



7 July 2023

Committee Chair
Senate Standing Committee
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Chair,

NFF submission - Biosecurity Amendment (Advanced Compliance Measures) Bill.

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee inquiry into the Biosecurity Amendment (Advanced Compliance Measures) Bill 2023 [Provisions] (herein the Bill).

The NFF is the voice of Australian farmers. The NFF was established in 1979 as the national peak body representing farmers and more broadly, agriculture across Australia. The NFF's membership comprises all of Australia's major agricultural commodities across the supply chain. Operating under a federated structure, individual farmers join their respective state farm organisation and/or national commodity council. These organisations form the NFF.

The NFF provides in principle support for the proposed legislation. We see the Bill as a means to help strengthen a key element of our biosecurity system, being at-border prevention. Given the importance the sector places on maintaining its favourable pest and disease status, it supports the increased penalties for biosecurity non-compliance and information gathering powers for broader officials. These issues, as well as some further considerations around appropriate resourcing and reporting to ensure the effectiveness of the measures, are outlined below.

The importance of Australia's biosecurity system

Australia's biosecurity system is fundamental to the success of our agriculture industries, the health of our natural environment and to our society and economy at large. Our vision of a \$100 billion-dollar agricultural industry by 2030 is heavily reliant upon Australia maintaining a favourable biosecurity status amid increasing pest and disease pressure on our borders.

Australia has a sophisticated biosecurity system, operated by dedicated professionals, that has kept us free of many of the pests and diseases that are prevalent around the world. However, the system is under pressure, with Australia facing an increasingly complex biosecurity environment. Growth in risk pathways has increased the risk of major biosecurity threats entering and establishing in Australia, and responses to current incursions have drawn on a significant amount

of resources. The threats to biosecurity are constantly evolving, making it essential to adopt robust prevention and deterrence measures.

To achieve our desired level of protection, it is imperative that appropriate biosecurity practices are in place along the pre-border, border and post-border continuum. Within this continuum, a key element of risk resides at the border, necessitating the implementation of effective biosecurity control mechanisms to prevent incursions. The NFF recognises that prevention provides the greatest efficacy as well as the greatest economic return for biosecurity investments.

Increasing civil penalties to reflect the biosecurity risk and incentivise greater compliance.

The NFF supports increased civil penalties for individuals and entities that fail to comply with biosecurity laws. Stronger penalties should reflect the ever-increasing risks associated with non-compliant behaviour, which threaten Australia's favourable biosecurity status.

While we have a highly sophisticated biosecurity system, including at our border, we continue to see individuals and entities seeking to contravene biosecurity rules and regulations. While our system works to ensure such instances are kept to a minimum, we know that even a single contravention event can lead to severe biosecurity consequences.

For this reason, the NFF supports the increased civil penalties contained in the Bill. We see these as a means to enhance the biosecurity system and incentivise greater compliance with Australia's laws and regulations.

Increased information gathering powers to support the detection of non-compliance.

Akin to the application of more robust civil penalties, the NFF provides in principle support for increased information gathering provision for border officials as it relates to biosecurity.

The sector supports officials having access to accurate and comprehensive information about travellers and goods, as a means to enhance our capacity to most accurately assess and manage relevant risks pathways. This would appear not only to support a more effective system but improve efficiency to allow for the most effective allocation of resources and biosecurity controls.

Other considerations relating to the proposed measures.

To ensure the ongoing effectiveness of new compliance measures proposed in the Bill, it is crucial to establish appropriate performance indicators that can accurately assess the impact and outcomes of these measures. Developing well-defined metrics will allow for ongoing performance indicators, identify any potential gaps or weaknesses, and make necessary adjustments to improve the efficacy of our biosecurity system.

Moreover, ensuring there is appropriate resourcing to carry out these changes is essential in supporting at-border measures. Appropriate resourcing is vital in

processing intelligence, understanding biosecurity threats, policing the changes in compliance arrangements and prosecution measures for non-compliant activities. The establishment of appropriate resources to support at-border biosecurity will ensure that Australia can effectively combat biosecurity risks by enforcing the proposed changes as outlined amended Bill.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES THOMAS
Acting Chief Executive Officer