

New South Wales Biosecurity Roundtable report

Thank you for attending the 2017 National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) Biosecurity Roundtable held in Sydney, New South Wales on 2 August 2017.

This event was hosted by the NBC, together with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, the NSW government Department of Primary Industries and the ACT Government Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

There were over 80 participants at the roundtable representing a wide range of organisations including meat, eggs, dairy and horticulture industries, zoo, wildlife, apiary, aquaculture and animal husbandry representatives, as well as state, territory and local government.

What we heard from participants

- Biosecurity surveillance and monitoring could be boosted by educating and empowering the community to participate.
- More work is needed to lift the adoption of biosecurity standards such as biosecurity plans and quality assurance schemes across industry, particularly in the peri-urban space.
- We need better drivers for change as well as incentives and disincentives to improve biosecurity compliance.
- We need to work together with consistent messaging and action across the country.
- Building confidence in reporting and response processes will improve planning and reporting outcomes, including through increasing general awareness of biosecurity.

Following the official welcome by Amber Parr from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, Dr Bruce Christie from the NSW Department of Primary Industries provided an Acknowledgement of Country and a welcome on behalf of the NSW government. Cameron Kerr from Taronga Zoo also welcomed participants and reinforced the importance of biosecurity at the zoo.

Morning presentations began with biosecurity updates from NSW, ACT and Australian governments. Dr Christie (NSW) discussed the importance of improving growth in the value of primary industries in NSW and emphasised that this was underpinned by a strong focus on biosecurity and food safety. He talked about projects that are increasing biosecurity knowledge in the community through initiatives such as competitions in primary schools and public risk workshops. Dr Christie also spoke about the challenges to emergency management presented by generational change in staffing.

Stephen Hughes (Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, ACT) talked about the ACT government's focus on improving biosecurity in the territory by developing a Biosecurity Strategy, strengthening emergency preparedness and improving engagement with stakeholders. Mr Hughes spoke of the strong emphasis and large investment in environmental weed biosecurity and gave some examples of exotic insect surveillance around Canberra airport and engaging rural landholders to assist in feral animal monitoring. A major challenge for the ACT is that a large portion of the land in the ACT (57 per cent) is owned and managed by the ACT government.

Marion Healy (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources) spoke about the importance of shared responsibility and collaboration in the face of increasing passenger, cargo and mail movements; and the growing diversity of supply chains. She gave an overview of recent national investment and activities including implementation of the *Biosecurity Act 2015* in June 2016, the \$200 million allocated to biosecurity under the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper as well as the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity and National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement reviews.

Matt Brand, (CEO, NSW Farmers) provided an update on behalf of industry in NSW. Mr Brand spoke of the importance of agriculture to the NSW economy and emphasised that farmers were at the forefront of managing biosecurity. He said that industry supports the new NSW legislation but that it needs to be backed up by funding to

implement reforms. He noted that more work needs to be done to lift the adoption of biosecurity standards such as biosecurity plans and quality assurance schemes across industry, particularly in the peri-urban space.

Andrew Cox (CEO, Invasive Species Council) provided an update on environmental biosecurity. Mr Cox highlighted the serious impact that invasive species have on biodiversity and extinction rates. He also highlighted some recent achievements in environmental biosecurity including control of bitou bush on the mid-north coast of NSW and the removal of over 14 million sea spurses by 'SPRATS', an adventure volunteering group in Tasmania. Following the updates, a Q&A panel answered questions submitted by participants prior to the Roundtable.

After a short break, Dr Christie spoke about biosecurity reform in NSW through introduction of the NSW *Biosecurity Act 2015* and noted that implementation had so far been a success. Julia Harvey (NSW DPI) discussed the NSW Biosecurity Attitudinal Survey. The survey provided a benchmark of the current state of biosecurity knowledge in NSW and highlighted the need for a biosecurity awareness and knowledge campaign and capacity building for local land services, local control authorities, industry organisations, primary producers, vets and agribusinesses.

Dr Karrie Rose from Taronga Zoo presented a case study about the Bellinger River Turtle. Dr Rose stepped participants through the response to an outbreak of a mystery pathogen which was leading to unprecedented sickness and mortality among the turtle population. Dr Rose concluded the response was a great example of how NSW has the right balance of systems in place, good decision making and agility to appropriately conduct a multi-disciplinary biosecurity response.

During the first workshop of the afternoon, 'surveillance and reporting', participants highlighted a number of barriers to reporting. These included not knowing what risks to look for or if something was significant, being fearful of consequences to their livelihood if they report, lack information or confidence about where to report, and a general lack of awareness of biosecurity. Participants thought that incentives to report (financial or otherwise), and building confidence in reporting and responses processes, would improve reporting outcomes.

The next workshop 'industry's role in biosecurity' focused on what stops industry members from having biosecurity plans. Participants suggested that barriers to having a plan included being time poor, financial constraints or lack of awareness of the need to have one. Participants noted that a while a lot of farms did not have a documented biosecurity plan they still generally did the right thing regarding biosecurity. There were a number of suggestions on ways to increase the adoption of biosecurity plans including better education on the advantages of having a plan, providing financial incentives, helping or assisting farmers to develop plans (for example provide a guide or template), and making the plans mandatory (e.g. though quality assurance or insurance requirements).

Next steps...

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, NSW Department of Primary Industries and the ACT Government Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate would like to thank everyone who participated in the NSW/ACT Biosecurity Roundtable for their time and contributions. The discussions and ideas from the Roundtable will feed into the agenda for the National Biosecurity Forum later on 2 November 2017 as well as biosecurity governance and communication processes through the NBC and other avenues.

We value your feedback – if you have suggestions about this Roundtable or the Roundtable program please contact us at biosecurityroundtable@agriculture.gov.au