

Submission to National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA) Five Year Review Discussion Paper

17 March 2017

The role of the National Landcare Network (NLN)

The NLN is the national peak body for Australia's state and territory grassroots Landcare peak bodies. State and territory Landcare peak bodies exist in every Australian State and Territory and along with the NLN are supported by the Commonwealth through the NLP.

A recent review showed that members of the NLN represent over 100,000 grassroots landcarers throughout the country. Whilst these groups are involved in landcare in all its forms – including coast care, bush care, sustainable agriculture and farming groups, aboriginal landcare, youth landcare and urban and peri-urban and environmental landcare, they are also often **“first responders”** in emergency situations such as associated with flood, fire and biosecurity breaches. With adequate support the Landcare network represents a significant asset already in place that could be utilized better in biosecurity in both response and surveillance, and many would be keen to be involved.

Despite the interest and engagement in biosecurity by many of its constituent groups, the NLN was not invited to participate in the NEBRA targeted consultation earlier this year. The NLN would appreciate engagement in any future review processes.

The NLN support for Biosecurity Response

NLN members can be utilized as an important conduit for rapid biosecurity response. Landcare and associated groups are located across Australia with strong local knowledge. They are often already engaged in biosecurity risk reduction activities such as feral animal and pest plant control, and in many jurisdictions are now recognized as experts in the field and are at the heart of **peer group learning networks** (for example, Victorian Rabbit Action Network).

Landcare groups are **“facilitators of change”**. There are already recognized communication networks established as part of the landcare community and these have the critical role of disseminating information to the broader community, which is crucial in rapid biosecurity response and in ongoing information sharing.

Landcare groups are **“resident”**. They have the long term interest of the environment at heart. This is essential to support ongoing surveillance once a biosecurity incident has been controlled.

What would support Landcare groups to respond to biosecurity incidents?

In all jurisdictions, resources are limited and biosecurity is no different. The established network of landcare communities provides an ideal opportunity to “value add” to detection of and response to biosecurity threats in Australia. In no other country does this ready-made network of citizen scientists exist. A strategy that values, utilizes and supports this existing network is a win for the environment and for the public purse.

Arrangements for Biosecurity Groups

The arrangements and responsibilities for biosecurity groups in some states and territories e.g. Western Australia, is not clear. In that state there has been a devolution of responsibility from the state agency to community based Recognised Biosecurity Groups that must be incorporated and have representation from specific government departments and formally nominated organisation prior to seeking government support for activities or being able to raise funds through local rating.

This process has been staged over some years meaning that biosecurity responsibility uptake has been patchy across the state. This represents a heightened risk to biosecurity, particularly as local groups will tend to deal with local issues, and biosecurity risks that affect adjoining regions may not get the attention they deserve. Additionally, the current arrangements often duplicate the work of local landcare groups, who also have a focus on biosecurity issues, such as invasive weeds and feral predators.

In the view of the NLN it is important that biosecurity responsibility remains shared between the Federal and state governments and local organisations and be relatively consistent across all states and territories.

The ability to rapidly respond to biosecurity incidents will rest on these arrangements.

Up to date information

While biosecurity information is made available to specific biosecurity groups it would be more effective to make updates on biosecurity risks, information and training sessions and biosecurity incidents available through more general groups such as the National Landcare Network, its state and territory member peak bodies and their members.

The NLN consider that it is essential for as many people as possible to be primed in understanding and identifying biosecurity risk and how to reduce risk as well as who to notify and how to respond to an incident.

Funding for known biosecurity risks

Arrangements between Federal and State governments for known risks such as border control of Starlings between South Australia and Western Australia need to be reviewed to ensure funding is adequate to control incursions. Reduced funding is putting this control at risk.

Surveillance is critical for biosecurity risk reduction and needs to be strengthened by appropriate levels of fines for non-adherence.

Preparedness to respond

NLN members report that there has been little information or training available for landcare groups beyond specific biosecurity groups to improve preparedness to respond to biosecurity incidents.