



Sustainable funding and investment to strengthen biosecurity

Discussion Paper

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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The Australian Veterinary Association

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health, and quarantine systems while other members work in industry, research, and teaching. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Sustainable funding and investment to strengthen biosecurity

The AVA thanks the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry for the opportunity to comment. We have the following comments related to the discussion paper.

- 1. Considering the potential funding options and opportunities above, as well as from your experience, what elements do you think a sustainable biosecurity funding model should include? Are there elements that should not be included; if so, why?**

The AVA is of the opinion that biosecurity must be funded by those who benefit. In order to deliver and recoup the costs of what is required of a robust biosecurity system, a clear understanding of all aspects (plant, animal and environmental biosecurity) is required, and gaps identified through continuous improvement methodology, so that appropriate costings can be forecast.

The biosecurity framework must have adequate funding for each section, as the system is only as strong as its weakest link and the interplay between each section cannot be underestimated. A sustainable model requires a process of evidence-based decision making as to which biosecurity activities are prioritised, and this decision-making must be transparent with overarching accountability assigned. The funding framework must be adaptable to accommodate currently unforeseen biosecurity risks that will need to be addressed in the future.

- 2. How would your proposed model operate at a practical level and who would it apply to?**

As the bulk of the benefit of a robust biosecurity system goes to the community in general, the Australian economy and public good (health), a large component of the cost-sharing responsibility needs to be borne by the government (federal/state or combined) via the tax system.

Consideration should also be given to imposing biosecurity levies on incoming goods and visitors (who do not contribute to the tax system) entering Australia.

- 3. How would your proposed model impact you and others? What would be the benefits or disadvantages to you and/or other stakeholders?**

This model would positively impact all the human stakeholders that deliver the public good that is derived from a robust biosecurity system; the veterinary profession is included in this group. Furthermore, improved biosecurity will positively benefit the health of animals, plants and the environment.

Activities that carry the most risk must have the most stringent biosecurity principles applied, which will come at significant cost. If risk analysis is transparent and occurs independently of those who have vested interests, through government funding, this will benefit the entire community.



4. Is the proportionality between those who contribute to the funding system and those who benefit the most, right?

Every person in Australian society benefits from a robust biosecurity system and every person who uses goods and services that rely on this system should contribute to the cost within their means.

5. Are there other technologies, current or emerging, that could be employed to increase the efficiency of the biosecurity system, and perhaps reduce operational cost?

There is likely to be a large amount of data that is currently being collected and siloed commercially that could be used to improve the efficiency of the biosecurity system. Emerging technologies that deidentify and collate data to allow “big data” and artificial intelligence analysis are likely to increase efficiency. Harmonising data collection and storage could reduce operational cost. For example, disease surveillance would be enhanced by developing systems that provide timely, de-identified, regional syndromic data of sufficient quality to meet identified needs of both government and veterinary practices. Standardising reporting systems across state borders to enable aggregation of data will maximise the reliability, accuracy and useability of surveillance data.

Accurate, timely traceability and assurance is essential to a well-functioning biosecurity system. Harmonised traceability mechanisms could also improve the efficiency of the biosecurity systems as the early actions after a disease is diagnosed are critical.

6. How could the Commonwealth Government improve efficiency in the biosecurity system (consistent with meeting our Appropriate Level of Protection)?

Improving efficiency in the biosecurity system may be best served by ensuring that prevention and preparedness activities for an incursion are both given equal importance in “business as usual” activities.

Having a focus on prevention through surveillance and early detection of incursions will improve efficiency of the biosecurity system. This requires appropriate investment in mechanisms to deliver these. In the context of the veterinary profession the AVA is of the opinion that a robust sustainable government veterinary service (including government laboratories) is essential, maintained at sufficient capacity to meet the needs of Australia’s animal health environment now and into the future, as well as ensuring capacity to respond to animal health emergencies. Coupling this with fully utilising the private veterinary sector through adequately resourced relevant surveillance schemes, will improved efficiency.

Other initiatives to improve prevention and early detection are:

- evaluating options to increase private veterinary laboratory involvement in reference laboratory support, to supplement the government laboratory system.
- investing into emerging areas of surveillance importance, such as companion animal and wildlife diseases;



- researching the changing epidemiology of vector-borne diseases and other impacts on biosecurity as a result of climate change

Continued or increased investment (money and expertise) in neighbouring countries' biosecurity systems, is likely to continue to pay dividends and provides mechanism of developing and refining the skills required for incursion management.

7. What other investments or actions could the Commonwealth Government make or take to sustainably support the delivery of biosecurity activities?

The delivery of biosecurity activities requires a workforce, therefore proactive workforce planning, including the ability for surge capacity, would allow for these activities to be sustainably delivered. In the context of the veterinary profession the effectiveness of Australia's veterinary resources should be regularly audited against the present and future risks to Australia's animal industries, and any deficits addressed. Governments should invest adequately in their veterinary services as well as schemes which rely on the private veterinary sector and para-veterinary staff. This is essential to support Australia's favourable biosecurity status and prevent billions of dollars in losses to our domestic and export animal industries.

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