

23 September 2022

Mr Gerry McInally
Committee Secretary
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Mr. McInally,

Questions on notice - Inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the public hearing on 8 September 2022 of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness. The following are Plant Health Australia's (PHA) responses to the questions taken on notice taken during the public hearing. The questions were informed by the Hansard Proof available online¹ and outlined below.

QUESTION – How many times have we utilised it [*the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed*] as a response towards something like varroa mite?

Extract from Hansard Proof

Senator CICCONE: Thanks for coming tonight. I want to follow Senator Colbeck's questions on the deed: how many times have we utilised it as a response towards something like varroa? Are you able just to explain that to me? How that deed is actioned, I guess, and how many times we've utilised that?

Ms Corcoran: I might explain the deed just in its basic sense. It's a legal cost-sharing arrangement that allows us to respond to things quickly and to bring all of the affected parties to the table for shared decision-making. In terms of its activity, or how often it has been invoked: it was ratified in October 2005, and it was tested very quickly, in 2006, with the first plant pest incursion—sugarcane smut. And we have seen a steady increase over time of plant pest incursions that the deed has been applied to. I'll defer to my colleague Dr Susanna Driessen, who is the General Manager Emergency Response and who looks after the deed area.

Dr Driessen: Thank you, Sarah. On the exact number of response plans that have been implemented under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed that relate to bees: we had *Varroa jacobsoni* in 2016 and *Varroa jacobsoni* in 2019-20. Both of those were very successfully eradicated. And there's *Varroa destructor*. There have been a number of other successful

¹https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commsen/26025/toc_pdf/Rural%20and%20Regional%20Affairs%20and%20Transport%20References%20Committee_2022_09_08.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22rural%20and%20regional%22

response plans under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed. I do apologise—I don't have the exact number. I believe it's around 15 but we can take that on notice and provide it to you.

Senator CICCONE: That would be good.

ANSWER – The Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) was ratified on 26 October 2005, forming a legally binding partnership between the Commonwealth, all state and territory governments, PHA and an initial 12 peak plant industry bodies. Industry signatories (as at 23 September 2022) now stand at 38 peak plant industry bodies².

Since ratification there have been 21 cost shared response plans endorsed by the relevant government and industry signatories through the National Management Group that is formed for each plant biosecurity incident. As of 23 September 2022, there are four 'active' response plans under the EPPRD: Banana freckle (Northern Territory), Khapra beetle, *Varroa destructor* (New South Wales) and the Exotic Fruit Flies in the Torres Strait (2021-2026) program.

In addition to the above agreed Response Plans, each year the relevant signatories to the EPPRD are notified (on average) of one new/exotic plant pest per fortnight that may be considered a potential emergency plant pest (as defined under the EPPRD). Detection and notification of these suspected emergency plant pests may not result in a nationally agreed cost shared response plan under the EPPRD; however, each report needs to be given due consideration and resources applied by governments and industries to ensure an appropriate and measured response is taken proportionate to risk and potential national impact.

Of the 38 peak plant industry bodies that are signatories to the EPPRD, all have been involved in multiple incidents, providing resourcing, with 31 industry signatories having been involved in a cost shared response plan.

QUESTION – Out of the 2021-22 budget (that included around \$67 million for biosecurity preparedness), was PHA involved in the roll-out of that funding?

Extract from Hansard Proof

CHAIR: I just want to ask about the budget. I believe the 2021-22 budget included around \$67 million for biosecurity preparedness. Part of that included more training and exercises to respond to pests and disease incursions. Are you involved in any of the roll-out of that funding?

Ms Corcoran: I believe we are. I would have to take that on notice in terms of additional information.

CHAIR: About what you're doing exactly—if you could take on notice where that's up to. Just finally: you cover a lot of different types of farming. How does it work for a farmer that might produce a number of different goods that cover your area? How do you provide assistance to them?

ANSWER – To date, PHA has not received any specific projects from the 2021-22 budget to deliver on plant biosecurity training or exercises. It has, however worked with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) on a fee for service to the value of \$44,018 over 11 months to provide specialised emergency exercise advice in the concept development and planning of DAFF's national biosecurity response exercise series, Exercise Paratus. The scoping activities that PHA were engaged with were completed in August 2022.

² List of signatories to the EPPRD at www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/biosecurity/emergency-plant-pest-response-deed/epprd-signatories/

PHA thanks the Committee for its time enquiring on this important topic and looks forward to the outcomes supporting plant biosecurity and the broader biosecurity framework protect Australia's agricultural industry and regional communities.

Kind regards,

Sarah Corcoran
Chief Executive Officer