# 2021 National Biosecurity Forum

2021 Australian Biosecurity Awards Q&A

(Duration 57 mins 07 secs)

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## Introduction

This is the transcript of the National Biosecurity Forum – 2021 Australian Biosecurity Awards Q&A, presented by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

## Transcript

[Session begins]

Richard Morecroft: Good afternoon and welcome everyone, to the Australian Biosecurity Awards 2021 Q&A session, with our 2021 award winners. I'm Richard Morecroft. It is great to be back with you for this session and what an exciting afternoon it was yesterday, as the winners received their awards and we heard about the fantastic work that they've been doing.

And now we have a panel of our winners. In fact, we have such a big panel it's almost impossible to call it a panel. A wonderfully large group of winners gathered together for a Q&A session. Now, each of our winners have in a whole variety of ways, represented outstanding services in keeping Australia safe from pests and disease, and now we have the opportunity to speak with those winners in a Q&A session and you will be able to see them very shortly here on the screen, all named on the screen, but unfortunately, the winner of the Education Award, Associate Professor Kim Plummer, isn't able to be with us today. But to all of you, all of the award winners who are here, the very warmest of welcomes. We look forward to speaking with you shortly.

First of all, I'd like once again to welcome all of our award winners, and I'd like to begin with Dr John Virtue, who in fact received our first award in the ceremonies yesterday. And John, you, yesterday were awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award for your contribution to biosecurity, but as I think you pointed out in your acceptance, there's a lot of that lifetime to come. So, what is the next project or challenge that you will be undertaking?

Dr John Virtue: Thanks, Richard. Yes, I do feel like I've got a fair bit more to go, but it is wonderful to have been recognised for what I've done to this point in time. Now, the work I'm currently doing is working with a company called Wild Matters, and we're looking at the future of established weed management in Australia. So, we've had weeds of national significance (WONS) for about... it's been over 20 years now. What's the future of WONS? We're looking at another concept of weed issues of national significance and really how do we work from the national right down to the local level, in terms of tackling the impacts of established weeds?

Richard Morecroft : Let me, perhaps, bring in some of our other award recipients and let's look at some of the big questions. And what we might try to do, in fact, is to bounce some of these questions through or past quite a number of you to see what your varied responses are. And perhaps we could begin by looking at what you think the biggest priority for biosecurity is going to be for you over the next decade or so.

And I want to go... It was wonderful yesterday, we went live all the way to Groote Island and I'm wondering if we can bring Tom Lawton in first of all, to try and respond to this question. The winner, or one of the group winners of the Environmental Biosecurity Award. Tom, can you give us a sense of where you see the next decade going?

Tom Lawton: Yeah, thanks very much. And yeah, once again, thanks for the acknowledgement with the award yesterday. It was a pleasure and an honour to receive that along with the rangers in South 32. So, we see things probably a little bit differently up here within the Anindilyakwa where we are.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you for that, Tom. We're going to put the same question to one or two of our other award participants and Kellyanne Harris, I wondered if you were there at the moment. You were one of the winners of the Community Award for the Urban Plant Health Network. So, how do you see the decade ahead shaping up for you in terms of biosecurity priorities?

Kellyanne Harris: Yeah, absolutely. So, we targeted that urban area because they're a known entry point for the establishment of potentially exotic pests and diseases. So, if we can have a greater surveillance and more buy-in from community and backyard gardeners, we may be able to get onto something earlier and a potential easier to eradicate before it spreads outside those urban areas.

And then also, there's a lot of community and backyard gardeners focused around the ports as well, which is another key entry point for potential exotic pests and diseases. So yeah, our aim is to try and contain it within urban areas, before it gets out into those farming landscapes.

Richard Morecroft : Thank you. Ross Abberfield, from Goulburn Murray Valley (GMV) Fruit Fly Area Wide Management Program, you were the recipient of one of the Community Awards. Just hearing those comments from Kellyanne, what are your takes on the decade ahead?

Ross Abberfield: Thanks, Richard. I manage or coordinate the program, but most of the direction is coming from our governance group, which their core stakeholders being industry groups, community groups, government groups. So, I simply represent that organisation and for the last four years, we've been building an area wide management platform and we've done that successfully, but going forward, what we need to do now is to make that platform more sustainable, increase our efficiencies.

We need to expand beyond Queensland fruit fly and go in and target and look for detections and incursions by exotic species. And we can use our area wide management platform very effectively to do that, particularly with the community. And then we also... the platform is also being used by research organisations for a lot of fruit fly research trials and they're utilising the confidence and the engagement that we've built up within the broader community of the region.

And with our 3000 volunteers, I'd like to see that increase as well. And so we're continually expanding and I think going forward, if we can just make it a more sustainable project, then it will benefit everybody, in particular industry. And Adrian represents industry in the region, so he might have something to add.

Richard Morecroft: Adrian, would you like to add to that?

Adrian Conti: Yeah, I'd just like to firstly thankyou... we're quite proud to win the award and just to reiterate what Ross has said, it's been a great program that we've rolled out to the community and we've had so much engagement. Doesn't matter whether it comes from school kids making fruit fly traps and understanding the pest and how it can affect such a large industry in the Goulburn Murray Valley of horticulture. We grow a lot of Australia's fruit and vegetables in this area and it's important to us, because that's our livelihood.

Richard Morecroft: Well, it's also great to see that both of you have the award actually very prominently in front of you on the camera. Can we just have another look there at the shot with that award in place for Ross and Adrian? There it is. Thank you very much. Great that you've been able to make the award a feature of that. Thank you for those thoughts as well, much appreciated.

Let's continue this theme of looking towards the activities and the possibilities of the next 10 years. And this time, can we go to Justin Bellanger from South Coast NRM. The Environmental Biosecurity Award was the one which you accepted yesterday. Where do you see the decade ahead for the areas that you're focused on?

Justin Bellanger: Yeah, thanks. Like I said, there's a really significant challenge in recognising and formalising the role for community, particularly in general surveillance and early response actions for biosecurity. And I think we also need to look forward to funding. I hate to be the person that talks about money, but we are under resourced in our approach to biosecurity and with the increasing challenges we've seen. We've increased our transport and people movements, we really do need to significantly address that issue as well.

Richard Morecroft: Well, thank you, Justin. I think we had a little difficulty with our connection with you there. We could certainly hear your comments, so thank you for that, but we're just having a little difficulty with your vision, but let's see how we go.

Speaking of potentially a little difficulty, I know that Pohlmans Nursery, who won the Farm Biosecurity Producer of the Year and Andy O'Brien is there, but we did understand that you're in the midst, or just about to get a huge thunderstorm, so let's try and cross to you, if we can, before that thunderstorm might have an impact. Andy O'Brien, are you there and can you give us a sense of how you see the next decade going?

Andy O'Brien: Yeah, thanks Richard. We are here. The rain's eased off for the moment. Probably the biggest... maybe threats, for us going forward would be the incursions of new pests. We've had a couple in the last 12 to 18 months come into the country and everybody knows about those. The fall armyworm and serpentine leafminer. And I think going forward, we need to be sure on how we manage those future incursions that we would expect coming in over the next decade. And for us in Southeast Queensland, obviously fire ants are a large concern for us and hopefully in the next decade, we could be seriously looking at having them eradicated. That would be a massive win for everybody.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you very much, indeed and great to hear that the thunderstorm has passed. We certainly had a good connection with you. And speaking of good connections, we think and hope connection with Sarah Corcoran has been re-established. So Sarah, let me go back to that question, which I asked of you a little bit earlier in terms of the CEO role that you've relatively recently taken up at Plant Health Australia. We know you've drafted a five-year strategic plan. So, can you tell us a little about the focus for that strategic plan and what you hope to achieve?

Sarah Corcoran: Yeah, great question and thank you for bringing up our five-year strategy that we've been working on. It's been a collaborative process that we've developed with our board and our members and our specialist staff here at Plant Health Australia and we've certainly gone far and wide in the consultation to make sure that we can capture people's views and concerns and where there's opportunities for us to have a role in the next five years.

And we've developed a strategy that has three pillars and they are the partnerships and collaboration area, which is a really great strength of ours at Plant Health Australia, in bringing together key stakeholders across industry and government, particularly in the plant pest space. So, partnerships and collaboration and we're going to be focusing more around having connected strategies to improve preparedness and resilience across our members, because that is a key element of being prepared for biosecurity events. Also looking at supply chains, the wider community and how we can improve effectiveness of communications and extension.

The second pillar is managing emergencies effectively. That is a really core function of the work that we do. We're the custodians of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed and we will be looking at how we can focus on the reduced impact of plant pests on Australia's economy, environment and community. And also considering what the recovery looks like from those incidents and how we can do a much better job in putting recovery at the front of an incident when it occurs and have people thinking about what that looks like.

And finally, integrated system solutions. So, focusing on enhanced decision making and that'll be underpinned by the technology that supports it and evidence-based systems to deliver a more integrated biosecurity system and solution. So, the strategy will be about creating opportunities. As I said, propagating a future focus culture and developing those cohesive networks and improving systems.

Richard Morecroft: Well, thank you very much, indeed Sarah and great to be able to establish that contact with you. We were looking... In fact, of course, Sarah was just talking also about looking to the next five years, but we've been hearing from quite a number of our award recipients about perhaps the next 10 years and some of the biosecurity issues that they see as the major priorities during that decade ahead of us.

So, Craig Wilson from Queensland Port Authorities and Biosecurity Queensland, you received the Industry Award yesterday. Can you give us a sense of where you see the most important issues in the decade ahead being for you and your organisation?

Craig Wilson: Yeah, sure. So I guess it's been mentioned quickly previously, but the ports are a major vector for the introduction of both marine and other pest species into the country. So, certainly what we've seen with the Q-SEAS program, I think surveillance will become quite critical in the next 10 years and how we monitor and track any potential introduction in incursion of pests coming into the country, but I will hand over. Anita is the regulator, because she's probably got more insight than I have.

Anita Ramage: Yeah, thanks Craig. Yeah, I guess over the next 10 years with the continual increase in international shipping and also the re-commencement of the cruise industry that's just about to kick off again, managing the risks of introduction of pests through the biofouling pathway is probably going to be our next most significant challenge. Trying to keep the risk offshore and get that message out to industry to try and manage those vessels before they get here.

But then obviously we can't stop everything from getting here, so then trying to ensure that our surveillance, as Craig just mentioned, through our program continues. And if that surveillance can be spread further around Australia, some of the other jurisdictions are also looking to implement similar programs, so just increasing that coverage and getting that early detection capability increased I think is going to be a real key factor.

Richard Morecroft : Thank you, Anita. Now, we've... A little earlier, when we were talking to Tom Lawton from Anindilyakwa, we were having one or two little connection problems with some of our award winners, but now we've sorted some of those out. I think there's more material that Tom was quite keen to try to bring to our attention. So Tom, if you're still there, can we go back to you and can you expand a little on the points that you were making?

Tom Lawton: Yeah, sorry about that guys. So yeah, the points I was trying to make before are around the fact that the islands around Australia are basically... are essentially a safe haven or a refuge from the pests and diseases that are unfortunately present on the mainland. So a big thing for us over the next five to 10 years is hopefully seeing the introduction or development of legislation that allows indigenous ranger groups and stakeholders to have more control and especially safeguard islands such as Groote.

We've got species here that are unfortunately no longer found anywhere else in Australia and safe havens for ecosystems and endangered and threatened species. So, the greater protection of Australia's islands and archipelago groups will obviously benefit greater, more broadly Australia as a whole into the future when we can use these islands to repopulate the mainland eventually. So yeah, some island biosecurity legislation specific to areas like this and providing powers and legislative backing for rangers would be fantastic.

Richard Morecroft : Thanks. Thanks very much indeed Tom for getting back to us on that, because it is, as you've just been explaining, an extremely important area. We have some questions that have come in and I'm now going to come back to John Virtue, Dr John Virtue, because there's a question that's come in for him. And it is: what are the biggest lessons you have learned in your vast experience? What advice would you like to give us all? So John, big question, but somebody is looking for your advice.

Dr John Virtue: Big question, but I think actually I've probably heard but I was going to say anyhow, in terms of one of the key things. And coming from a small jurisdiction, I was the only weed researcher in the South Australian government, so I had to quickly build a network. And it's that collaboration I think that's fundamental, these next 10 years. Collaboration between government, between industry and between community. Working across borders between governments, just sharing expertise, sharing knowledge and I suppose getting that consistency.

That partnership approach has probably been a hallmark of how... I suppose the various groups I work with, how we've achieved success, how we built ownership. And in terms of where that could go, looking at more involvement of community and industry in decision making governments, probably moving more from a leader to a facilitator and getting that more shared approach, I think, is where we would be heading.

Richard Morecroft: That's terrific. Thank you very much indeed, John. We have another specific question that's come in and it is for Pohlmans Nursery, who as you might recall, won the Farm Biosecurity Producer of the Year Award. The question is; how has the BioSecure HACCP improved productivity and sustainability? Now, we heard previously from Andy. I think Barry Spence is there as well. Barry, would you like to address this one or would Andy prefer to take this on?

Barry Spence: Well, I've only been in the role for a short time, so I've sort of come in not long before the award was issued. I'd love to take the accolades for it, but it's really Andy that's done all the hard work behind it, so I'm more than happy to pass this one on to him.

Andy O'Brien: Yeah, sure. I think we're... We look at BioSecure HACCP as more than just a biosecurity system, but a whole plant protection system across the whole nursery. It encompasses everything we do now. It doesn't just focus on the biosecurity issues or threats and it... for us, the record keeping, it generates data. And the data that we get back really enables us to scrutinise what we do and look at... And that's where the productivity gains are coming from really.

Prior to BioSecure HACCP, we wouldn't have had the data that we have now and that's been a real advantage to what we do. And I think it's helped our integrated pest management program as well. Again, through data capture, we can actually prove what we are doing on the sustainability front and that it is working and we have the data to back that up, which makes us proud.

Richard Morecroft: Great. Thanks very much indeed Andy. And just a reminder to all of you watching as we just had then, a very specific question, do feel free to send your questions in using the Q&A box on your screen and we'll try and make sure that those questions are directed towards the appropriate award winner.

But it was interesting then hearing Andy talking about that vital importance of the data that they in particular are dealing with, but perhaps let's springboard from that to a bigger question that I might bounce around a number of you as award winners and that is that sense of what information or what program perhaps has been particularly helpful for you in preparing your business for biosecurity risks? What is the data? What is the information that has really made a big difference?

And Graeme Cooke, who is the... or from Agriculture Victoria, who was one of the recipients of the Government Award yesterday. Can we bring you in Graeme? And what's your feel about the most important kind of information in terms of your biosecurity assessments?

Dr Graeme Cooke: Well, firstly Richard, let me thank the panel on behalf of the 300 plus people in Victoria who were involved in the avian influenza response over many, many months. It's really nice for them to be recognised and thank you for that. And it is all about people in the end. You're talking specifically about what intelligence is of greatest use and I'm looking at this from the point of view of being able to understand where the risk might be in terms of the spread of a pest or a plant disease or an animal disease. And that's traceability.

I come from the northern hemisphere where they're just about getting to grips with electronic identification in sheep and cattle. And in Victoria, we have both of those and it is a huge force multiplier and saves you days in terms of understanding where the risk may be or where it's come from. And that is something I would very, very much encourage all across Australia, because it's not there in sheep in its entirety.

The other area is finding ways of really pinpointing what's important data and then being able to understand the trends happening. There's a lot of discussion about big data, but I think it's actually about just finding what's the important data and then being able to monitor the trends in them.

And the last thing I would say is, I think there may even have been a little bit of a failure to understand data that was right in front of us, which is the level of inter-state trade that has evolved and how supply chains are very, very integrated. And I think COVID has taught us that we may be separate states, but the supply of food and animals and animal products is very much inter-state and that's a rising trend and we need to mitigate that and be careful.

Richard Morecroft: Well, thank you very much, Graeme and good to hear your reinforcement of the importance of that information. But perhaps I could bring in... and I think Sarah Brown is there from the Urban Plant Health Network, one of the recipients of the Community Award. Sarah, I wonder if you could perhaps give us a little bit of a sense of what has been really important for your organisation in terms of information and what sort of data is vital for you to be able to do the things you need to do in this biosecurity zone?

Sarah Brown: I'm actually... Can you...? You can hear me? I'm actually just going to pass to Jo to answer this one.

Richard Morecroft: Okay.

Sarah Brown: She's all over this question.

Richard Morecroft: All right, Jo Chong Wah. Thank you very much, indeed. And please give us your approach to this.

Jo Chong Wah: Sure. Well, one of the things that we obviously struggled with from the beginning with the Urban Plant Health Network, was how would we measure our impact and what kind of surveillance data could we realistically expect to collect? And so part of that early start-up process was deciding on a tool to use and we agreed to use the MyPestGuide Reporter for collecting surveillance data. And that's how we ended up taking it on as a department as well. So, as a result of this project now, Agriculture Vic takes on all the Victorian reports that come through that app.

So, that's one way that we measure. Another way that we've measured our engagement is obviously through social media engagement and through our website analytics, but ultimately I think something we'd love as a department, I think, is probably something that all of us struggle with, is how do we collect what's important surveillance data and get that into AUSPestCheck? How do we match that up with our targeted surveillance that's happening at the same time? So, yeah, there's still questions that we're trying to answer, but for now, for this pilot, we've used MyPestGuide Reporter.

Richard Morecroft : Thank you very much indeed. And actually we might try and bring Sarah Corcoran back into the discussion on this topic of the most important use of data and how it's vital, looking to the plans that you are seeing ahead of you and the function of the organisation. Would you care to comment, as some of our other award winners have?

Sarah Corcoran: Thank you Richard, I'd love to. And Jo mentioned a system just then called AUSPestCheck, which is a system that Plant Health Australia developed. It's essentially what we'd call an overnight success. It's been 10 years in the making or more, but it has actually gone operational as of this year and all of the states and territories are utilising AUSPestCheck to capture their surveillance information.

And the way the system works is that it is a real time system that aggregates data and you can visualise that data on the screen via mapping, et cetera. The data is secure and it can be shared if people agree that they want to share their information. So it's a real hub of information that brings together lots and lots of surveillance efforts that are being undertaken throughout Australia.

And that's through our industry, agricultural industry representatives, as well as our government representatives. So, it's been a really valuable tool, because we know that for the future, in order for us to be facing the increased threats that we've spoken about over the last two days, we need to make sure that we've got connectivity and that it works well and that we've got information at our fingertips in real time.

There's another couple of data systems that we also have been breathing some new life into. So, the thing I like about these systems is that they've been thought about many years ago and have been operating and in place, but over time, as systems do, they need to have a bit of a renovation, be brought up to the current day standards and what those data standards look like, but they are the pest and disease image library.

So, that is a significant collection of imagery for pests and diseases that are exotic to Australia and is a really valuable reference tool, especially for our diagnosticians and the Australian plant pest database, which captures all of the reference collection information, again held across Australia and brings that all together into one central point.

So yes, looking towards our future, I think connectivity of data systems, and people's willingness to share that information will be a significant bonus to how we're going to be facing those future biosecurity threats.

Richard Morecroft : Thanks very much indeed, Sarah. And Justin Bellanger, we have a question that's come in for you. It is, a lot of your work is centered around strong community networks. How have you built these and what have you learned along the way? So one for you, Justin.

Justin Bellanger: Yeah, look, I've turned my video off. I'm sure I don't have quite enough bandwidth at the moment. We use the extensive NRM (National Resource Management) network in Western Australia as one of our primary ways of both engaging with practitioners and also the general community. It's a fantastic and quite functional group of people with expertise in biosecurity, but also in plant health and also animal health as well, so that's really useful.

But our approach has very much been an integrated and collaborative one, so we're in a fortunate position to have strong ties with universities and also government agencies, but also utilities. We work a lot in for Phytophthora Dieback area, which involves preventing soil-borne pathogens from being spread around. So we've been very fortunate that we've had Western Power and Main Roads and other utilities like that, that both understand and respect the need to have good hygiene practices and minimise their biosecurity threats.

So, it's been useful to engage with all of those. It's still a challenge with communication, but it's created a great network.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you very much indeed, Justin. Now, we have had another question that's come in either for Kellyanne Harris or Sarah Brown. Could they...? In fact, the question is, could they build on what it is that Justin's just been talking about, that strong community networks and the building of them and indeed the importance of building them?

Kellyanne Harris: Absolutely. I've just got my kids' iPads going crazy. It's like end of school time. I'm trying to turn it off and it's not working. So, absolutely. So, we found the community was so willing to be involved and it's just a matter of they didn't know how to. So, involving them in any aspect of biosecurity, for sure.

And then with us, we've had a really... Throw that iPad away. A really big aspect to the Urban Plant Health Network has been our community of practice. So for us, that network is completely invaluable having government and industry, completely working together. And it's been asked with 13 industry organisations, that whole collaborative collegiate approach is just amazing and you can certainly achieve more than you can do by yourself alone. Sarah, did you want to add anything else? I need to destroy this iPad.

Sarah Brown: No, I think you did good Kel.

Richard Morecroft: Okay, great. Thank you, Sarah, though for being available. So Duncan, can we come back to you and I'm not sure if you can recall exactly where you are, but if you could continue with the gist of that, looking at the information and the importance of information and programs to help you do the vital work that you do.

Duncan Swan: Yeah. Thanks very much, Richard. Hopefully you can hear me well now. It was a little bit-

Richard Morecroft: Yes, we've got you.

Duncan Swan: Yeah, it was a little bit ironic that I was about to talk about connectivity and couldn't achieve it. So, I think that the increasing connectivity of all of our communities and that is international and domestic connectivity, both physical and domestic are creating a whole lot of biosecurity risks. So, we've been trying to address that through a compliance program and when we're talking about compliance, it's the full spectrum of education through to enforcement.

So, letting people know and really trying to educate people about the risks that they could be creating, particularly in the online environment, by selling or trading an invasive species right through to a really strong enforcement. And we've had a really good response from people. I think that when people see that the government's saying something and following up with that with action, it builds a lot of confidence in the community around biosecurity. So, that's probably been a real achievement that we've been able to achieve here.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you very much, Duncan. And yes, great that we were able to reconnect with you. Thank you for making those adjustments, because as you say that connectivity is so important. Now, we've had a question that's come in, which probably can relate to, well, in fact, many of you, so let me perhaps first bounce it to Dr John Virtue. But the question is basically, can you tell us about a significant moment for you over your career relating to biosecurity? A really significant moment that has been, perhaps a moment of change, a moment of difference. Can you give us an insight?

Dr John Virtue: Yes. It takes me right back to 1999, Richard. Myself and a colleague, Rebecca Lang, we organised the first International Workshop on Weed Risk Assessment in Adelaide. And very young and fresh and what are we doing? We're too naive to pay it off. And that led the way I suppose, to how around Australia... around the world, how we predict weeds and how we prioritise weeds.

And it really changed a lot of the mindset in terms of people deciding, why am I working on that weed or why am I working on that pest rather than this one? And what's the most appropriate management action? So from that conference, it led on to Weed Risk Management Systems and all sorts of things and all sorts of collaborations, but that really has, I suppose, changed a lot of the approach. So we're much more strategic in how we manage established pests.

Richard Morecroft: Thanks, John. Actually, we're going to leave that question for a moment, because I can bounce that around to quite a number of our other award winners in a moment or two, but we've had a very specific question that's literally just come in, either for Darby O'Sullivan or Tom Lawton from Anindilyakwa and... Or from up on Groote Island. But the question is; you're in your fifth year of a collaborative program between South32 GEMCO and the Anindilyakwa Land Council, what is the key to the success of this partnership? So, I think we heard from you before Tom, I don't know whether Darby, you want to chime in first here, but what do you see as the key to the success of that partnership?

Darby O'Sullivan: Thanks for that. I think the key to the success of our partnership is the collaboration we have between both South 32 and the ALC Land Council and the Land and Sea Rangers. We are working towards now... For 60 years on Groote Island, South32 have been here as a mining company. Within the next 10 to 15 years, that's going to change. So, we are working towards what does that look like post South 32 not being here and that collaboration is a really big key for us going forward.

Richard Morecroft: Great. Thank you. Did you want to add to that at all, Tom?

Tom Lawton: No, I think he just sort of... yeah, Darby really hit the nail on the head there. It's just demonstrating working together. There's common ground and interests there and we're fortunate enough that both the Land Council and South 32 have seen those gaps and come together to form this program. So yeah, that was pretty much it.

Richard Morecroft: All right. Thank you both very much indeed. And actually we're going to bounce back to Duncan Swan because there's a specific question that's come in relating to your activities, which says, can you tell us about the BQ Officer and how that helped decrease online offending? So Duncan, can you respond to that one?

Duncan Swan: Yeah, absolutely Richard. So BQ Officer was a Facebook profile that we created and the reason why that's significant is because most accounts that organisations use, they're not private profiled, so they're not like your own personal Facebook account, so we can't message directly to other people with them. And one of the issues that we have, when people particularly are selling things on Facebook Marketplace, is you can't message them from our corporate account.

So, we went through the process of engaging with Facebook Marketplace or Facebook I should say and getting them to recognise that personal profile, BQ Officer, as a legitimate government account so that we could message people directly on Facebook Marketplace. So it's basically giving us a tool to engage with people on Facebook that we didn't have previously and it took quite a lot of work from our DAF Digital Communications team to do that, but it's been really successful. We use that account all the time.

Richard Morecroft: Great. Well, great to hear that it works and it was a very practical solution to that. Another question has come in and this one is for Ross Abberfield and Adrian Conti. Why is community engagement and education so crucial in managing biosecurity risks, such as fruit fly?

Ross Abberfield: Thanks, Richard. Really, it's summed up... I think everybody has covered it in the two key words, being collaboration and ownership. It's all about sending the message out there and the message that we've been sending out continuously over the past four years has been based on the data situation. So, all of our data is spread across all of our communications. It's on all of our print, it's on television, radio, social media, it's in our schools education program, it's in our workshops, our grower workshops, community workshops, it's in our tree removal program, it's in our research trials.

That data, essentially, is gathered from our tracking grids. So very early in the piece, we established our tracking grids across the GMV region, which is approximately a hundred and... Sorry, 15 and a half thousand square kilometres, five local government areas and we have approximately 450 traps located throughout those areas and they're targeted towards the horticultural growing zones.

Those traps or the trapping grids, are broken down into an urban trapping grid, a rural or commercial trapping grid and an SIT or sterile insect technique trapping grid, which we are trialling in Cobram. The information from those trapping grids is gathered, so the flies accounted from the traps on a weekly or fortnightly basis by our field officers, that data is then processed by our researchers who analyse it and interpret that information. It's then presented to the public in monthly columns in all the newspapers across the media.

So we have community columns, we have grower columns, we have grower organisation outlooks, which are a more technical version and then we have newsletters on our webpage and social media and everything like that. So, that information goes out monthly, it's continually updated and most of all, it targets the hotpots where the fly numbers are increasing, so we can target those, increase our tree removals and increase our awareness and education in those areas.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you very much, Ross. And thank you to everyone who's been sending questions in. We have another one that's come in specifically for Craig and Anita. That's Craig Wilson and Anita Bennett from the Queensland Port Authorities and Biosecurity Queensland. The question for them is; we heard the eDNA technology earlier today, what has your experience been using the technology and how has it helped in your program? So, Anita and Craig, would you be happy to address that?

Anita Ramage: Yep, certainly. Thanks, Richard. Yeah, the eDNA technology and using molecular diagnostics has really changed the way that we manage our biosecurity risks in the marine space. So, it's really allowed us to analyse a large number of samples relatively quickly and at a lot cheaper price as well. So we're getting more information quickly, which is obviously better. The earlier we're on to something, the better chance we do have of doing something about it.

And because we've taken a metabarcoding approach, rather than just getting a yes or no as to a specific target list of pests, we're actually getting a snapshot of the biodiversity in the samples that we are collecting, which provides extra information for ports to use as well. So, it's a fantastic tool and it's rapidly evolving. It's continually evolving and we're really grateful for the information that it's providing us at the moment to enable us to really focus down how we utilise our resources to really target the risks.

Craig Wilson: I certainly think cost effectiveness and the timelines as well is critical to us. Traditionally, you're having to send samples off to a taxonomist that... You have to find a taxonomist in the first place and then it obviously takes time to identify a species and that's relying on port staff knowing what a potential pest species look like.

So, certainly the eDNA technology is much better than that traditional approach and as Anita said, it also provides us with additional information on what other natural species are occurring in our ports. So, it gives us a really good data set and information on what's happening in our natural environment, which is very useful for environmental management.

Richard Morecroft: Anita and Craig, thank you. And our next question, which has come in is for Graeme Cooke from Agriculture Victoria, who were one of the winners of the Government Award yesterday. And the question to Graeme is this; what was the biggest challenge in managing an outbreak during COVID-19? Graeme.

Dr Graeme Cooke: Well, Richard, at the time it was a challenge, a huge challenge, but we actually think it has done other responses a service, because we proved that it was possible to do it and do it effectively. As someone who is sort of sitting in the centre, I think awareness of what's happening on the ground, that's difficult. Very hard to substitute a computer screen, effective as it has been for us all, with being in the room and being able to dig down and ask further questions about things.

Also, actually delivering on the ground was very complicated because of social distancing, people not being able to travel in the same vehicle and so on, like that. So it really prolonged the logistics side of things. And I think part of our response is actually getting through it together and it was not the same feeling of everyone punching through problems, when they had to do it at a considerable distance from each other.

But as I said, I think it has actually given Australia options in terms of how to resource. We resourced some of our teams from across Australia and thank you very much to those states who donated experts in terms of epidemiology and so on. And we showed that a different way was possible, but it was not easy. And we will possibly put forward a hybrid way of doing it, but we felt that in the end, if you delivered on the ground effectively, in terms of the logistical operations that had to be delivered by people physically, then it was entirely possible to lift out expertise elsewhere and perhaps have them in the positions for longer as well because they didn't have to go through a roster as frequently.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you, Graeme. And we're going to bounce back to Craig and Anita now, because a very specific question has just come in for them. And Craig and Anita, Craig Wilson and Anita Bennett, the question is: Q-SEAS is being expanded into new areas. Do you see this being rolled out into other parts of Australia?

Craig Wilson: I'll go. Obviously Q-SEAS is the Queensland version of the Murray Pest Surveillance Program and currently it's in five major Queensland ports, but it's looking... Currently, we're looking at expanding that into other Queensland ports and there certainly is the opportunity to expand that into other states. WA have their own similar program, so all the WA ports are doing a similar marine pest surveillance program, but there certainly is the opportunity to expand that into other state boards throughout the country.

Anita Ramage: Yeah, there are definitely some other jurisdictions that are currently looking at implementing similar programs and are running some pilots at the moment. So yeah, it's great. We're looking to get a lot more coverage around the whole of Australia.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you very much indeed. We heard... I think it was when Ross was speaking a short time ago. I'm hoping I'm attributing this correctly, Ross, but I think there was some emphasis on collaboration and ownership were the two words which were emphasised. And I'm wondering if we can, perhaps from a number of our award recipients, just get a little bit of a sense of how central these two elements have been in their functional success of the moment and perhaps the way in which they look to the future. Could we come back to you, Kellyanne Harris on collaboration and ownership in terms of the work that you've been doing, how critical have they been?

Kellyanne Harris: Oh, it's complete... It's been the backbone to our whole project, is collaboration. Not only with our project team been in wider Agriculture Victoria teams. Our team actually sits outside of biosecurity’s. We're highly collaborative with the biosecurity team within Agriculture Victoria and then outside of that, our community of practice, which underpins our whole model of how we're delivering this, is made up of 13 different industry organisations that we work with. We meet on a regular basis and we discuss what we need, what issues and what information we want to get across and they help us derive that content.

So, we couldn't do it without those organisations and the video that will be posted on a social media about this project just shows how much this project means to them and how working together and being that sort of collegiate has been fantastic and it's contributed to greater outcomes. So, that's just within the model and then working with the community.

And looking forward, if we can keep this pilot continuing, it'll be further developing that collaboration with the backyard and community gardeners. So as Graeme mentions, we've done most of these projects in Victoria during COVID lockdown. So, the Melbourne Flower and Garden Show was cancelled. Every other event that we were preparing to go to face-to-face was cancelled, so we really had to have that collaboration with community in a different way, and an innovative and unique digital, virtual, all sorts of different ways that we could do it. So it will be really good to combine that with face-to-face collaboration with our target audience as well going forward.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you very much Kellyanne. And we've had a very simple question that has come through that I think we won't be able to ask to everybody by any means, but I'd like to bounce it off one or two award winners. And that is just very simply; what does winning this award mean to you? And so could I go, perhaps... I'm thinking, for example, with an independent operation like Pohlmans Nursery. Andy O'Brien, this award, what has it meant to you?

Andy O'Brien: Well, as Chris said yesterday, we are incredibly humbled, I guess. We see this as our day-to-day operation. We operate under the program, but it's just what we do. We don't see it as anything major, I guess... or different to what we do on the day to day. So yeah, a national award on the national stage, it's a huge level of recognition for the work that's been put in over the last almost 10 years.

Richard Morecroft: Well, thank you very much and it's good to hear that. Can we cross back Groote Island and Tom and Darby, if you're still there? Tom, for you... not only for you, but for the community and for the collaborative partnership that you're involved with, what's your sense of how significant an award like this can be?

Tom Lawton: Yeah, look, it's demonstrated what can be achieved, I think, when different organisations and groups do work together. Achieving this or getting this award is something that we are absolutely stoked with. It's purely... feels like a great recognition of the hard work that's gone into it.

As for the community and for Groote Island generally, it's obviously demonstrated what can be achieved and the real efforts that we're going to, to protect Groote from not just cane toads, but all introduced and invasive plants, animals and diseases.

So yeah, we hope that the Torres Strait keep reaching out to us, the Kiwis and anyone else that wants to know and hear about what we're doing, because we are more than happy to share our successes and also our learning outcomes from working in this space.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you. And Sarah Corcoran, if we can come back to you, how significant is it to be able to have the work that you do awarded in this way?

Sarah Corcoran: A great privilege, Richard and one that I'm just so extremely proud to be acknowledged in the same league as the scientist, is what Dr Kim Ritman was. He was a great colleague and a mentor and a friend and I really learned a lot from him working with him over the years and to be put in that same category is certainly a big achievement. And of course I haven't got here on my own. There's been many people along the way that I've had the good fortune to work with that are like-minded and want to achieve the same great outcomes. So yeah, I do feel very privileged and honoured.

Richard Morecroft: Thank you, Sarah. And we began our discussion this afternoon with the winner of a Lifetime Award, Dr John Virtue. John, I know a lot has been made of the lifetime nature of the award and the things that you are looking forward to as well as the things you've done, but how significant at this stage in that lifetime, is the award you just received?

Dr John Virtue: It was really, I suppose... I've made the jump from government to private industry and I suppose it was quite affirming that, okay, I've got the interest and the capability and the network, but probably I think the main thing for me is just having found out who nominated me. It was just this terrific network of weed professionals around the country that got together. And we work really well together and we will continue to work well together. And that to me, I suppose, is the main lesson and the main... The award, I suppose, like I said to a number of people yesterday, is actually... it wouldn't have happened without all of you and how we work together, so I really appreciate that.

Richard Morecroft: Well, thank you very much, John Virtue. We appreciate it too and thank you. And congratulations, once again, to all of our winners. All of their details are going to be available to you. If you would like to follow up or learn any more about any of them, all their details will be available on the department website, which of course is awe.gov.au, so do find out a few further details and of course, all of these recordings as well of the various sessions. Today's session and the other sessions will be available also on the website in a few days’ time, down the track.

So, thank you very much indeed to all of our award winners for joining us, but also especially thank you to everybody else for joining us for the last two days for our forum and for our awards and now finally for this awards panel discussion. Many thanks of course, to our award winners for their time and for sharing their stories this afternoon. And thank you very much for your participatory questions. We hope that you have found the 2021 Biosecurity Forum constructive and informative. It's been a pleasure to be involved. Goodbye for now.

[Session ends]