



Plant Health Committee Communiqué—PHC48

The Plant Health Committee (PHC) held its forty-eighth meeting at the National Arboretum in Canberra (ACT) in November 2015. During the meeting, field trips were undertaken to Canberra Truffière farm—which is one of the largest on the east coast of Australia—and to the site of the elm leaf beetle management program. These outings were extremely informative and again demonstrated the breadth and depth of issues plant health managers handle.

Issues considered by the Committee at the meeting are detailed below.

▪ National policy and strategy

The committee reconfirmed their priorities for 2015-16 based on discussion of the outcomes of the review of the National Plant Biosecurity Strategy undertaken by Plant Health Australia, current reforms already in progress and direction from the National Biosecurity Committee. The priorities range from continuing the work to strengthen national surveillance and diagnostic arrangements for plant biosecurity through mechanisms and processes already in place, to providing more focus and effort on specific projects such as e-certification and pest prioritisation. Implementation of the National Plant Biosecurity Strategy also remains a priority for the committee.

The committee also received an update on the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB) Implementation Taskforce under the National Biosecurity Committee, including the objective of the taskforce, its role in driving implementation of the IGAB priority reform areas and the development of reporting arrangements.

▪ Risk analysis, trade and market access

The committee continued discussions on the progress and priorities in reforming trade arrangements. This remains a focus area to ensure the system keeps pace with contemporary practices and new technologies. Outcomes from these discussions are described below.

- Jurisdictions will continue to ensure that their area freedom certification aligns to the national *Framework for Certifying Pest Area Freedom*. This body of work was initiated approximately 18 months ago to harmonise area freedom certification arrangements across the jurisdictions and to ensure alignment to the relevant international standards.
- The committee discussed the ongoing arrangements for management of fruit fly in Australia which are in line with international standards and national codes of practice and supplemented by both historical data and observations of specific on-going surveillance of protected areas. Providing clear guidance to industry to maintain or improve market access is challenging and will be one of the aspects addressed through the newly established National Fruit Fly Council.
- The committee has been thinking through a possible framework to support using third party services for a range of biosecurity activities. An initial desk top study has been conducted on third parties providing surveillance data to support area freedom claims for citrus and has shown the potential benefit of such a framework. The committee is now looking to engage industry on the concept and possible requirements.
- The committee were provided a presentation on the *BioSecure HACCP* program initiated by Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA). This program is currently being implemented



through a national 3 year trial. Members continue to support this initiative and will put in place permanent regulatory arrangements under which third party plant health certification programs can operate.

- The committee discussed the benefits and barriers to the development of a national horticulture biosecurity accreditation scheme proposed by Plant Health Australia, AusVeg, Horticulture Innovation Australia and the Commonwealth and supported continued progression of this concept.
- The committee discussed the progress of developing national management strategies for cucumber green mottle mosaic virus and potato spindle tuber viroid and possible next steps through Plant Health Australia in developing a framework to support this activity into the future.
- The committee discussed the challenges and complexity of domestic trade in plants and plant products and will be providing advice to the National Biosecurity Committee on improvement and ongoing sustainability of domestic trading arrangements. As part of their deliberations, the committee reviewed non-conformances related to interstate trade and noted the system, although large, is working well.
- The committee discussed the expected release of a number of import policies and assessments by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources over the next few months. Although a Commonwealth responsibility, states and territories put a large amount of effort into ensuring the analysis covers all the pests of concern and the management measures proposed will protect their industries.

▪ **Diagnostics and Surveillance**

The committee continued discussions on the benefits of nationally consistent standards to capture surveillance data and agreed to the progressive implementation of the National Minimum Data Standard for Plant Pest Surveillance ensuring surveillance data shared at the national level is consistent in format and comprehensive.

Four new working groups to support national surveillance and diagnostics were established and relate to: diagnostic surge capacity, general surveillance, surveillance protocols and diagnostics to support field surveillance.

A paper on the Victorian CropSafe program was provided. The committee were very supportive of the program, and discussed the benefits of capturing data to support pest absence claims, the easy link to relevant growers that the network provides, and the potential application of this type of system to other jurisdictions. A workshop is proposed between governments and the grains industry to discuss how to enhance and better integrate current surveillance arrangements.

▪ **Management of pests**

The committee noted the progress achieved by the honey bee industry in developing a national Biosecurity Code of Practice and National Bee Biosecurity Program. The honey bee industry is an example of a proactive agricultural industry that is demonstrating national leadership and facilitating an effective industry/government biosecurity partnership. The committee endorsed the establishment of the Bee Biosecurity Steering Committee to oversee the national program as well as work towards harmonising relevant regulations between states and territories.

The committee also discussed the improvements to the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program that



Plant Health Australia have led in recent years and the current project to statistically review and redesign the surveillance program. This review and redesign is timely and will provide confidence that surveillance levels for high priority bee pests across the continuum are appropriate.

The committee also received an update on the establishment of a Forest Health and Biosecurity Subcommittee under the Australian Forest Products Association. The committee congratulated the forest industry on their autonomy and enthusiasm in establishing this group and welcome continued engagement with them.

▪ Emergency preparedness and response

The committee noted the work of the Karnal Bunt Working Group which is developing a risk mitigation strategy for Karnal bunt disease of wheat. This strategy is being developed in consultation with all the affected stakeholders and will culminate in a simulation exercise to test the strategy. Committee members agreed to undertake functional activities in their jurisdictions to test delimiting surveillance as part of Exercise Haryana, a simulation exercise associated with the exotic grain pest Karnal bunt.

The committee noted progress made in broadening the current, emergency animal-disease focused rapid response team to a broader cross-sectoral biosecurity resource; and appreciated the support expressed by all jurisdictions, Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia to date on this initiative, which will enhance the capacity nationally in dealing with biosecurity threats.

The committee noted the report commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources on national preparedness capability. Overall, the analysis found that the current system is effective in responding to plant pest incursions; however, aspects of the system relating to the early detection of pests could be strengthened. This will be progressed by the Department.

▪ Research, Development, Innovation and Extension

The committee, as a subset of the Plant Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre's Regulatory Advisory Panel, provided input into the planning process for delivery and adoption (impact) of PBCRC research outputs. This is an important process that will ensure the benefits of investment into research are realized.

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