see a number of challenges and changes occurring around goods and logistics chains, just in time for example. Growing trade volumes, you might have thought with COVID trade volumes would go down, in fact they've gone up. Because we haven't been able to maybe go on overseas holidays, we're buying a lot from overseas. And in some ports volumes have gone up over 30% month on month. As Australia's population has changed and as Australia has become a more complicated and interesting country, we're drawing in imports from more places around the world. And that brings real challenges if you're trying to keep pests and diseases out.

Andrew Tongue:

Supply chains are more complex. You might think say a car coming into Australia was kind of assembled in one place, but all parts of the car come from all over the world. And so embodied in that car is a really quite complex set of risks. Climate change and variability is changing pest and disease distributions globally. So things that might not have previously got to Australia can now get to Australia. And then once pests and diseases are in Australia, they can move to other locations that they might not once have been able to reach. Using the cane toad example, it's coming south quite far, further than we might have contemplated and part of that's climate change.

Andrew Tongue:

The other thing we're finding I think very sadly is illegal activity. And we are constantly confronted at the border by bad actors, in my view some of the worst actors in our economy who are trying to get round our controls purely for financial and self-interest. And hopefully in future, we're going to lock more of those people up because what they're trying to do is wrong and it can hurt agriculture, it can destroy the environment, it is pernicious and we're going to do a better job at dealing with it. Could I just move to the next slide please?

Andrew Tongue:

So what we're trying to capture with this slide is our reality. Once we were a big continent with a small population, a long way from anyway. And if you go back to the last time we had a foot and mouth disease outbreak in the Age of Sail, it snuffed out really quickly because we weren't a connected economy. It was amazing that the disease even made it here because mostly the ill beasts died on the voyage to Australia. And so that was in the past. In our present, we still have a tendency to look backwards, we still have a tendency to view ourselves as a lucky country, a long way from anyway, and capable of managing all the risks we face, it's becoming more challenging.

Andrew Tongue:

And the reason we've put a question mark about our future is what we see is increased pest and disease pressure on multiple fronts. And we see that pressure growing over the next decade, not declining for the reasons I've outlined and we see a real challenge for the country. So my no regrets view, and this is the Andrew Tongue view, of what we're going to confront in future is we've got to assume that something bad might happen. We've got to plan as if we're going to have to confront at least one maybe more really serious incursions. And we have to be the country that can deal with those incursions. And I would argue that we're pretty good. Are we good enough? Maybe not. And so we see the need to do a lot more around preparedness, resilience, response and recovery. Can we move to the next slide please?

Andrew Tongue:

Sort at a very high level, there's a lot of ways to cut Australia's biosecurity system. Basically the federal government has invested $400 million in the Commonwealth into the biosecurity system so that we can do more overseas and at our border and contribute more within Australia. The reason we have to go overseas is we have to manage risks before they come to Australia. We do some of that now, we're going to have to do better. Part of the reason for that is right now we bring in 2.4 million containers a year. Those of you who dealt with the recent khapra beetle post border incidents would know that the index factor there is containers that spent some time on the ground in Africa sometime in the last eight years. So we've got to get better at being able to understand pest and disease profiles, linking them to the movement of goods and then working out how we manage those risks.

Andrew Tongue:

The more we can do that off shore, the better it is for Australia. At our border because of volume growth and international travel will return, it will come back. Since November, 2018, and remember nobody travelled last year, very few people travelled. We've seized 43 tonnes of pork products at the border, 43 tonnes of pork, a lot of people travelling with their favourite Polish sausage. And so we need to be in our part of the biosecurity system, the agency that can work with that. 11 and a half tonnes of pork in the mail. And when we sample some of that product, up to 20% of it, for example, has fragments of African swine fever. So our challenge is more technology, excellent science and dealing with volume growth. And then within Australia, I'll defer to my state and territory colleagues.

Andrew Tongue:

We play a role, but it's not our special thing. We aspire to be a better partner, but it is most significantly a state and territory responsibility. Just to give you an idea of scale of the biosecurity system, the biosecurity security system is worth in its present value about 314 billion over 50 years. There's $71 billion trapped in agriculture, $51 in forestry, fishery, exports, $50 billion in direct tourism contribution, 1.6 million jobs and $5.7 trillion in environmental assets. That's an awfully big asset that is trapped in a high functioning biosecurity system. And in the world I've described, that biosecurity system's under pressure and increasing pressure over the next decade. Just to give you an idea of scale of the types of problems we might have to confront, $45 billion impact from ready imported fire ant, $4.8 billion, nearly $5 billion of established pests and weeds that our state and territory colleagues principally manage.

Andrew Tongue:

$51.8 billion if we got foot and mouth disease, around $2 billion African swine fever and so on. So we're playing for sheep stations. And I suppose the thing I'm most seized with is the 1.6 million hardworking Australians that rely on the biosecurity system. And that's why I think one of the reasons the federal government's prepared to up its investment in biosecurity. Very quickly, how are we responding to our new reality? There's a few areas I'd like to pick out. People, the key asset of the biosecurity system is in fact the people in it. And for us we are going to make, and are making a stepped up investment in people so that we can respond to all the things I've described. In governance, we have a set of really well-tested governance arrangements nationally, deeds in various areas where we risk share with states and territories, industry, the Commonwealth. But we need to continue to work at our governance mechanisms in my humble opinion.

Andrew Tongue:

The reason for that is the governance that existed last year might not be the governance we need next year. We need to challenge ourselves around that question. And I think those of you in agriculture industries, for example, I've spoken to a number of stakeholders, would like to play a greater role in for example, governance. Regulation, at the Commonwealth level, we share the Biosecurity Act 2015 that our Federal Health Department counterparts. It's a very powerful act but we have to maintain the relevance of the act. So for example, we've significantly increased penalties. The government put through the federal parliament, the significant increase in penalties for those bad actors who break the law. Now $1.1 million fine for a company that knowingly breaches our biosecurity regulations.

Andrew Tongue:

Funding, we think we need as a nation, a long-term sustainable funding model. It's not just about us, it's about our state and territory counterparts, it's about industry, it's about the community. What does a nation need to spend? We have a big continent that's very fragile and it's under pressure from a biosecurity point of view. So what should we invest? How should we collect that money? How should we spend that money? So funding is very important to us.

Andrew Tongue:

And finally technology. We think we can really use technology to unleash ourselves. And very quickly because Tongue by name and Tongue by nature, I talk too much, a bit of a breakdown of the funding that the federal government's provided to the biosecurity system. One thing I'd like to pull out under that $205.9 million is our ability to support greater engagement across the Asia Pacific region in managing risks associated with hitchhiker pests. There's around 14 pests that we really worry about hitchhikers, they hit your ride on or in containers. We're particularly worried about them amongst many things to worry about, and a lot of money for technology. I'll stop there and hand to my state colleagues. Thanks very much.

Nick Housego:

Malcolm, are you right to roll?

Malcolm Letts:

Welcome everyone and thanks for your time today. A little change in terms of tempo from my presentation, because I want to focus on an example of a Queensland based response. I'm relatively new to the biosecurity space, been here for about five years now, but one of the things that's been outstanding for me is the national nature of the inter-governmental agreement, the deeds, the role that the Plant Health Australia, Animal Health Australia play and all of the I guess mechanisms that have been put in place to deal with incursions when they arrive in Australia. So Andrew's talked about the fantastic work the Commonwealth do in terms of keeping things out and how they're ramping that up, but things do get through and we do need to deal with them. And all of those elements have been really powerful from my point of view.

Malcolm Letts:

The other thing that I think most recently has been a growing agreement in relation to the shared responsibility of biosecurity across the community and industry. And the case study that I'm presenting here today, highlights those two things from my point of view. So the question is around the deeds that we have in place, which I'm sure most of you online are familiar with. They are fundamentally based on the feasibility of eradication, the EPPRD, the plant deed is an exception in that it allows 12 months for containment until we get a handle on what's happening. But in essence, we are focusing on eradication. So eradication beneficiaries are right across the board, obviously producers are right up there in terms of the impact on their production systems and what happens to that post, but you can see all of the other beneficiaries in relation to eradication going forward. The question that I guess I'm posing here with this case study that we're going to talk about the Panama TR4 disease outbreak in the banana industry in North Queensland is, is it possible that all of those stakeholders would also benefit from a containment strategy?

Malcolm Letts:

So thanks to my Victorian colleagues for this diagram, but it's something that most of you will be familiar with, it's the invasion curve. And this talks about clearly the benefits of intercepting things very early. So stopping stuff at the border, the prevention thesis has a very high return on investment, as you can see in that bottom line. And that return on investment reduces as we go towards the right-hand side of the curve. I just want you to remember looking at this curve those figures that are down there, and I know they're indicative only around return on investment for eradication and containment. So for some pests, fairly early in the piece, we can make a call that we need to move very quickly to protection of assets and fall armyworm is a prime example of that at the moment.

Malcolm Letts:

So it arrived in Australia I think early last year, I think it was and has spread very quickly throughout Australia. The ability of anyone industry or others to contain that pest, let alone eradicate it is virtually nil. So we move very quickly in that instance to a protection of assets. So the case study I'm talking about is Panama TR4. There was an outbreak of TR4 in the territory back in 1997 which basically wiped out the banana industry in the territory. For those of you who aren't familiar with TR4, it's a Fusarium, a fungus that enters plant roots via the soil and spreads throughout the plant. It basically chokes the plant to death. It infects most varieties of bananas including Cavendish, which is the number one variety not only in Australia, but throughout the world.

Malcolm Letts:

It's very easily spread in soil. There's no available treatment in relation to eradication and it can survive for decades. And at this stage, probably importantly, there's also no resistant cultivar. So the banana industry. The banana industry today is very different from the banana industry that I grew up with, I have to say, the banana industry is absolutely concentrated in far North Queensland. So 94% of Australia's banana industry resides in far North Queensland. You will be familiar with the impact of things like cyclones on the banana industry because a few years ago, I think it was Yasi came through and the price of bananas went up to about $12 or $13 a kilo. So you can have those events and the industry has reacted to those cyclone events by moving and spreading its geographic footprint up onto the Tablelands and further north up around Lakeland.

Malcolm Letts:

So that the impact of any particular cyclonic event is going to be smaller than what it otherwise would. So back in March, 2015, a suspected case of TR4 was identified in a plantation in Tully. I just wanted to also highlight the importance of the banana industry to the Far North Queensland economy. So while it's a massive horticulture industry in its own in Australia, it's the number one fresh produce product in the supermarkets. It's also incredibly important, one in six jobs in North Queensland are employed in the banana industry or the banana industry supply chain. So we got this infected property confirmation in the Tully Valley back in 2015. So what was the impact? What was the likely impact of this infestation given that there was no possibility of eradication?

Malcolm Letts:

So we saw a range of different reactions and responses across the board, but in effect between government and industry, we moved straight to containment. We had no other option and that was about buying some time for the industry to adjust. But from the stakeholder perspectives infested property owners, their very livelihood was at stake. So think about the fact that this disease persists for decades in the soil. So once you've got it on a banana farm, and once that banana farm is destroyed by the disease, you cannot grow bananas there again. What does that do about the capital value of that land in an area where the highest return on investment production systems are bananas. For the non infested properties, obviously there's that fear of infection. We had people out on the ground doing surveillance rapidly across all of the farms in Far North Queensland.

Malcolm Letts:

And that very act also raised some levels of anxiety amongst people. Have these people being on an infected property, how do we know that there's anything else we need to do? There's a cost of risk management. So at this point in time and for the subsequent three or four years, the bigger operators spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in protecting themselves against getting the disease, so they went to that asset management phase very quickly. Recognising for those of you who aren't familiar with the banana industry in North Queensland, fences largely didn't exist prior to the arrival of TR4 in North Queensland. So growers used roads for access onto their farms, that was very common practice and very convenient. So fences were just a hindrance back when this disease first arrived. Almost immediately the Australian Banana Growers Council very quickly stood up.

Malcolm Letts:

Doug Phillips was the chair at the time and showed some really strong leadership in relation to the role of the industry body could play in relation to this disease. They engaged with government very quickly, they engaged with us very quickly. And we worked with them in relation to how the response might roll out. The Queensland government obviously was very conscious of the impact of the disease on the economy of Far North Queensland and also on the Queensland economy. And the head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet actually established a task force at this point that he chaired with a range of different agencies at the table to look at what the potential impacts were of the disease on the industry, but also on the broader community.

Malcolm Letts:

But because the determination was made very early that there was no chance of eradication, basically the only engagement with other jurisdictions was through the ABGC and it's fellow agencies or fellow organisations in the territory in WA and in New South Wales. So, as I said, there was a taskforce established, the ABGC made the decision with assistance from the Commonwealth government to purchase that first infested property. So we had a scenario where the first infested property was the only infested property for some time. And in the interest of dealing with some of those anxieties across the broad industry, they made the move to purchase that property and shut down operations immediately. And I was in a role at the time where we had a false positive up on the Atherton Tablelands, I can confirm that the industry and government stood shoulder to shoulder in every communication that we had.

Malcolm Letts:

I can tell you that we now have five properties in the Tully Valley in Far North Queensland. The second was in 2017, the third in 2018, the fourth in 2000, sorry, 2020. The really interesting chart in this slide is the one in the top right-hand corner around the total infected plants. So one of the issues that we are dealing with when I was up in Innisfail the night before last meeting with growers, one of the issues we are dealing with is the complacency around, well, this thing hasn't spread so we don't need to worry about it anymore, and we can lower our guard in relation to the overall impact. All of our response to this point in time has been very heavily advised by science. So everything that we do, all the protocols we've established, the protocols to move fruit off farms, infested properties have all been advised by the science.

Malcolm Letts:

And we've also with the support of horticulture innovation stood up some breeding programs to look at resistant varieties. So having that underpinning science capability within the organisation has been critically important. We've also done a whole lot of work around community engagement, running workshops, webinars e-newsletters using Facebook, a whole range of other to get out and engage with the industry to raise the profile. Thanks. So just a bit of a timeline, we've got a couple of the current presidents Stephen Lowe and Doug Phillips behind him there in the top right-hand corner. But a bit of a timeline in relation to the leadership I've been through some of this already, so I won't dwell on it. But the main thing I wanted to focus on was that we have come to an agreement with the industry to transition the management of their response to industry.

Malcolm Letts:

And that transition involves both the funding for the response, as well as the management of the response. And the reason I was in Innisfail this week was to have another board meeting around how we transition that responsibility. And it doesn't come without a whole set of new questions that haven't been answered to this point in time in relation to how we do that. So what opportunities does this present, running a contaminant program for over five years now coming up to seven years? A recent ACIL Allens survey in 2018 showed that the return on investment for containment in this case is nearly 40:1. And think back to that earlier chart that I spoke about where the container on investment figures that we were talking about for containment were in the order of 10:1, and for eradication were 25:1. This is cost beneficial as a response.

Malcolm Letts:

And I have to say combining the resources and expertise of BQ along with the industry has been incredibly beneficial for us. So I'd argue that the beneficiaries under the containment program are the same as those that I put up in the early slide in relation to right across the spectrum and the supply chain and given the benefits are the same, I'd argue that there's a case for establishing equivalent national agreements, adopting the principles of containment that are contained within the Panama TR4 program.

Malcolm Letts:

So just one final comment, thanks, and that's that industry taking on responsibility for running a response of this nature from levees that industry is rising from growers themselves raises a whole range of new questions for that industry body and in the minds of the growers in that part of the world. Any industry is not uniform, and across the board there's cultural differences, there are geographic differences, a whole range of other things. So there will be challenges for the ABGC going forward in relation to managing this response that we in government probably don't face. We have to work through a whole range of things, including legislative responsibilities, compliance roles, all those sorts of things, which are worth doing at the moment. Thank you.

Nick Housego:

Malcolm, fantastic. Great insights into how you engage with industry. Very powerful and a wonderful case study for us to consider. Katherine, we're going to pass over to yourself now and get underway with your presentation.

Katherine Clift:

Good morning, everybody. And I'd like to start with acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, who are the traditional owners where I'm coming from in Bundoora in Victoria. So it's a real pleasure to be here today and have the opportunity to talk about biosecurity. And obviously I don't really need to talk about the benefits of good biosecurity so much, I think this is a converted audience. As you know, biosecurity is absolutely essential to protecting all the things that we value in terms of our economy, our environment and our people. And it's particularly important for Victoria.

Katherine Clift:

Victoria is an agricultural powerhouse. We have over 150,000 people employed in our agricultural sector and we export nearly $15 billion worth of agricultural produce annually. We're also very dependent on those exports more than 70% of our agricultural produce is exported. So that means we're quite vulnerable to changes in our biosecurity status and the impact that that can have on our sector. I won't go over this in detail because I think Andrew has done an amazing job of presenting the overview of some of the increasing demands and pressures that we're facing with respect to biosecurity. But as these biosecurity risks increase, obviously we need to consider how best we can address them. And this requires us to really focus our efforts where we can make the most difference.

Katherine Clift:

So the Victorian government has made a significant investment into strengthening Victoria's biosecurity system. And the aim of that investment is really to help improve our capability and our capacity in our staff and in our systems to improve our ability to work across the system, particularly with all of the groups and organisations that have an involvement in biosecurity, and that's what I'll be particularly focusing on today. And also to improve our legislative framework. So we have a commitment to move towards a one biosecurity act to provide a really modern and flexible framework for our management of biosecurity risks in Victoria. So we know biosecurity works very much better when we can all work together and I think Malcolm's presentation was an excellent example of that.

Katherine Clift:

So in terms of getting that better understanding of Victoria's biosecurity system and how we can improve it, we have recently undertaken a really extensive stakeholder engagement process. So we started with a statewide survey, which included more than 1400 survey responses. And that included farmers, allied businesses, small holders, industry interest groups, community representations and members. And we asked them to have their say on biosecurity and that included questions around their knowledge and understanding of biosecurity threats, where they sourced their information from and what could be done to improve the system. We also undertook just over 100 one-on-one interviews, also with people from across the whole diverse range of different groups and organisations that we work with. So this has been one of the biggest engagements that Victoria's ever taken in terms of really trying to understand the biosecurity system, particularly from the outside in.

Katherine Clift:

So what are other people's views of biosecurity and how can we use that to improve what we do? So in terms of a brief overview of some of those responses, and I'd really encourage you if this sparks some interest to download the reports they're available on our website, both the summary of the interviews and the survey responses, they've really interesting reading. There is a lot of diversity in the reports which reflects people's different experiences, views and understanding, but there are some things that really shined through. And one of those is that biosecurity is very much viewed as a shared responsibility. And almost everyone who responded saw that they did have a part to play in protecting Victoria. I was also really pleased to see that it came through very strongly, that biosecurity was important for a whole range of reasons. It wasn't just about the economy or the market access reasons.

Katherine Clift:

It was very much about also the critical role of biosecurity in protecting the environment, our way of life and also our cultural heritage, which I'll touch on in a moment as well. Some of the information it's quite fascinating and to some extent, contradictory as well. So we had about 80% of our farmers and 75% of allied businesses felt that their day-to-day actions contributed to biosecurity. But only 61% of farmers and 43% of allied businesses actually had a biosecurity plan in place. And despite quite good efforts that people were making to keep informed and up to date on biosecurity, only 55% of them actually felt they had a good understanding of the biosecurity threats that were relevant to their business. Interestingly, 56% of farmers thought that we would have a significant biosecurity event in the next five years compared to 94% of government participants.

Katherine Clift:

And Sebra has recently undertaken some expert judgement exercises in this work and their analysis was very similar to the point of view of the farmers estimating the probability of an outbreak of a serious exotic animal disease in the next five years at about 42%. We absolutely rely on people reporting significant pest or diseases to us. And in Victoria last year we undertook two and a half thousand investigations based on those reports and undertook five biosecurity responses. So I'm very grateful to see that 64% of the survey participants would report a pest or a disease from their property, but that still leaves plenty of room for improvement. So in terms of opportunities, I think as Malcolm's talk to, we know we can't do this alone there was almost universal agreement that more effort needs to go into Victoria's biosecurity system over the next five years.

Katherine Clift:

People really do want to do the right thing and there's a really high level of engagement and interest. Victoria does have a good track record in biosecurity, and we have led Australia in some areas, but interestingly, there were quite some strong views put forward that the system was performing quite poorly. So I think we need to better understand what's driving those views and what we need to focus on there. We do have some strong relationships and frameworks in place, but they're certainly not universal. So there are some areas where we really need to focus in terms of how they can be expanded and extended. We did undertake some specific interviews with individuals representing Aboriginal communities and interests from around Victoria, traditional owner corporations, rangers working on country, land managers who were working directly with Aboriginal communities to care for country. And we were focused on that because we knew that was a particular area in Victoria, where we have a lot of work to do it's not a strength for us.

Katherine Clift:

And some of the insights from those interviews were particularly that for the traditional owners we interviewed biosecurity is part of a much broader whole of country perspective. So they take a very holistic view to healing country. And this is only one of the many factors that they consider, and they don't necessarily see biosecurity as a different area, but one of the many influences that can affect the health of country. And their interest around biosecurity was very much around protecting the culture and the spirit of country. It came through very strongly, some of the impacts, particularly of the pest the invasive species. Culturally significant burial sites, for example, in Victoria particularly rabbits and hard hoofed animals. And that in some cases traditional owners had higher priorities, they're very stretched in terms of their remit across traditional owner corporations.

Katherine Clift:

They have a lot of very immediate socioeconomic concerns in their communities and felt there was reasonably limited opportunities to undertake the sort of work that potentially we were interested in from a biosecurity perspective. It wasn't particularly well supported by government in terms of the work that we do with traditional owners. And very much that as a first step the focus should be on building the trust and ensuring that we had the right engagement in place with traditional owner groups and the Aboriginal communities. So we recently held a two day workshop and some of you may have attended that. This was online over two days and we had more than 100 people participating. And it was a fantastic event. We're really pleased, obviously it was held online and this just gives you a brief picture of some of the many participants.

Katherine Clift:

It did bring together people from across the biosecurity system. And we had a focus on a couple of key themes for us. So partnerships and engagement, legislative reform, biosecurity preparedness and information sharing and surveillance. And this was really the next key step in terms of sharing the insights from the surveys and the interviews, and really looking at then what was the next step for us? So in terms of the reflections from those workshops, once again, we saw a really universal willingness to contribute and to continue the conversations. People were incredibly generous with their time and with their contribution and very willing to see the change that needs to happen. Everyone was able to bring something to the table and recognise that there's no one single holder of the truth. There was very much, I think also an agreed understanding of what some of the key priorities are for change and what we need to do. A really strong focus on relationships, how we can build them, maintain them and leverage them.

Katherine Clift:

And we knew from our survey results that while we have some strengths in our relationships in some areas, there's definitely work to do in other areas, and this will take time and commitment. Also quite surprising amount of enthusiasm for some of our legislative reform often that can be seen very much as the domain of government, but I think it really reflected people's understanding of biosecurity and the sense of shared responsibility and that they want to have some of that more explicitly recognised in legislative reform, how they can contribute and be part of the biosecurity system and very much the opportunity to think outside some of the traditional agricultural networks, groups and organisations that we work with and just that there's so much expertise across industry and community. And we're not currently probably always making the best use of that.

Katherine Clift:

So in terms of the opportunities and challenges for the future. So I'd just like to leave you with a few questions. We talk a lot about shared responsibility but I think it is still an area for challenge in terms of really understanding how do we make shared responsibility real, and how do we support the next one around transformation? And this was very much the topic of the CSIRO report that was released earlier on in the year. How can we match our rate of adaption and innovation to the rate of challenge that we are going to face in the biosecurity area over the foreseeable future? And relationships are absolutely critical, we cannot do this alone. So how is it that we can support, grow and enhance these relationships that we need across the biosecurity system? Thank you.

Nick Housego:

I'll just quickly go to one of the questions, the shipping companies have tracking systems for most containers yet the minimum document policy does not recognise this online tool. How do we get policy to change to accept these modern online tools? I think that's an Andrew question.

Andrew Tongue:

Yeah. Thank you very much for the question. We're doing a lot of work behind the scenes on the whole question of tracking containers, data associated with containers and how we can bring a really contemporary approach to risk assessment. And so I think you'll see some changes there. We're doing some work on what we call green lanes, and the reason for that is we're keen to work with importers who take biosecurity seriously. We've got a limited resource and we want to focus where the biggest risks are. One of our challenges of course is the khapra beetle can lie dormant for up to eight years in the bottom of a container, under the floor in the container.

Andrew Tongue:

And then it can suddenly wake up because the goods that are in the container are packed in cardboard packaging with rice paper glue. And so we're looking at all the data sources and techniques we can use to try and encourage well fumigated containers, new containers, and also do that risk assessment process. We're heavily engaged with industry, but if anybody online has got ideas that you think we should be following up, please feel free to fire something through either to me or any of my colleagues. Thanks for the question.

Nick Housego:

One of the questions I've got sitting in front of me for Andrew, great to see data driven biosecurity systems being highlighted. How do you see that working in practise in terms of bringing the necessary disparate data together and all the challenges that come with that? And I'm sure it's just not your question, I'm happy if the other panellists-

Andrew Tongue:

No, look, I think I'll go to some of the criticisms of us in the Commonwealth. We're committed to doing better at sharing data and finding ways to do that to address some of what Katherine raised so that we can respond quickly and we can inform quickly. We're rebuilding, we got a lot of money to rebuild many of our computer systems so that we can extract more data from the border. I think there's a few issues there for us collectively to do with some of the meat and potatoes of data and analytics, data standards, are we comparing like with like, et cetera.

Andrew Tongue:

For me I would like to start not try and build the perfect data system upfront, but commence, and we're certainly committed to doing that. We've got a team offline led by a senior person in my part of the department already working on a data and analytics strategy for the whole department, but including my group and the government's given us a lot of money. But in giving us that money, the government's expectation is we're working with the states and territories and industry. So absolutely think it's crucial.

Nick Housego:

Malcolm, would you like to respond on that as well?

Malcolm Letts:

Yeah, thanks. This is something that was identified, I think in the last review of IGAB undertaking by Wendy Craik, is that the information that's been generated by all of us and how we share that I think it's a really good question. And we are making good progress towards that space, but there is the sharing of data that raises a whole range of technical questions associated with it in terms of how you integrate that and how you provide permissions and all of the other things, and whether you're operating off different platforms, et cetera. And there's the sharing of the output of the data, which I think is also something that we are moving towards now.

Malcolm Letts:

So for example if we're getting larger numbers of NSB at a particular port, then the states can respond by upping the surveillance around that port of entry or that potential port of entry. But we don't need the data, we just need to know that there are numbers that are increasing and that they're arriving at that port. So there are different ways of handling this. I think going forward, we don't want to get overly invested in all working off some national biosecurity system, but we need to think about the use of the data and the purpose of it and how we actually share it going forward. Thanks.

Nick Housego:

Katherine, I have a question here directly for the Victorian government, what initiatives are being undertaken by the Victorian government to encourage primary producers and businesses to have biosecurity plans in place? It's one thing to talk about them, it's another thing to see them actually being deployed.

Katherine Clift:

Sure. So this isn't something that the Victorian government is doing just on our own. Obviously there's other industry associations who are very much supporting and encouraging their members to also take up biosecurity planning. We have run workshops with producers to encourage and support them to understand how to develop a biosecurity plan. And those are the sorts of things that we'll continue doing. What I would say though is there are templates readily available on the websites, Animal Health Australia has templates. There's a lot of resources available to people, but there's obviously still some barriers there that are preventing people from actually taking that next step. The other thing that our survey didn't actually look at but would be interesting to consider is actually what's the quality of some of those biosecurity plans? How comprehensive are they? Do they cover the sorts of biosecurity risks and threats that are really relevant to those businesses?

Nick Housego:

Are they up to the task? So very much that. Okay, another question that's popped in, and this is for all presenters, as we adapt our biosecurity systems to enable us to be more nimble and responsive to the changing environment, what are the views of the Commonwealth and the states on the role of industry i.e. The peak industry councils and bodies that we have amongst our agricultural sectors?

Andrew Tongue:

I see in future that governments will be really stretched. Talking with state and territory colleagues, the number of incidents that they are managing at a state or territory level goes up every year. I know the pressure we're under at the border. And I'm not copping out here, I just think there is a growing role for industry. And I think that role is to do with some of the things Katherine's just talked about and that Malcolm highlighted with Panama TR4, taking charge of the biosecurity future of a particular industry. Government must do its role and we know we need to do better but it is necessary, but not sufficient. So I see a growing role for industry, but I think some of the things that Katherine and Malcolm have talked about how that role gets expressed, legislative issues, funding issues, et cetera, are things that we have to engage with over the coming years. So I think that is an area that will continue to evolve.

Nick Housego:

Okay. Katherine.

Katherine Clift:

Sure. I think to some extent, Australia has been a little bit of a victim of our past successes, which Andrew reflected on. It's easy to look backwards and see how successful we have been eradicating pests and diseases. We have a very strong biosecurity system at the border which has been a fantastic defence for Australia, but the challenges that we're going to face in future are really difficult for us. And I think industry will need to increasingly think about biosecurity, not just as something that happens at the border or off shore, but something that is absolutely integral to the way they operate and manage their businesses both locally in terms of individual farms, but how we think about entire industries and production chains. So we're going to need to spend a lot more time working together and looking at how we can address these biosecurity challenges together.

Nick Housego:

Malcolm.

Malcolm Letts:

Yeah. Don Horne's lucky country was ironic, of course. And we have been incredibly lucky not to have more major outbreaks to this point in time. I'll go back to the systems, the national biosecurity system discussion that I mentioned earlier, that we're having around how all of these pieces work together, because there are many, many disparate pieces. Wendy Craik's review identified that there's a lot of investment in biosecurity at the farm and paddock scale in Australia. So farmers are investing, the R&D corporations are investing where some of the gaps are at the national systems level on how that system works. I believe that the peak industry bodies and councils can be more involved in that conversation going forward because they are a critical part of the system.

Nick Housego:

Okay, I've got another data question and this one has come up. How is it expected the data systems are integrated between the states. There's been a lot of challenges getting data shared, getting it up to agreed standards. You're in a situation where if you've got data you want to share with the other states, how do we get around this? It's been here for a long time, that challenge.

Andrew Tongue:

It has and it's not just a challenge in the biosecurity system, it's a challenge in many aspects of public policy. For me, we do share some platforms and so most of the jurisdictions, for example, use Victoria's incident management platform. And so we actually have some shared platforms that we can build out from, if you like, to share core elements of data. I think our challenge is we've got mountains of data, it's what's important to know, and I guess it goes to Malcolm's point. We know, for example, we have a problem with port of Townsville and Asian honey bee because of our Townsville's network into the near region. Well, should we build a pipeline between ourselves and Queensland and industry on the ground in Townsville is kind of just purely about the port of Townsville.

Andrew Tongue:

Is that one model? Is there another model which is about quarterly updates, if you like, of data and analytics between us? Do we focus on what South Australia has experienced with fruit fly and the data that they're generating? So there isn't a shortage of data, it's really what's important to know for me. And for people online who are involved in data and analytics and hungry for data, let's get a conversation going. We've got mountains of the stuff what's important to know, what do you need to know? Start that conversation, let us know, let's have an engagement because we can swamp everybody with data, but it won't be helpful. And I think the states and territories would probably feel the same thing, they could kill us with data, but what's important to know?

Nick Housego:

Katherine.

Katherine Clift:

Yeah. I think the what's important to know is a very good question. And a lot of biosecurity is around getting the good practices in place and the right behaviours. So what is the information that people need to understand what their risks are and then to act in a way that's consistent with managing those risks? Also we want really good engagement, for example, in surveillance is one area that I'd pick up on and there's fantastic opportunities there now with Citizen Science and some of the new technologies and innovations that are occurring in that space, but it has to be a two way street. So if we're asking people to help us in terms of reporting and providing information through MyPestGuide or other apps, what is it that we're able to give back to them in terms of the information that helps make it a self-reinforcing cycle?

Nick Housego:

Malcolm, you're going to be the closing voice in this forum. So if you'd like to answer this one and then we'll move to a close.

Malcolm Letts:

Thank you. I think Katherine hit it on the head. I think the challenge for us in biosecurity is moving our investment to the left-hand side of that curve that I put up. That's obviously the key, doing more in surveillance is actually reduced the cost for everyone, industry, community, more broadly of biosecurity incursion. So if we can get that data to tell us where the risks are being created, it helps everyone in relation to whether it's at the border or whether it's at our regional level where we've got established pests that might be spreading. That's a critical piece of what we are doing.

Malcolm Letts:

And there's lots of work happening across the state. I should do a call out to Victoria because they have done a fantastic job in relation to providing the other states with a platform to work off. And to Katherine in particular for setting up some governance arrangements around that to make sure that it works more effectively. So all of the states are building systems and platforms, the same way that the Commonwealth is, how we get those to work together is work in progress. And I have to say that we are making some good progress towards that. Thank you.

Andrew Tongue:

Can I ask everybody participating if you're on a family zoom call do a shout out for Australia's biosecurity system, ask people to buy into our biosecurity. We have one country, and a lot of what we take for granted can be lost if we get pest and diseases in this country and they get a foothold. So just ask people to buy in and to think about how their actions affect our biosecurity. Thanks very much, Nick.

Nick Housego:

Thank you. And this jogs my memory, the Biosecurity Awards is still open. So we'd like you to get there and nominate someone in your community, someone in your area who you think is a fitting recipient for Biosecurity Awards. It'll would be great to see that nominated from out there in the industry sectors. Thank you all for your participation and your timing today. Andrew, thank you for that last minute call. That is very powerful and good to do. At this stage, we'd like to sign off and say, thank you very much for participating. We'll let you know when the next webinar is coming. Thank you.