

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Referral of the inquiry

1.1 On 26 June 2014, the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee (the committee) for inquiry and report by 3 December 2014:

The adequacy of arrangements to prevent the entry and establishment of invasive species likely to harm Australia's natural environment, including:

- (a) recent biosecurity performance with respect to exotic organisms with the potential to harm the natural environment detected since 2000 and resulting from accidental or illegal introductions from overseas, including:
  - i. the extent of detected incursions, including numbers, locations and species, and their potential future environmental, social and economic impacts;
  - ii. the likely pathways of these recently detected incursions and any weaknesses in biosecurity that have facilitated their entry and establishment;
  - iii. the extent of quarantine interceptions of exotic organisms with the potential to harm the natural environment, including numbers, locations, species and potential impacts, and
  - iv. any reviews or analyses of detected incursions or interceptions relevant to the environment and any changes in biosecurity processes resulting from those reviews or analyses.
- (b) Australia's state of preparedness for new environmental incursions, including:
  - i. the extent to which high priority risks for the environment have been identified in terms of both organisms and pathways, and accorded priority in relation to other biosecurity priorities,
  - ii. the process for determining priorities for import risk analyses and the process for prioritising the preparation of these analyses,
  - iii. the current approach to contingency planning for high priority environmental risks and the process by which they were developed,
  - iv. the adequacy of current protocols and surveillance and their implementation for high-priority environmental risks,
  - v. current systems for responses to new detected incursions, the timeliness and adequacy, and the role of ecological expertise,

- vi. the extent to which compliance monitoring and enforcement activities are focused on high priority environmental risks,
- vii. the adequacy of reporting on incursions, transparency in decision-making and engagement of the community, and
- viii. institutional arrangements for environmental biosecurity and potential improvements; and

(c) any other related matter.

1.2 On 24 November 2014, the Senate granted an extension of time to report until 4 March 2015.<sup>1</sup> On 3 March 2015, the Senate granted a further extension of time to report until 13 May 2015.<sup>2</sup>

### **Conduct of the inquiry**

1.3 The committee advertised the inquiry on its website and in *The Australian* newspaper. The committee also wrote to relevant organisations and individuals inviting submission by 12 August 2014. The committee received 91 submissions, which were published on the committee's website and are listed at Appendix 1.

1.4 The committee held public hearings relating to its inquiry in Perth on 8 October 2014, Canberra on 31 October 2014, Hobart on 10 November 2014 and Sydney on 11 November 2014. A list of witnesses who appeared at the hearings may be found at Appendix 2.

### **Acknowledgement**

1.5 The committee would like to thank all the organisations, individuals and government departments who contributed to the inquiry.

### **Structure of the report**

1.6 The focus of this report reflects the terms of reference for this inquiry, which focus on *environmental* biosecurity—that is, the protection of the environment from negative effects associated with invasive species, as distinct from impacts on the economy, agriculture or human health. The terms of reference also focus on *recent accidental and illegal incursions* and *potential new incursions*, rather than on established pests and diseases.

1.7 This chapter outlines the conduct of the inquiry.

1.8 Chapter 2 provides background to environmental biosecurity, including legal and administrative frameworks currently in place.

1.9 Chapter 3 considers the distinctive features that characterise environmental biosecurity and the level of support it currently receives in comparison to other biosecurity sectors.

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1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 67, 24 November 2014, p. 1827.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 80, 3 March 2015, p. 2223.

1.10 Chapter 4 examines Australia's recent environmental biosecurity performance, and examines, by way of example, recent myrtle rust and tramp ant incursions.

1.11 Chapter 5 explores Australia's level of preparedness for the increasing environmental biosecurity threats it faces, including high-risk pathways and industries and the quality of risk assessments and species prioritisation.

1.12 Chapter 6 discusses marine, freshwater and island environmental biosecurity issues raised during the inquiry.

1.13 Chapter 7 contains the committee's conclusions and recommendations in relation to Australia's environmental biosecurity arrangements.

