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Committee Secretary
Senate Rural, Regional Affairs & Transport References Committee
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SENATE INQUIRY INTO BIOSECURITY & QUARANTINE ARRANGEMENTS

Thank you for the invitation to respond to the Senate Inquiry into Biosecurity and Quarantine Arrangements by the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee. Primary Industries and Resources SA (PIRSA) offers the following feedback in response to the terms of reference:

a) *the adequacy of current biosecurity and quarantine arrangements, including resourcing;*

South Australia remains free from many pests and diseases that affect agriculture, natural and built environments, and people in other parts of the world. This favourable biosecurity status confers significant economic, environmental and community benefits to the state. In response, from 1 July 2010, the South Australian Government has consolidated biosecurity capacity into Biosecurity SA, a new division within Primary Industries and Resources SA. The formation of Biosecurity SA has integrated the biosecurity functions to plan, prevent, respond and recover from animal, plant and aquatic pests and diseases that affect primary production, the environment and social amenity. The aim is to strengthen the Government's capacity and consistency to respond to national and state biosecurity priorities.

Protecting primary industries, the environment and the community from biosecurity threats arising from increasing levels of global trade and tourism is a shared responsibility between governments, industry and the community. However, due to budget pressures facing governments, maintaining current capacity to manage biosecurity threats is becoming increasingly challenging. In 2008, the Australian Government released the Beale Review which made 84 recommendations to improve Australia's biosecurity capacity. Biosecurity SA supports the recommendations and will continue to collaborate in partnership with the Commonwealth to deliver an effective and efficient biosecurity system. However, while progress has been made in implementing some of the recommendations, further work is required and some capacity constraints remain.

While the importance of pre-border quarantine managed by the Commonwealth to prevent pests and diseases from reaching Australia cannot be understated, this barrier is permeable and there will continue to be incursions and establishment of new pests into Australia. Biosecurity SA endorses the view expressed by the Beale review that zero risk is unattainable and undesirable, as such all partners need to ensure that they maintain preparedness and capacity to respond to new incursions when they occur.

Post-border arrangements for responding to new incursions and established pests are less clear-cut as responsibilities migrate along a continuum from the Commonwealth to state and territory governments and then onto industries, landholders and the community. The Beale review recommends that the Commonwealth should increase resources to support monitoring, surveillance and investigation in post-border areas (Recommendation 3). Biosecurity SA supports this view but also notes that this should be a partnership with state and territory governments, and industry (Recommendations 49, 53 and 54).

Biosecurity SA supports the draft Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB) as a framework for the partnership between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments (Recommendation 9). However, there are considerable cost implications for governments to implement the action plans to increase capacity and preparedness that have not been addressed nationally. Furthermore, a recent case of an incursion of giant Asian honeybees at Adelaide airport highlighted that, while collaboration is improving, full and automatic information sharing between governments has not yet been achieved (Recommendations 9f and 54).

One area of progress has been the development of arrangements for sharing the costs and resources to eradicate new pest incursions based on an assessment of the risks, the probability of success, and the benefits and costs. The draft National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA) provides a framework for cooperation between governments on post-border biosecurity emergencies in areas of public benefit. Similarly, the two agreements with industry including the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) and the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) provide a framework for nationally coordinated response to pests and diseases that threaten the viability of industries. Unfortunately, not all industries are signatories to the agreements and not all pest threats are covered by them. The recent outbreak of equine influenza highlights the importance ensuring that all industries become signatories of the deeds, as governments may not provide the financial capacity to carry the full cost of emergency response in the future.

The national agreements provide a mechanism to fund responses to emergency pest and disease threats. Unfortunately, eradication of some pests occurs over decades rather than months due to differences in the biology of species. For example, weed eradication programs need to continue for many years due to the longevity of seeds in the soil. These long-term responses do not comply with current funding cycles for government, which means there is a significant risk that funders will become fatigued before the program is complete. However, ending an eradication program is effectively a decision to manage the pest in perpetuity.

The lack of an agreement to share the costs of eradicating new weeds that threaten industries remains a significant gap in current arrangements. There are currently several nationally coordinated responses to eradicate new weeds, including branched broomrape in South Australia. In the absence of an agreement with industry to cover weeds, eradication of branched broomrape has been funded entirely by governments under ad hoc arrangements agreed through Primary Industries Ministerial Council. While the lack of industry contribution is undesirable, there is no current funding mechanism to equitably appropriate the costs from industries that might be beneficiaries. As a result, there is a risk that these weed eradication programs will not be renewed after the next major reviews in 2012. Biosecurity SA supports the recommendation (Recommendation 25) that all animal, plant and aquatic industries should commit to sharing the responsibility and cost of pest and disease response actions, with a levy applied to those who are not signatories to relevant cost sharing agreements to meet their appropriate share.

Consistent with the recommendation (Recommendation 77) that government should establish cost recovery arrangements with business groups, Biosecurity SA is considering options for cost recovery for some biosecurity services within South Australia that directly benefit industry. It is hoped that this approach will maintain services to protect industry in the face of government budget pressures. However, establishment of a single cost-recovery process and a pooled biosecurity fund or foundation to partially fund a national system in partnership and inclusive with the state and territory governments should be explored. Cost recovery should be structured to create a positive funding balance to improve services to meet anticipated national needs, rather than just maintaining current levels.

While there has been considerable focus on developing agreements to cost-share eradication programs for new incursions, national funding for research, development and extension on established pests continues to dwindle. Pests such as rabbits remain a major national threat to the natural environment, particularly in Australia's rangelands. However, there has been limited funding available to continue research on enhanced methods of control. The Cooperative Research Centres program has been a very successful model for funding and coordinating national research. However, the CRC model when applied to biosecurity also has major shortcomings, due to the paucity of alternative funding sources for public good research, so that when CRCs are not renewed, major programs and initiatives often end at the same time. Governments have an ongoing role as a funder of public good research to underpin biosecurity. Biosecurity SA supports the work by the National Biosecurity Committee to develop a Biosecurity Research Framework (Recommendation 57) but notes that this alone will not address the lack of funding to support this research.

b) projected demand and resourcing requirements;

National capacity to conduct and maintain an effective surveillance network for key pests and diseases is a high national priority (Recommendation 3). Biosecurity SA maintains surveillance at high risk sites and has specific programs for targeted high priority pests, such as fruit fly and branched broomrape. A broadening of the role of the Commonwealth in surveillance in South Australia is welcomed but must supplement, partner and share resources and information with these existing state based programs (Recommendation 9e).

There is a looming crisis in national biosecurity research capacity through retirement and non-replacement of scientists and technical experts. The non-renewal of the CRC for Australian Weed Management created a vacuum in weed science that recent funding programs have been unable to replace. A similar threat now faces biosecurity through the recent non-renewal of the Biosecurity CRC. In this area, the Beale review did not go far enough (Recommendation 57) as funding, recruitment and career structures for biosecurity scientists need to also be considered as a priority.

Training for biosecurity staff also remains a major issue for all jurisdictions (Recommendation 14, 46 and 84). Biosecurity SA supports the need for a national approach to develop training standards and courses adapted to meet the needs of all partners.

A similar national approach should be applied to laboratory and diagnostic capacity to manage exotic disease and pests as a national priority (Recommendation 58). Gaps in existing capacity should be addressed in partnership with the state and territory governments and industry.

It is noted that these gaps are likely to be addressed as priority issues under the draft Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity.

c) *progress toward achievement of reform of Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service export fees and charges;*

Biosecurity SA supports the principle of cost recovery at a national level to allow adequate long term investment in infrastructure, staff, certification and diagnostics (Recommendations 77 and 78). Biosecurity SA recommends that cost recovery for export certification (Recommendation 79) be extended to apply equitably to all risk creators and beneficiaries, and to include importers as well as exporters.

d) *progress in implementation of the 'Beale Review' recommendations and their place in meeting projected biosecurity demand and resourcing; and any related matters.*

The Beale review recommended that an effective national biosecurity system be a partnership between the Commonwealth, states and territories, business and the community. The review made recommendations to make our national biosecurity system operate more efficiently. Progress is being made, but some key recommendations, particularly on additional resource requirements for DAFF and AQIS have not been funded or implemented (Recommendations 73 and 75). Other key issues remain around information sharing between Commonwealth and state and territory governments, particularly in relation to quarantine interceptions at the border.

Yours Sincerely

Geoff Knight
CHIEF EXECUTIVE