Australian Government
Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper (Biosecurity) Forum, Canberra

Communiqué – July 2017

The department held a White Paper biosecurity forum on Thursday, 13 July, at the Hyatt Hotel Canberra. Departmental delegates met with a range of industry, environment and community groups to discuss the Australian government's $200 million investment to 'improve biosecurity surveillance and analysis to better target critical biosecurity risks' through the $4 billion *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper*.

A significant amount of work is underway across biosecurity areas of the department to deliver the White Paper measures. Subject matter experts from several business areas discussed the various aspects of the projects along with the value and benefits to stakeholders.

What was discussed?

The Secretary, Daryl Quinlivan, opened the forum and outlined the opportunities for Australia's agricultural sector, explaining how the White Paper is positioning the sector for prosperity. He also discussed growth in international trade and passenger movements, and the accompanying biosecurity risk arising from increasing volumes of goods and passengers from countries which Australia sources its imports becoming more diverse.

First Assistant Secretary, Matthew Koval, delivered the keynote address and highlighted the various projects that sit within the four key themes, being:

- strengthening biosecurity surveillance
- building community-based engagement
- growing scientific capability
- improving information and analytical capability.

Following the plenary session, attendees split into breakout sessions covering these four key themes.

Strengthening biosecurity surveillance

This session examined the projects involving strengthening the biosecurity surveillance system, building capacity and capability domestically and offshore, and increasing the scope of general and specific surveillance. Attendees learnt how the projects are helping to detect and respond to biosecurity threats, what pests and diseases are present and where, which in turn provides evidence of freedom from pests to support market access. Subject matter experts touched on topics relating to onshore animal health surveillance, plant health surveillance, offshore surveys, Torres Strait infrastructure, and the Enterprise Surveillance Project.

Building community-based engagement

Subject matter experts provided information on how this measure is developing and implementing strategies to assist with community-based action.

Attendees discussed the extended use of the Indigenous Rangers Programme, better utilising their invaluable local knowledge of the land, to help combat biosecurity threats and risks. There was a focus on efforts under this measure in northern Australia and how, due to its climate and closeness to other countries, it presents different biosecurity risks. An overview was provided of how the department is managing and implementing activities to raise awareness about biosecurity in the north that will also benefit the rest of the nation.

Growing scientific capability

Scientific analysis is an integral part of managing biosecurity risk. This session provided an overview of how the department is boosting its scientific capability by employing more scientific staff to assess biosecurity risks for a range of animal and plant materials. Subject matter experts discussed how the department is analysing risks through more efficient approaches and working closely with stakeholders through liaison officers.

Attendees discussed the department's scientific capability, how we are improving our ability to conduct evidence-led risk assessment, the diagnosis of pests and diseases, and how the department is applying appropriate treatments and controls to goods moving through the border. Other topics included technical market access; a review of import conditions; modern diagnostics; a review of vegetable seeds; pest group policies; Innovative Risk Analysis; and stakeholder engagement.

Improving information and analytical capability

This session covered topics relating to the improvement of the department's biosecurity information systems and analytical capabilities. Nearly 25 per cent of the funding has been dedicated to strengthening and improving the department's integrated information systems and analytical capabilities. Subject matter experts provided an overview of the Biosecurity Integrated Information System (BIIS) and how the allocation of this funding will go a long way to improve our ability to better manage biosecurity risks.

Information was also shared about how the department is enhancing its intelligence capability by rolling out improvements to its International Biosecurity Intelligence System (IBIS) project, a web-based system that automatically searches the internet for biosecurity information from all over the world. IBIS generates reports used for early identification of biosecurity trends and problems to help us manage biosecurity risks. Additionally, funds have been used to employ staff to further develop the system, create updated training materials and implement the system more broadly to its subscribers.

Common themes:

A number of common themes emerged throughout the breakout sessions including:

- opportunities for the department to further collaborate and coordinate with state and territory governments and industry on White Paper biosecurity initiatives
- potential partnerships with key stakeholders that may help achieve business needs more effectively and ensure outcomes remain relevant to holistic government objectives, industry and the wider community
- increased two-way sharing of information to avoid duplication and help ensure government and industry initiatives are complementary
- ways in which the White Paper biosecurity initiatives will leave a legacy of improved biosecurity outcomes into the future.

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