# Country Handle with Care

# Episode 1 – The Big Farm transcript

Biosecurity Officer 1: Across our 10,000 kilometre northern coastline here in Australia, we have a group of dedicated biosecurity officers, scientists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rangers monitoring our plants, animals and oceans.

Biosecurity Officer 2: We are also recording what isn’t changing.

Biosecurity Officer 3: Our trading partners need proof that we don’t have the pests and diseases that can damage their country.

Biosecurity Officer 4: This is one of the least known, but important parts of the biosecurity story.

Biosecurity Officer 5: It’s a story of antiquity and modernity. Relying on traditional knowledge of country, while using 21st century technology.

Biosecurity Officer 6: Respecting culture and providing hope for future generations.

Title: Country Handle with Care, The Big Farm

Scrapboy: As Australia grows, and more water, rail and road infrastructure is built, it’s important that we keep the remote, regional parts of our country safe. If we’re not careful, high risk pests and diseases could move, potentially destroying farms, communities and businesses.

Biosecurity. It’s everyone’s business.

Title Map: Darwin, Northern Territory

Title: Sentinel Herd, Berrimah Farm

Farmer: Sentinel herd is like a small group of animals, say 25 to 30 head of animals. There’s two groups up in the Darwin area, a couple more in Katherine and another one further out around the VRD and the Douglas-Daly area. So what their main sort of job is, is they get bled once a week or monthly and bloods then go back to the laboratory and they sort of keep an eye on what sort of insect-borne disease we’ve got in the livestock up here.

Veterinary officer: The blood tests themselves for the sentinel herds is mainly looking at blue-tongue virus.

Farmer: Its carried by insects and biting midgies. That’s the one we mainly test for here. Touch wood there’s been no outbreaks and things like that.

Title map: Seisia, Cape York Peninsula

Biosecurity Officer 7: Before we do the cattle bleed, we set the culicoides trap for three days. With that trap we monitor for the sand flies that hangs around the cattle’s eyes. At night, there’s a green light so the flies come to the trap then they get sucked down to this bottle here, then we send the bottle down to Cairns to check if the cattle has blue-tongue.

Veterinary officer: In addition to that, we’re looking at the general health of the cattle and looking for signs of other diseases that we don’t currently have in Australia. Some of the diseases we look for are foot and mouth disease, sara and screw-worm fly.

Costa: So what exactly is this trap.

Biosecurity Officer 6: We monitor for screw worm fly. It lays its eggs on live flesh, then eats the live flesh.

We’ve got the two lures in here. One attracts the male fly and one attracts the female.

Costa: It smells a little bit. It smells a lot, actually. That’s rich.

And so what does it actually do? It lures the fly in, then what happens?

Biosecurity Officer 6: It lures the fly in then we have a tiny insecticide strip which kills the fly and stops them escaping when we collect the flies.

Costa: And then once you’ve collected the fly, what happens to it?

Biosecurity Officer 6: We take the flies back to the office, we freeze them for treatment, then we send them down to Cairns for identification.

Costa: Standing behind me are some full time employees of the department of health. These chickens put their wellbeing on the line, for ours.

Veterinary officer: This is a sentinel flock of chickens and they are used by the department of health to monitor for endemic viruses that could affect the human population. The viruses are transmitted by mosquito bites. So mosquitoes breed, they bite an infected animal and then they carry the virus in their body and then they transmit it to the next anima they bite. That could be a chicken. That could be a horse or a person or any kind of animal.

Veterinary officer: The consequences of any of those disease getting into Australia – it would have a big impact on our domestic livestock and our export markets which would be very detrimental to Australian agriculture. In the distance, some of those diseases could affect our native wildlife and obviously we don’t want that to happen.

Farmer 1: Extremely important for the cattle industry, for our export industry, in particular, need to be clean and to be seen that we’re on to these things, monitoring and that we have procedures in place. Their main job, even though they’re only a small group of animals, really important for the cattle industry up here and our export.

Title map: Humpty Doo, Darwin, NT

Barramundi Farmer 1: The Northern Territory is synonymous with barramundi. At the end of the day, barramundi really is Australia’s fish. It’s got an Aboriginal name, it’s what people equate with Australia.

We’re a fifth generation Northern Territory family, and from our point of view, the river behind us, the Adelaide River, is got lots of barra in it, so if something that comes in from the wild, it’s going to affect not just our business, but it will also affect Indigenous communities, it will affect commercial fishing. It will affect tourism.

Barramundi Farmer 2: Fish farming’s important for the environment to ensure we can have adequate supplies of fish for Australian consumers. In the context of the Australian industry, Humpty Doo Barramundi has grown from being the smallest to become the largest supplier of barramundi in Australia and we actually grow more fish on this farm than the entire north Australian wild-caught barramundi industry producers.

Costa: Dan, how many fish are in a tank like this?

Barramundi Farmer 2: Look, these are baby barramundi and there’s about 40,000 in this tank.

Costa: How old are they?

Barramundi Farmer 2: They’re about two months old now. They start off really small but they’re getting under way now.

Costa: Can we have a look at some?

Barramundi Farmer 2: Yeah, too right. Let’s have a look. Here we go.

Costa: Oh! Look how many there are.

Barramundi Farmer 2: Beautiful things aren’t they?

Costa: They’re fantastic. And what’s the time to maturity for a little fish like that, to plate size?

Barramundi Farmer 2: So we do everything from a 400 gram plate size fish that will be about nine months old through to a five kilo fish that goes into the filleting trade or the sashimi market and that might be more like two years to grow.

Costa: So there’s a lot at stake in what you do here?

Barramundi Farmer 2: Too right. It really is.

Farmer 2: In recent years, we’ve seen the collapse and disappearance of, first, the banana industry and then subsequently the rock melon industry, both due to exotic diseases coming in that aren’t native to Australia. You can see what’s happened in the prawn industry in southern Queensland with the white-spot took it out and more recently than that the oyster industry in Tasmania with the Pacific oyster mortality syndromes. So, it’s not restricted to land. The aquatic environment also can carry diseases and in fact once a disease enters the aquatic environment it’s almost unstoppable.

Barramundi Farmer 2: Farming fish in the way that we do is very sustainable. It minimises any impact on wild fish stock to ensure that Australians can eat Australian seafood without running out of fish.

Farmer 2: We have pretty good control on the water side of things because are farm is designed in seven separate water management units, each of which predominantly re-circulates water and so we’ve got a high level of control of what we take in and what we get out and we also have some capacity to treat incoming water in the case of a known disease emergency.

Barramundi Farmer 2: Look, the most important ways that we care for country here, on our farm, are the way that we look after the water, the way that we create a habitat for animals and we reuse water again and again so that we don’t impact on the river, the beautiful water right next to us.

So one way that Australians can help to support farmers like myself to care for country, is to consider your purchasing when you’re buying product. Look to buy Australian locally sourced product because it is sustainably produced in a considered way and that enables us to continue to look after our country.

Farmer 2: If you’re dealing with imported barramundi, my preference is that you don’t buy stuff with skin, bones, head. Stuff that, one way or another will find its way into the environment but at the same time, we’re not saying don’t eat imported fish. We’re not trying to block people’s access to imported barramundi. What we’re trying to do is keep out diseases that will destroy our business, our industry and our beautiful natural environment. And that’s what we don’t want to happen.

Barramundi Farmer 2: And when people are going on or near farms, to think about their own impact, you know. Are they bringing foreign bait with them, or are they going to be jeopardising the stock on the farms that they’re visiting. It’s something we really need people to think about. What we can do as fishermen is when we’re going to go fishing, consider the bait that we use. You know, if you’re using something that’s imported, its likely come from a place where there are contagious diseases and they can be introduced to the Australian environment. Whether that’s using a prawn that’s come from overseas or whether it’s using a head from an imported barramundi in a crab pot is a problem.

Barramundi Farmer 1: I don’t know what the dollars are, or for tourism in the northern Territory in terms of barra fishing but people come to Darwin. They want to catch a barra. They want to eat a barra. And so if that opportunity’s not available, to them then it’s massive.

Barramundi Farmer 2: We care a lot about the environment we’re working in, our business depends on it. That’s where our heart is as well.

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Farmer 3: it’s like a big dog, really, that’s sort of pretty friendly and nice to be around.

Barramundi Farmer 2: We’re in the middle of an operating farm today so lots of things operating all the time

Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

This is an initiative of the Australian Government’s Agricultural Competitiveness and Developing Northern Australia white papers, the government’s plan for stronger farmers, a stronger economy and a safe, secure Australia.

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