

National Biosecurity Forum Report

The 2016 National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) National Biosecurity Forum (forum) was held in Canberra on Tuesday 8 November 2016.

The forum brought together 80 representatives from across industry and government for a day of workshops that focused on improving the management of Australia's biosecurity system. The forum built on a series of seven regional roundtables, which were run in conjunction with the NBC.

The forum opened with an address by Daryl Quinlivan, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, who took the opportunity to highlight some of the biosecurity successes in 2016.

The remainder of the day focused on four workshop sessions, where participants discussed the key challenges and potential solutions for the four most prevalent key themes raised during the regional roundtables:

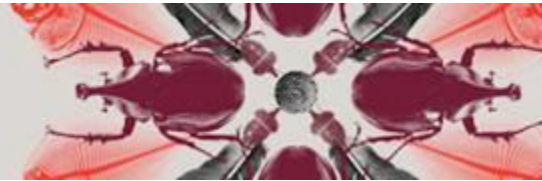
1. Shared responsibility
2. On-farm biosecurity
3. Community awareness
4. Surveillance capacity

A key focus of the forum was building a shared understanding of biosecurity and the part each of us play. The conversations from these sessions are summarised below.

The forum concluded with an update on the Intergovernmental Agreement of Biosecurity (IGAB) Review from Dr Wendy Craik, Chair of the IGAB Review Panel.

A copy of the agenda is provided at [Attachment A](#).

A copy of the presenter biographies is provided at [Attachment B](#).



1. Shared responsibility

Presented by Mr Duncan Rowland, Livestock Biosecurity Network.

One of the key issues raised by Mr Rowland was that the language used to describe shared responsibility tends to have negative connotations. Words like 'cost shifting' and 'risk creator' can lead to a negative response when associated with shared responsibility. A lack of a clear definition of shared responsibility leads to concern from industry and community as to what shared responsibility means.

Suggested actions:

- A positive, simple definition of 'shared responsibility', and better understanding and acceptance of the definition
- Promote small wins to demonstrate the benefits and to break the negative connotations of shared responsibility

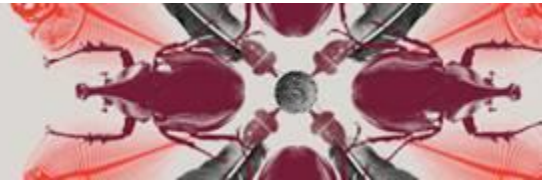
Mr Rowland suggested that there could be a role for government in putting mechanisms (whether legislative or through funding) in place for shared responsibility to be fully adopted and for all stakeholders to understand what their responsibilities are (and why). There needs to be a guide/process for defining responsibility (leadership) and to find drivers (incentives) that will encourage participation.

Suggested actions:

- Clearly defined roles – to allow expectations to be set and met
- Define risk – then allocate responsibility for managing that risk

Other concerns raised in table discussions:

- Industry and community have a perception of conflict/disagreement between federal and state governments which leads to a lack of confidence in the government.
- Funding cuts have led to the loss of extension officers/government staff on the ground. Extension officers lead surveillance; it is an alert system we no longer have.
- How to reward good practitioners of biosecurity practices i.e. farms with quality assurance programs.



2. On-farm biosecurity

Presented by Ms Dianne Fullelove, Australian Melon Association.

The key message from Ms Fullelove's on-farm biosecurity discussion was that "you are only as good as your neighbour".

Ms Fullelove noted that in an incursion, strong on-farm biosecurity can allow for continued trade and minimise the impact of the incursion for all involved. There is the risk though that when things are going well, complacency can lead to on-farm biosecurity being taken for granted, and it remains true that industry fear the consequences of reporting an incursion.

Suggested actions:

- Government needs to investigate, develop and promote clear reporting guidelines, as well as support to incentivise industry to report
- Farmers should know how biosecurity risks are most likely to enter their property such as through resources, machinery and people (pathway analysis)

Ms Fullelove suggested that there is a need to raise the public profile of biosecurity in order to support a culture of strong on-farm biosecurity as everybody's responsibility.

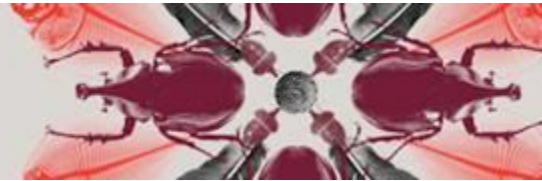
Government and industry need to encourage learning at all levels of society through use of relatable personal stories, peer-to-peer discussions, and the use of trusted ambassadors.

At a minimum, a biosecurity plan should focus on:

- The risk of entry of pests into the production area
- The risk of transmission between production units
- The risk of release of pathogens and pests from the farm

Other concerns raised in table discussions:

- Incentives need to be more than just financial. It is important to instil good biosecurity practices and to get farmers talking.
- High levels of communication need to be maintained between all parties.
- New ways to engage need to be explored and trialled. For example, could social media platforms be used in place of field officers?
- We know pests and disease hazards are out there. There needs to be an effort from both governments and industry to raise the community's awareness to care about the ones that may affect them and do something about them.



3. Community awareness

Presented by Dr Sarah Britton, NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Peri Urban Program.

Dr Britton presented a series of projects that NSW DPI has undertaken in the peri urban space, with a strong focus on socialising biosecurity and the challenges that this poses outside the primary production industries.

There are difficulties in reaching all audiences, such as the problems with a 'one-size-fits-all' message, and the need for the constant renewal of information to sustain awareness. However, there are opportunities to engage broad audiences through social media in order to share biosecurity messages, but you have to service specific subject matter issues in order to sustain interest and momentum that translates information into action.

Suggested actions:

- Actively respond to issues/concerns raised during engagement activities. Failure to respond equates to a loss of participation and confidence in biosecurity activities
- Have a consistent model of engagement instead of 'surge then nothing'
- During consultation and engagement, ask the audience for suggestions on how things could be done, instead of just telling them

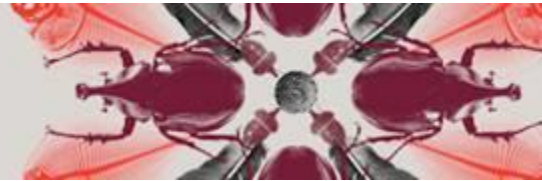
Dr Britton noted that a key issue is how to best measure and report on improvement of community awareness. How improvements to awareness are assessed is an important consideration, and should inform how we present the biosecurity narrative. Success might be best measured in basic statistics, such as who attends events, how many and where from.

Suggested actions:

- Information from citizen science programs needs to be met with increased diagnostic and communications capacity/resourcing by government
- Identify and explain what the reward of community awareness is for all involved: government – industry – community
- Identify where government and industry will be able to effect the outcome the most

Other concerns raised in table discussions:

- The need to adopt new technologies such as 3D printing models of specimens to educate the community about likely risks.
- New ideas for community engagement like a biosecurity badge for Guides and Scouts or free or low cost attendance at biosecurity conferences/workshops for community members.



4. Surveillance capacity

Presented by Ms Kathleen Plowman, Animal Health Australia and Mr Greg Fraser, Plant Health Australia.

A key direction for this presentation on surveillance capacity was around what the benefits are, not just to industry and government, but to all Australians. Through a combined approach, Ms Plowman and Mr Fraser presented arguments for why we need to improve our surveillance capacity, citing improved detection times, prevention of significant diseases and potential increased costs if biosecurity risks are not detected early.

The presentation also explored the need to be positioned to verify and provide data to maintain market access. Overseas testing and verification systems are becoming more advanced, and our clean-green reputation and the fact that our product is high quality is no longer enough. Surveillance is critical to support our claims of pest/disease freedom.

Suggested actions:

- There should be consistency with software platforms and compatibility with other systems to allow sharing of surveillance data
- There should be clear aims/objectives of a surveillance system at all levels

Ms Plowman and Mr Fraser noted the timing and ease around data sharing, and the associated problems, was another key focus. There is a need to expedite reporting timeframes, and to ensure that data/material is accessible to ‘front line’ operators (extracting information from database). One of the suggested ways forward in this regard was to investigate the use of smart technologies in the surveillance space, rather than using officers. This reduces costs and increases effectiveness through real-time testing and reporting.

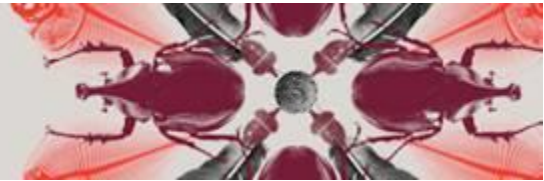
There was also discussion about whether there is value in monitoring other sources of information for surveillance outcomes, such as social media.

Other concerns raised in table discussions:

- Privacy issues can hinder the timely sharing of information, and need to be taken into consideration in dealing with incursions.
- The need for an adaptable “priority pests/weeds/diseases” list to match changing priorities.
- The issue that conversations around who is responsible for funding often lead to inaction, and there is a need to combat this.



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture
and Water Resources



A way forward

Following the success of the 2016 state and territory roundtables, the NBC has agreed to deliver roundtables in their states and territories in 2017, using and improving on the template trialled in 2016. The National Biosecurity Forum will also continue in 2017.

If you did not get a chance to do so on the day, it would be helpful if you could complete the feedback form—your feedback will help us in our planning for the 2017 events.

The roundtable secretariat is liaising with NBC representatives to work out the dates for the 2017 events so we can give you enough time to plan to attend.

Given the interest in the roundtables and forum, we would like to reach out to as many stakeholders as possible next year.

See you in 2017.