



African swine fever roundtable—6 September 2019

Parliament House, Canberra

Key Issues

- Adequate resourcing is needed at all levels (industry and governments) to prepare for and respond to the increased threat of African swine fever (ASF).
- Important to continue heightened activities at the border.
- Communication and coordination between government, industry and the community about ASF is vital. This includes:
 - Clarity of roles and responsibilities particularly for producers during an emergency animal disease response
 - Sharing activities and outcomes relating to ASF.
- Important to increase producer and industry awareness of biosecurity, what it entails and make it a routine part of their work practices including:
 - Biosecurity plans
 - Business continuity planning.

General overview

Given the significance of ASF internationally and the impacts on Australians and our Pacific and Asian neighbours, Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie MP, Minister for Agriculture, convened a roundtable at Parliament House to gain insights from a broad range of stakeholders.

Over 40 participants took part in the ASF roundtable on 6 September 2019 including representatives from a wide range of industries and government departments (participant list at [Appendix B](#)). The generosity of all participants with their time and their significant engagement and contribution throughout the day is acknowledged.

The day commenced with three presentations from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture:

- 1) Mark Schipp, the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) described the current international situation
- 2) Jared Greenville, ABARES discussed the economic impacts and trade implications of ASF
- 3) Robyn Martin, Biosecurity Animal Division presented the systems and policies in place to minimise the risk to Australia from disease incursions like ASF.

This was followed by two panel discussions—trade and biosecurity. The trade panel consisted of Malcolm Thompson (Department of Agriculture), Jason Strong (Meat and Livestock Australia)

and Simon Quilty (MLX Market Analyst). The biosecurity panel comprised Allison Crook (Queensland CVO), Deb Kerr (Australian Pork Limited), Carolyn Macgill (Food & Beverage Importers Association) and Dean Merrilees (Department of Agriculture).

At the end of the day the ideas that had been discussed were workshopped in three groups and the key issues for trade and biosecurity were identified.

Presentations

The international disease situation

Mark Schipp discussed the international ASF situation—a global outbreak, not just a series of country outbreaks and one that shows no signs of abating. The effects of this outbreak are likely to be felt for many years to come and it won't be restricted to pig production. Animal health and welfare, food security, world economies and international trade may all be affected. This unprecedented spread of a disease is a stark reminder of how biosecurity threats are constantly evolving and the importance of maintaining vigilance to protect Australia's animal producers from the devastating effects of emergency animal diseases.

In 2007 ASF was reported in Georgia, then it spread into Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In 2014 ASF was detected for the first time in Lithuania, which marked the beginning of its spread in the European Union. ASF has since entered 10 member states (ASF has been present in Sardinia for many years) extending as far west as Belgium, and was also detected in Serbia in August 2019. August 2018 saw the most significant movement of ASF when it was detected in China. It has now spread to Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Hong Kong, North Korea, Laos and Myanmar. Since the roundtable the disease has been reported in the Philippines, South Korea and on 27 September 2019 in Timor Leste. There are no signs that spread is slowing down.

China is the world's largest pig producer and it is estimated that over 30% of their pig herd has been lost to the disease. There is no vaccine or treatment so the only response to control disease is the culling of infected and at risk pigs. The spread of the disease has been driven by human activity—movement of pigs, contaminated vehicles and people, and meat and meat products containing the virus.

A joint global ASF strategy is being developed and missions deployed by FAO to at risk and affected countries. Awareness campaigns have been run to disseminate information. Countries, including Australia, have run or are planning simulation exercises to test their response capacity and capabilities.

We all benefit from, and share responsibility for, biosecurity. We need to work together—across Australia, and indeed, across the world—to successfully manage these increasingly challenging biosecurity threats.

Trade implications

Jared Greenville discussed the trade implications of the spread of ASF worldwide. Australia is a relatively small pig producer with limited exports—around 10% of production in value terms is exported. Singapore is Australia's largest market, taking about 46% of our exported product. There is currently no pig meat trade with China.

Australian consumers will be affected regardless of whether ASF reaches Australia or not as we import a lot of our pork products—around 50% of total consumption. Our imports are sourced from the same countries that supply China, which will place pressure on import prices due to a shortage of pork on the global market.

Effects on exports of feed grain have occurred, for example soybean exports to China have decreased due to reduced demand as their pig numbers fall. Exports of other meats (beef and sheep) have increased. For beef, much of the increase is occurring in response to the ASF outbreak as exports of frozen product (more price competitive to pork) have increased. Exports of sheep meat have increased, however, this may be in line with general trends, and not due to ASF spread.

Australia's biosecurity

Robyn Martin discussed Australia's biosecurity system, describing it as complex with continually changing trade patterns and volumes. It is national and multi-faceted with measures applied offshore, at the border and post-border.

Following the spread of ASF there has been a review of import pathways and conditions to ensure they include measures to address the risk of ASF. In some cases imports have been suspended or import conditions amended and personal consignments of pork jerky are not permitted from any country.

The department has increased intervention on flights and mail from high risk countries such as China and Vietnam and has developed targeted communication materials to increase public awareness of ASF.

Additional testing of pork products seized at a number of international airports in Australia and at the international mail centres in Sydney and Melbourne has begun (collection from 2-15 September 2019) to further inform our assessment of the biosecurity risk of ASF. When the results are available these will be shared.

The department is also investing in enhanced detection capacity in the form of 3D x-ray machines at the border and improved data analytic capabilities.

The ASF AUSVETPLAN disease response manual is being reviewed and the department is developing a simulation exercise on the roles and responsibilities of the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD) and the National Management Group (NMG) during an ASF outbreak. A larger exercise that will include producers and those involved in the supply chain is proposed for 2020.

As part of our diagnostic preparedness ASF PCR (polymerase chain reaction) detection capability has been rolled out to the national state and territory veterinary laboratories, to enable, along with the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) to test the large number of samples during a disease outbreak.

Trade panel discussion

Issues covered during the trade panel session included:

- Resourcing to manage the increased risk at the border and post-border.

- Trade and tariff issues and improving relationships with the relevant authorities in the importing countries including through our overseas Agriculture Counsellors.
- Developing close relationships with trading partners in peace time by Government and industry.
- Despite the US-China trade war, US exports have increased to China.
- Diversification of markets was identified as an area to focus on however China will remain a crucial market for Australia.
- Application of equivalence in biosecurity standards in relation to trade – don't be afraid to require a high standard.
- The global shortage of protein.
- The increased cost of raw materials for the Australian processed pork industry and resulting price increase for consumers.

Biosecurity panel discussion

Issues covered during the biosecurity panel session included:

- Using behavioural science studies to look at what is driving non-compliance of passengers, and this data being used to inform education and awareness campaigns. The future landscape of profiling will be very different, we will know much more and this information will then affect decisions about how to intervene.
- The fines for non-compliance need to be increased so they are more of a deterrent.
- Need to continually talk about biosecurity to producers and farmers – break the process down so it is clear what they need to do and so they develop a biosecurity mindset. Should be mandatory to have a biosecurity plan.
- Australia has a detailed emergency response framework to respond to ASF and government and industry understand their roles. However this understanding is lacking among producers. What would be involved – what movement restrictions? Would cross state border movements be allowed? How will movement of large vehicles that need to transport feed be managed? How will they be disinfected?
- The pork industry employs many foreign workers on visas – they could pose a significant risk if their home country has ASF. Suggested they should have a 7 day period in Australia before returning to work on pig farms.
- If there were multiple detections involving several states, the effects would be major. Coordination of communications at a national level would be very important – can start preparing for this now. Can apply to all diseases, not just ASF.
- There have been unsuccessful attempts to develop an ASF vaccine for the past 40 years. Some vaccines have caused significant side effects in pigs vaccinated and have not provided protection. New technologies such as the use of sub-unit and vectored vaccines are currently being explored world-wide.

- Need to close the gaps in the traceability system—not just live animals, include products. Trading of pigs and pig products also occurs online and it is difficult to prevent and trace these animals.

Workshop

Participants split into three groups to discuss and identify the top five key issues in light of the preceding discussions ([Appendix A](#)). Several themes emerged:

- Resourcing for biosecurity at all levels of government and industry
- Emergency animal disease preparedness
- Communication and engagement
- Understanding the risk
- Market access strategies.

Next steps

The interest in the roundtable and the engagement from the attendees demonstrates the commitment of everyone to continue to work together to enhance our biosecurity system and address the risk of ASF.

A number of actions have been undertaken or have been proposed by parties to address some of the key issues identified such as raising awareness and education of travellers including international students, tour operators, airlines, through e-commerce channels, producers and peri-urban farmers, enhancing Australia's emergency animal disease preparedness through simulation exercises and further testing of products seized at the border to gain a better understanding of the risk. However, as highlighted and identified at the roundtable there is more to be done. The Department of Agriculture will work with industry and through existing mechanisms such as Animal Health Committee, Animal Health Australia and Australian Pork Limited's Biosecurity Strategic Review Panel to progress key issues, disseminate information and provide updates.

Appendix A: Workshop Identified Issues

Table 1: Workshop identified issues

Issue	Group
Resourcing for biosecurity (federal, jurisdictional and industry)—investment at the border and post border	1, 2
Emergency preparedness Clarity of roles, responsibilities and coordination in a disease response including for producers Simulation exercises Gap analysis of our emergency disease arrangements—preparedness and response Best practice emergency response framework between government and industry Supply chain—can something be salvaged in an outbreak through processing of pigs On farm biosecurity plans Business continuity planning Time to detection depends on ability for producers to recognise a disease problem, vet personnel to diagnose and then time to laboratory diagnosis Better traceability—pigs and their products	1, 2, 3
Communication and engagement Coordinated communications and activities across industry and governments Connect with individuals or cohorts that present the highest risk such as international students, tour operators and customers purchasing products through e-commerce Fines as a deterrent to passengers, e-commerce related offences How can we better identify and engage with peri-urban, lifestyle farmers	2, 3
Understanding the risk Application of equivalence in biosecurity standards in relation to trade—it may be appropriate to require a higher standard Testing of pork products seized at the border Have a mechanism to quantify Australia’s risk for a disease as the situation changes not just for ASF (some countries use a ranking system with most using a qualitative measure)	1, 3
Market access strategies/pre-emptive market access arrangements in the event of a disease outbreak in Australia	3

Appendix B: Participating organisations

- Animal Health Australia
- Australian Meat Industry Council
- Australian Pig Veterinarians Group
- Australian Pork Limited
- Australian Renderers Association
- Board of Airline Representatives (BARA)
- Cattle Council
- Chief Veterinary Officer SA
- Chief Veterinary Officer VIC
- Chief Veterinary Officer QLD
- CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory
- Customs Brokers and Forwarders Council of Australia Ltd
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Food & Beverage Importers Association
- Grain Producers Australia
- Meat & Livestock Australia
- MLX Market Analyst
- National Farmers Federation
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- NSW Farmers
- Primo Foods
- Pork South Australia
- Sheep Producers Australia
- Stock Feed Manufacturers' Council of Australia
- Department of Agriculture