



23 August 2020

Attn: Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

SUBJECT: Inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness

The ACMF

The Australian Chicken Meat Federation Inc. (ACMF) is the peak coordinating body for participants in the chicken meat industry in Australia, representing all elements of the industry, including chicken growers and processors, at the national level. The ACMF was formed in 1964 and our members are the five State Chicken Meat Councils (Queensland, NSW, Victoria, SA and WA), the Australian Chicken Growers' Council and the Australian Poultry Industries Association, the latter representing the chicken meat processors that produce over 90 per cent of Australia's chicken meat.

Through its State organisations, ACMF also represents a range of other suppliers to the industry, providers of services to the industry, and customers of the industry, who are involved in the production and distribution of chicken meat in Australia.

The ACMF's interest in this Inquiry

The poultry industry in Australia has, unfortunately, lived through several outbreaks of an emergency animal disease (EAD). The ACMF has also been involved in EAD preparedness exercises and supported responses to emergency diseases which do not affect poultry. We have extensive experience in preparing for, responding to and reflecting upon the processes followed in an EAD incursion, which includes participating in 'lessons learned' exercises.

While this inquiry is focusing on foot-and-mouth disease and varroa mite, we thought our perspectives from repeated lived experience could be of value.

The adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness and response to and implementation of previous reports into biosecurity

In our experience, Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness are of a high standard. Previous incursions of poultry EADs have been quickly detected, contained and eradicated. Disruption to domestic markets has been minimal and, although it has taken longer than expected or desired to regain key export markets, work undertaken by the Australian DAFF in 'peacetime' has progressively improved the likelihood of more rapid recovery of markets in the event of any future outbreak. With each incursion, industry and government get more practised at responding to and eradicating poultry EADs to the point we consider Australia a world-leader when it comes to responding to poultry EAD incursions.

Australia is in the enviable position of having excellent, pre-established arrangements in place between government and industry to collaborate in preparedness and response activities for EADs. What we are perhaps not so good at is addressing identified opportunities to improve our arrangements.

We have found that, when it comes to implementing the recommendations from reflective and lessons learned exercises undertaken on return to normal business following an incursion, there appears to be no accountability for ensuring actions are completed to build the resilience of the broader biosecurity sector. The approach to undertaking recommended activities is *ad hoc*, and often based on the motivation and/or memory of individuals involved. For example, the lessons learned report from the 2012/13 Avian Influenza (AI) incursion identified that *“There needs to be clarification on cleaning standards, disinfection types, concentrations, application frequency, and application methods for all bird areas, silos and ranges.”*. While a project delivered through poultry industry research and development funds was initiated 4 years after the lessons learned workshop, this project would likely not have proceeded were it not for the fact that, during the ACMF's update of the chicken industry's biosecurity manual, a review of a broad range of documentation, including the lessons learned report (which was not a public document) identified that there were outstanding actions to progress.

Responding to recommendations from lessons learned exercises is important; however, recommendations made usually require activities to be undertaken which are beyond normal business resourcing, requiring additional investment and often collaboration with other stakeholders, and compete with more immediate priorities of getting back to business following an outbreak. These characteristics ultimately reduce the priority given to implementing recommendations when considered alongside other immediate issues being responded to on a daily basis. This, coupled with a lack of governance to ensure recommendations are implemented, provides little incentive to quickly progress resolution of recommendations well in advance of the next incursion or exercise. In saying this, we are not suggesting that there is no progress made; rather, we are suggesting that there needs to be a system established that provides oversight of these recommendations to ensure they are progressed, where relevant.

At a more macro level, it is common to see the same recommendations being made in independent reviews related to improving the biosecurity, preparedness and response systems in Australia. This suggests that guidance provided by earlier reviews is not progressed adequately to mitigate the need for subsequent additional reviews aimed at identifying opportunities to improve the system. For example, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB) review released in 2017 (<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/policy/partnerships/nbc/intergovernmental-agreement-on-biosecurity/igabreview/igab-final-report>) made recommendations across the broad categories of 'Risk and capability', 'Engagement and communication with system participants', 'Financial sustainability of the system', 'Governance of the system' and 'Government performance and accountability'. Recommendations that align with these broad categories are found in many other reports that relate to the biosecurity system as a whole. For example, the Inspector General of Biosecurity's *“Accountable implementation of Inspectors-General recommendations (2015–2021)”* (<https://www.igb.gov.au/current-and-completed-reviews>) report, makes recommendations we interpreted to be along similar lines to those made in the IGAB review. Recommendations along the same themes are also identified as part of the exercises conducted by various industry and government entities either at a jurisdictional, industry or EAD-specific level. We question whether this apparent lack of progress is due to a lack of resourcing and/or commitment, or result from the lack of a framework to ensure recommendations of these important reviews are responded to and/or acted on in a timely manner, where relevant.

The release of the National Biosecurity Strategy (<https://www.biosecurity.gov.au/about/national-biosecurity-committee/nbs>) presents another example of a review and consultation process that has highlighted the same needs for the biosecurity system as earlier reviews referred to. The failure in the system appears to come when prioritising investment to make progress towards these more complex, long-term needs, over managing other, more immediate issues.

To progress recommendations, and to actually address lessons learned from past exercises and responses, at industry, jurisdictional and biosecurity sector levels, a sustainable funding model is needed that provides the resources to support the implementation of recommendations (as relevant) specifically. This needs to be

resourcing additional to that required to address more immediate needs as they arise, and which is minimally diverted during biosecurity crises. This approach is needed in order to build a more resilient biosecurity sector in Australia as it would allow the short-term immediate needs to be addressed without compromising the long-term improvements to the system that have been identified.

Yours sincerely,

Kylie Hewson
Deputy Executive Director