

To: [Committee, EC \(SEN\)](#)
Subject: submission to Senate inquiry into biosecurity
Date: Thursday, 31 July 2014 12:24:51 PM

Dear Senators,

I am pleased to learn that the Senate is conducting an inquiry into the ‘adequacy of arrangements to prevent the entry and establishment of invasive species likely to harm Australia’s natural environment’. The continuing increase in the list of invasive species in Australia clearly indicates that such an inquiry is needed, and that increasing funding to tighten biosecurity measures could be a very good investment in Australia’s future.

I’m sure that you are all aware of the devastating environmental and economic impacts that resulted from the deliberate introduction of creatures such as rabbits, foxes, cane toads, and many of our Weeds of National Significance to Australia. The problem of new incursions continues to this day as a result of both deliberate and accidental importation of species from overseas into Australia. Such recent incursions include: myrtle rust, a pathogen of our dominant plant family (Myrtaceae) that was first found in a plant nursery in NSW; pigeon paramyxovirus, a disease that could infect native birds; Asian honeybees, that could alter pollination services to plants, compete with nectar- and pollen-feeding animals, and potentially carry Varroa mites that would harm our honey industry; several species of one of the most highly invasive group of animals (ants, specifically red imported fire ants, yellow crazy ants and electric ants); Asian black-spined toads and smooth newts, that were both found in Melbourne this year and could have impacts akin to those of cane toads but in cooler climates; and the highly invasive Mexican feather grass (*Nassella tenuissima*) that can be purchased online despite being illegal.

Invasive species cost Australia an enormous amount of money. Eradication and control programs are costly, and these costs increase rapidly with delayed detection and onset of eradication programs. If the incursion is not eradicated, and it causes environmental harm, there can be flow-on costs to industries such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism, as well as increased costs for recovery programs for threatened species and ecosystems.

To overcome the risk posed by new biosecurity incursions, I urge you to support the establishment of ‘Environment Health Australia’ to prioritise risks, improve preparation for new incursions, and monitor progress in improving biosecurity. Specifically, Australia needs to make it more difficult for people to introduce invasive species (e.g. through stemming the flow of plant propagules from overseas through Australia Post, and these and other sources of incursions through Australia’s airports and seaports). Hence, we need to improve our surveillance of pathways through which invasive species enter Australia, and tighten and improve our enforcement of quarantine regulations. We also need to improve our responses to incursions so that these are eradicated as early (and therefore as cheaply) as possible, and establish an incursions database.

The improvement of biosecurity will be an ongoing process, as we learn from our successes and failures. To this end, it is imperative that we document and review every incursion.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Andrew Hingston, School of Land and Food, University of Tasmania, Hobart.