

CATTLE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION

26 August 2022

Senator the Hon Matthew Canavan
Chair of Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator,

Re: The adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, in particular with respect to foot-and-mouth disease and varroa mite; response to and implementation of previous reports into biosecurity; and any related matters.

Cattle Council of Australia (CCA) is the peak industry organisation representing Australia's grass-fed cattle producers. Established in 1979, CCA brings together all state-based farming organisations representing cattle producers in their jurisdiction, associate member organisations with close connections to the cattle industry and individual cattle producers. As a Peak Industry Council, we are responsible for grass-fed sector industry policy.

CCA welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, particularly relating to foot-and-mouth disease and varroa mite, the response to and implementation of previous reports into biosecurity and any related matters.

CCA supports the assertion that the biosecurity risks facing Australia are increasingly complex and harder to manage. The timing is right for us to renew our efforts on the biosecurity front and promote biosecurity as a national priority. The recent detections of Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Indonesia are a timely reminder of the more challenging biosecurity environment we are currently facing.

This submission supports CCA's pre-existing insistence that there be: an immediate strengthening and bolstered resourcing of biosecurity; any new revenue be spent solely on upgraded biosecurity measures; a substantial increase in biosecurity detector dogs for increasing volumes of incoming passengers, mail and cargo and the annual demand for an 'efficiency dividend' as it impacts on border-biosecurity staff numbers be removed. CCA also supports the role of the Inspector-General of Biosecurity in bolstering our national biosecurity system.

In addition to improved on-farm biosecurity, CCA would like to draw this inquiry's attention to the need for:

-) Increased domestic border measures inline with the increased threat levels
-) A focus on early detection, particularly for exotic disease transmitted by airborne vectors such as LSD
-) Continued support for Indonesia to contain and eradicate FMD and LSD
-) The development of livestock vaccines and rapid diagnostics
-) The development and implementation of a sustainable long-term funding model for biosecurity

-) Implementing nationally consistent livestock traceability (meeting national standards)
-) A focus on pre-incursion measures, such as feral animal control, to reduce domestic risk factors.

1. Our current disease response arrangements

The current response arrangements for the grass-fed cattle sector, as well as other livestock industries, are largely contained within the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA). This agreement sets out the respective parties, their responsibilities, cost sharing arrangements and the exotic animal diseases covered.

The EADRA also sets out the response arrangements for the 66 categorised animal diseases covered by the agreement. This agreement has been in place since 2002 and is intended to significantly increase Australia's capacity to prepare for, and respond to, emergency animal disease incursions.

CCA and the EADRA

CCA is a signatory to the EADRA along with other livestock industry bodies, state and territory governments and the Australian Animal Health Council (Animal Health Australia - AHA). Industries that are not a beneficiary of the response are not required to share costs and are not included in determining the response.

CCA's responsibilities under the EADRA

Under the EADRA, all signatories have agreed to work collectively to reduce the risk of emergency animal disease (EAD) incursions and share the approved costs of EAD responses. All parties to EADRA commit to the participation in a disease response through informed and empowered representatives who cooperate to determine and direct the response. All parties commit to maintaining the capability to ensure early detection of, and an effective response to, an EAD incursion.

Cost sharing under the EADRA

Under the EADRA, all parties commit to contribute to funding the eligible costs of responding to an EAD incursion by which they are affected. The costs to be shared are identified under the Agreement.

The cattle industry funds its industry commitments through its cattle transaction levy. The \$5 per levy comprises five separate levies directed to three different bodies. This includes \$3.66 for marketing, \$0.92 for research and development, \$0.29 for the National Residue Survey and \$0.13 for Animal Health Australia (AHA). The AHA component of the levy is by far the smallest.

The cattle transaction levy includes a nil rated EADRA levy that can be 'activated' to repay the Australian Government for industry's share of the response of an EAD incursion.

Disease Categorisation under the EADRA

Exotic animal diseases are categorised according to the impact they can have on livestock industry production (eg international trade losses, domestic market disruptions, production losses), human health and the environment. A disease category determines how much of the response costs are borne by affected industries and how much by government.

The two most current disease threats facing the Australian cattle industry are FMD and LSD. FMD is currently listed as a Category 2 disease which, under the agreement, requires an 80/20 cost split between government and industry. LSD is currently listed as a Category 3 disease and, as such, requires a 50/50 cost split.

CCA has joined with the Australian Dairy Farmers and the Australian Lot Feeders Association, in the application to have LSD recategorised from Category 3 (50/50) to Category 2 (80/20). The recategorisation of LSD, if successful, would provide for greater consistency between similar animal diseases.

2. Our current biosecurity environment

The Australian continent is currently facing a wave of exotic livestock diseases. Both LSD and FMD have been detected recently in Indonesia. African Swine Fever has swept through Asia and African Horse Sickness is also present in Asia. Japanese Encephalitis has also swept through Asia and into Australia, and our pork industry, has now suffered an incursion. Our honeybee industry is currently fighting an incursion of Varroa mite.

Most of the diseases we are facing, which include LSD, FMD, Varroa mite, African Horse Sickness and even FMD in certain circumstances, are transmitted via airborne vectors such as insects, making them very difficult to protect against and difficult to contain once an incursion has been detected. The Centre for Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis indicated a 42% probability of a significant animal disease outbreak in Australia in the next five years.

The three phases for each disease for the current Exotic Disease outlook includes:

-) Pre-Incursion (FMD, LSD, ASF and African Horse Sickness)
-) Post Incursion (Japanese Encephalitis and Varroa Mite)
-) Resilience and rebuilding

Each incursion phase requires different program measures, depending on whether the incursion has taken place and whether control and eradication have been successful.

Pre-Incursion

Pre-incursion biosecurity activities are aimed at implementing measures that minimise the risk of an incursion and/or reduce the spread of an incursion following its arrival. Pre incursion measures that support early detection should seek to improve surveillance and timeliness of detection following an incursion.

Regarding LSD and FMD specifically, the Australian Cattle industry is currently in the pre-incursion stage. Despite our increased efforts to keep these diseases out, we must be prepared for the reality that an incursion may not be far off.

Examples of pre-incursion activities include improvements to: response planning, vaccine and diagnostic testing development, traceability systems, feral animal eradication, management of public land, vector management and surveillance. Providing support to neighbouring countries to contain and eradicate LSD and FMD, which Australia is providing to Indonesia, is also an example of a pre-incursion biosecurity measure.

Post Incursion

Post incursion activities includes EAD response arrangements such as those included EADRA and the associated AUSVETPLANS which inform these responses.

Resilience and Recovery

The resilience and recovery phase includes measures such as trade negotiation to reopen export markets and herd rebuilding following stamping out of affected areas. Depending on the extent of the incursion, rebuilding devastated communities may also be required, similar to our recent drought recovery efforts.

Now is the time for the Australian grass-fed cattle sector together with the broader livestock industry and Commonwealth, State and Local Governments to proactively focus on pre-incursion biosecurity measures such as vaccines, diagnostics, feral animal control and wild cattle and buffalo management.

3. The Importance of the Australian Cattle Industry

The beef cattle industry is Australia's largest agricultural industry, with 23.5 million head of cattle, and 52,410 agricultural businesses involved with cattle. Beef cattle farming alone had a turnover of \$21,315 million in 2019–20, around 30% of the \$69.9 billion total turnover from Australia's red meat and livestock industry during that period. Over the past 20 years, total global consumption of meat has been steadily increasing at an average annual rate of 1%¹.

The beef industry's contribution to food security both within Australia and in importing countries cannot be overstated. In 2020, Australian beef exports totalled 1 million tonnes shipped weight, valued at \$9.6 billion, making Australia the second largest beef exporter behind Brazil.

Our beef producers are custodians to almost 80% of the agricultural land in Australia which equates to around 50% of the total landmass², as grass-fed cattle production is highly suited to regional Australia. Our industry is uniquely positioned to be instrumental in exotic disease prevention and management.

The Australian cattle industry works hard to maintain a high standard and world class animal health, welfare, biosecurity and production practices through: traceability and integrity systems; whole of industry health and welfare systems; adoption of animal health, welfare and biosecurity best practices and; optimising animal production for the environment and market.

The Australian grass fed cattle sector, particularly with its large northern cattle herd, is perhaps most at risk of a significant biosecurity incursion. Rural, regional and remote Australian communities cannot afford to lose this sector to disease incursion. CCA supports the Commonwealth in its efforts to assist Indonesia to control and eradicate FMD & LSD.

4. The Importance of Biosecurity

The health and well-being of our livestock is critically important. We do not wish to see our animals become infected with exotic disease, become sick or die. As challenging as it is, we do not wish to have to slaughter, either pre-emptively, large amounts of livestock following an EAD incursion as we have seen happen in other countries who have suffered incursions.

Further, the economic viability of our industry and the people who rely on it is also of critical importance. The Australian grass fed cattle sector, along with other Australian livestock industries, cannot afford to lose its disease-free status. CCA supports maintaining Australia's disease-free status to improve the economic resilience for our industry by increasing access to, and the performance of existing and new markets. With about 75% of Australian beef production exported, our industry policy and national policy must keep pace with that of our global competitors, and the expectations of our customers.

The recent emergence of several significant exotic animal diseases in our region have escalated the biosecurity threat to Australia's livestock industry, our rural communities, and our way of life. It is imperative that Australia increase its focus, resourcing, and promotion of biosecurity as a national priority.

As the threat to Australia's Biosecurity grows, so too must the prioritisation, funding, and resourcing of our biosecurity measures. Maintaining Australia's disease-free status has emerged as our number one priority, and we must be proactive in maintaining it.

¹ State of the Industry Report, 2021, Meat and Livestock Australia, available at: [2789-mla-state-of-industry-report-2021_d11_single.pdf](#).

² Australian Beef Sustainability Framework Annual Update 2022, available at: [absf_update_2022_web.pdf](#)

5. The important work that CCA does in biosecurity

CCA supports the development of appropriate planning and response to Australia's biosecurity threats. The creation of the CCA Internal Working Group for LSD and FMD has resourced CCA's engagement across the entire biosecurity planning and response space and this represents a significant investment on behalf of the grass fed cattle sector. Over the past six months this investment has continued to escalate.

Risk Assessment for the Importation of LSD Live Virus

CCA provided consultation and a submission on behalf of grass-fed cattle producers in response to the Department of Agriculture Water and Environment (DAWE) risk assessment of the importation of LSD virus specifically for:

-) Development of new diagnostic capabilities.
-) Rigorous testing of live attenuated vaccines.
-) The development of newer safer vaccines.
-) Understanding how the virus behaves under simulated Australian conditions.
-) Research the survivability and transmission of LSD within Australian livestock.

CCA supports the importation of the live LSD virus contingent upon:

-) The importation is conducted under a specific risk assessment process and does not cause disease in cattle and buffalo.
-) The assurance that the imported LSD virus will never leave the ACDP facility, and that LSD virus importation will not change Australia's animal health status.
-) Preference for research and development be focused on diagnostics and development of mRNA vaccine.
-) The Inspector General reviewing the process and controls of the importation.
-) CCA being further consulted if the importation of LSD virus changes from those stated.

The National Biosecurity Strategy

CCA supported the development of the National Biosecurity Strategy and its six priority areas which include: shared biosecurity culture; highly skilled workforce; sustainable investment; stronger partnerships; coordinated preparedness and response and; integrations supported by technology, research and data.

The CCA participated in consultations on behalf of grass fed cattle producers and also provided a submission to this process. Among other things, the CCA submission called for:

-) specific reference to farmers and other land holders,
-) the inclusion of stakeholders as "equal partners",
-) a "real-time" approach and a real-time culture in prevention and response,
-) improved cost recovery measures such as the container levy and sustainable funding,
-) the provision of an interim review of the National Biosecurity Strategy.

Draft National Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) Action Plan

LSD is perhaps the most threatening of disease for Australia's grass-fed cattle sector. CCA represented the grass-fed cattle sector through consultations with DAFF and a submission.

At time of writing this submission, the final National LSD Action Plan has not been released. Regarding the draft plan however, CCA has supported the key principles of:

- International Engagement
- Border security and trade
- Diagnostic capability
- Surveillance
- Preparedness and response
- Awareness and communications
- Research and innovation
- Resilience and recovery.

However, CCA also made specific suggestions which included:

-) A nationally consistent livestock traceability system capable of meeting the National Livestock Traceability Performance Standards across all red meat livestock species.
-) Long-term sustainable funding for livestock traceability that provides real-time exotic disease management capability.
-) Specific LSD (and FMD) surveillance activities targeted at LSD (and FMD) pathways including weather and vector modelling for potential LSD incursions.
-) Pre-Incursion activities identified by the DRAFT AUSVETPLAN for LSD including feral animal control, wild cattle and buffalo control, buffer zones and negotiated zoning arrangements with trading partners.
-) Arrangements and contingency plans for rejected Australian live export consignment, including scenario planning and exercises.
-) Infrastructure including truck washdown bays for biosecurity and incursion response.
-) Northern Australia cattle slaughter capacity for potential slaughter-out activities.
-) Rapid establishment of an offshore vaccine bank for LSD, similar to our FMD facility.
-) Improved resources for rapid training of stakeholders and industry representatives.
-) Specific engagement activities targeting landowners (and traditional landowners) regarding feral animal control, biosecurity, and land management.
-) Co-ordination between the Commonwealth, States/Territories, and industry on pre and post LSD responses.

The AUSVETPLANS

The AUSVETPLAN's are technical response plans that describe the proposed approach to an emergency animal disease incident. These plans provide guidance based on sound analysis, linking policy, strategies, implementation, coordination, and emergency management. The AUSVETPLANS are key to post incursion disease containment and eradication.

CCA was a key stakeholder in the development of the AUSVETPLANS for both LSD and FMD. CCA's Internal Working Group provided representatives with the expertise critical for drafting such important response plans, as well as conducting periodic reviews of the draft AUSVETPLANS.

An important outcome from the AUSVETPLAN Writing Groups was the development of a list of pre-incursion activities. The activities were identified as assisting greatly with a post incursion response and response planning. Some of these activities would have to be completed as part of an exotic disease eradication plan. Examples of these activities include:

-) establishing cattle and buffalo-free buffer zones in areas where disease entry is likely through depopulation/stamping out,
 -) securing access to, or developing vaccine manufacturing capability within Australia,
 -) negotiations of suitable health requirements with international trading partners,
 -) research to enhance diagnostic capability, LSD virus behaviour under simulated Australian conditions, developing DIVA assays in parallel with vaccine development,
- Senate inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's Biosecurity**

-) improved surveillance,
-) improved transport infrastructure, including truck wash-down facilities.

6. Biosecurity moving forward - what must be done

Pre-Incursion Measures

A list of pre-incursion activities has been identified by the AUSVETPLAN LSD writing group and this represents a significant workplan. Many of the pre-incursion measures identified are also pertinent to pre-incursion work required in preparation for a potential FMD incursion. CCA assumes this pre-incursion work falls under the LSD National Action Plan, however at time of writing this report the action plan is not yet released.

Successfully conducted pre-incursion measures provide Australia's best chance of success for our response plans and our chances for early detection, control and eradication of exotic disease incursion. However, funding and resourcing these measures is critical and at present it is not clear how they will be funded or resourced.

Key pre-incursion measures that require funding and resourcing include new and innovative surveillance techniques, feral animal destruction, wild cattle and buffalo management destocking of public lands and improved infrastructure such as truck washdown bays for truck decontamination at strategic points. Vaccine and rapid diagnostics development are also considered pre-incursion measures.

Continued Increases in Biosecurity Measures at Border

CCA has publicly called for increased biosecurity protection as the biosecurity threat to our industry has increased. It is imperative that all biosecurity responses provided, occur in real-time and that such improvements are supported by appropriate and scientifically based risk assessment. Moreover, as requested in our submission to the Draft National Biosecurity Strategy, our biosecurity agencies need to develop a real-time culture in their response to emerging biosecurity threats.

CCA understands that, in the application of frontline biosecurity technologies, all technologies have their limitations, and that success relies upon the use of all technologies together as a biosecurity system. The use of footbaths/footmats in airports, while an important technology in themselves, are not a stand-alone solution.

Sustainable Funding and Resourcing

At the Commonwealth level, the current funding for biosecurity relies upon budget allocations such as those made in the previous 2021 Federal Budget. While the allocation of \$400 million in the 2021 budget was most welcome, this will need to be repeated in future budgets if today's level of biosecurity is to be maintained.

It is simply not acceptable to have biosecurity reliant upon successive budgets, and therefore the political climate of the day, to meet our ongoing biosecurity responsibilities. More sustainable long-term funding measures will need to be developed to improve funding and resource sustainability.

Many of today's biosecurity activities are not fully cost recovered or simply not cost recovered at all. Further, previous recommendations for the implementation of a biosecurity import levy, or container levy, have not been implemented.

Biosecurity cost recovery policy is under-developed in Australia, and it is past time that new cost recovery measures were identified and implemented. CCA understands that non-cost cost recovered activities include screening of inbound travellers, bulk cargos, and shipping containers. This issue will need to be rectified in the near term if Australia is going to adequately resource its biosecurity effort into the future.

The Commonwealth needs to quickly identify and implement new sustainable funding measures for biosecurity, such as the container levy, if the current level of protection is to be maintained over the longer term.

The Australian cattle industry maintains whole of life electronic identification which provides traceability from paddock to plate making us a unique industry. This is made possible by the implementation of the Property Identification Code System (PIC) which provides a number for every cattle property in Australia, and the use of electronic identification tags applied after birth which provides every animal with its own unique identification number as well as its originating property number.

The Australian cattle industry is not content with its current level of traceability and seek to improve its traceability systems. The implementation of electronic National Vendor Declarations (eNVD's) and the assessment and potential employment of UHF technology are challenges to be implemented and resourced in the near future. Should Australia be required to vaccinate cattle for LSD or FMD, identification will need to include this also.

Many of Australia's FMD susceptible livestock industries rely on "lot traceability" rather than individual identification, and also rely on a paper-based system rather than electronic. It is past time for all FMD susceptible livestock industries to implement nationally consistent real-time individual traceability.

Australia needs to implement a nationally consistent livestock traceability system capable of meeting the National Livestock Traceability Performance Standards across all red meat livestock species as a matter of urgency. Further, the Commonwealth needs to maintain its commitment of \$68.4 million to improve traceability in agriculture.

Exotic Disease Surveillance

Early detection is critical to successful containment and eradication of an exotic disease incursion. Recent success in containing and eradicating Khapra beetle can be attributed to early detection.

While Australia needs to continue to use its traditional methods of surveillance for exotic disease, we also need to develop new surveillance methods for the new types of incursions that we can expect such as those presented by airborne incursions. LSD is an example of an airborne threat that could arrive in Australia via insect on monsoon winds from neighbouring countries.

Australia currently maintains the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) which provides an early warning system for exotic pest, weed and disease detections across northern Australia. This system focusses on unregulated pathways for disease incursion as well as regulated pathways. Diseases with airborne vectors such as LSD require special attention in deploying biosecurity resources in northern Australia and NAQS could be used to monitor LSD vectors as well as potential LSD incursions in our northern herd.

Early detection is the key to success - Attention needs to be given to exotic diseases with airborne vectors such a LSD, particularly in northern Australia where our cattle experience monsoon winds.

Regional Biosecurity Network and In-country Support

The time is ripe for the Australian Federal Government to take a leading role in how biosecurity is managed in our region. If Covid 19 has taught us anything, it is that we can all learn lessons on managing crisis from our neighbours. Australia has an opportunity to forge stronger relationships with our neighbours by establishing a regional biosecurity network. The network would operate as an information sharing forum, and as an opportunity to forge and strengthen the biosecurity capacity of neighbouring countries.

Communications

Clear and accurate information is critical to a meaningful response during both efforts to prevent an EAD incident and during a response. Conflicting messaging only serves to confuse those we rely upon to take meaningful action. It is therefore vital that biosecurity incidents do not become a political or ideological battleground, as this does not accommodate the best possible outcomes. We have an expectation that all organisations, including political parties, will operate on scientific advice and expert risk assessments. Consultation with industry is also key to the best possible outcome.

CCA will advocate for the grass fed beef cattle industry in the event of an exotic animal disease incident and will keep all producers informed of the status of the incident with practical advice on the steps producers should take. CCA's messaging will take into consideration the messages, views, and needs of the broader industry, but will ultimately ensure the interests of grass-fed beef cattle producers are protected as best as possible.

The Commonwealth and the States have a regulatory remit in this space, and they need to come together to lead and communicate clearly, particularly around the safety of Australian meat, the need for a robust biosecurity systems and practical advice on the responsibilities of every person, from livestock producers to overseas travellers. Any challenge to the approach taken must be supported by expert evidence.

CCA takes seriously our responsibility as the Peak Industry Council to communicate clear, concise and accurate information to industry and the public in the pre-incursion and post-incursion phases of an EAD incident. CCA also understands the importance of working with Government to ensure messaging is consistent and supported by expert advice.

In summary, CCA urges that now is the time for the Australian grass-fed cattle sector together with the broader livestock industry and Governments to proactively focus on pre-incursion biosecurity measures such as vaccines, diagnostics, feral animal control and wild cattle and buffalo management. A long-term, sustainable funding model for both Biosecurity and traceability will be required to achieve this.

The Commonwealth needs to quickly identify and implement new sustainable funding measures for biosecurity and maintain its commitment of \$68.4 million to improve traceability in agriculture.

We look forward to further consultation with the Department on this important process. If there are any queries about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact our office on _____ or email _____

Yours sincerely

John McGoverne
A/g Chief Executive Officer