

Submission to Senate enquiry on "Adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness to foot and mouth disease.

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

Key Issues

1. our overall capacity and capability numbers of people with the right skills - has dropped alarmingly. We are now well below critical mass.

The number of Stock Inspectors (defacto Quarantine/Biosecurity officers) has dropped to such an extent that many of Queensland's extensive/remote areas have NO permanent Biosecurity officer. I have intimate knowledge of this having served in such a position from 1983 to 1988 incl based in Normanton where I undertook Disease monitoring and eradication, quarantine duties on behalf of the Commonwealth, Coastal Surveillance on behalf of the Commonwealth, built critical relationships with and liaised with remote indigenous communities (who were our eyes and ears). Today, NO such officer is based in Normanton, Thursday Island or Cairns and virtually right down the Qld East coast there are few if any such officers. These officers were also based throughout Qld at strategic locations where they built relationships with the rural population/communities, kept disease under surveillance, were on the spot fountains of knowledge on all diseases of livestock and quickly responded to any disease issues/outbreaks. These officers were on the ground, ready, and quick to respond as well as being actively engaged in all forms of disease surveillance/control. Officer numbers have dropped by almost 60%!!

2. related to this (or possibly the cause) is that we don't have a proper funding mechanism for biosecurity - see the attached paper that Hugh Millar and Ron Glanville wrote a few years ago.

The current system is reactive and NOT based on being proactive. With FMD it is too late once and outbreak has occurred as with the feral animal population (deer, pigs, goats etc) once the outbreak gets established it will spread rapidly. With so few on the ground staff and the lack of veterinarians even in private practice in remote areas it will take days to confirm an outbreak and the spread will occur rapidly before control areas can be established. There is need for an industry/government partnership to jointly fund a critically mass of staff to educate the population in preventative measures and maintain surveillance/detection expertise.

3. Surrender of items at airports, people surveillance and swill feeding controls not properly monitored - much more important than people's shoes when returning from Bali. I recently returned from overseas on two occasions. Firstly from PNG where over 30 of us returned from trekking the KOKODA track. All had similar bright red uniforms on (highly distinctive) with

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"I trekked KOKODA" emblazoned on them and yet I was the only member of the party that went through Quarantine protocols because I CHOSE to. All other walked straight thru and were NOT challenged by Border Force/Quarantine as they either did NOT see the significance or did NOT care. Training of these officers appears inadequate. On the second occasion there were insufficient declaration cards available on the plane to be completed before landing and the plane crew were NOT really interested. There were NO cards available in the airport prior to customs. Then the bin for discarding items that can NOT be brought into Australia was overflowing with items, with some discarded nearby on the floor and people walking through and over them. What impression does this give to incoming passengers about the seriousness of protecting our biosecurity? Both incidents I reported to the Federal minister's office and the response was "**these things happen at times you should realise**"! Not good enough!!!

4. Surveillance has many gaps. The biggest one is that there are NO people on the ground out there working with Industry at the coal face. Whilst there is a desperate shortage of veterinarians in rural areas there is also a big trend for vets to go out of mixed practice and just concentrate on small animals, so there are many areas that just aren't serviced. Sheep industry is particularly bad. Recently large animal vet in WA was asked 'what are the chances that if there was something going on in the sheep industry in your area that you'd hear about it?' Answer: '**next to zero**'. Surveillance officers do NOT all have to be vets. Qld experience shows that Biosecurity officers (formerly Stock Inspectors) have the ability to engage in a highly successful and ground roots manner with livestock producers and others associated with the industry due to their hands on approach, acceptance as part of the community and knowledge. More staff are need at the coal face.
5. Governments are becoming too risk averse - but in the wrong areas, so they create other risks. For example, during the 2020 avian influenza response, Government officials didn't openly and honestly consult and involve industry because they were worried about privacy issues, so they didn't utilise industry expertise enough. Industry found out things second hand and NOT direct from the officials so the partnership that should have been there was Not working. Such a focus without critical industry involvement, reduces cooperation and lessens industry's confidence that the response to a FMD incident could be prudently handled.
6. AUSVETPLAN is too complex and too 'perfect'. It tries to cover off on every conceivable risk, without identifying the key things to be controlled. Hence, rather than do the key movement controls well, by trying to cover everything the result will be less than what is needed in a FMD situation. Australian officials were in Great Britain for their most recent FMD outbreak/eradication and saw firsthand the issues but we do not seem to have measures to make sure the same mistakes are NOT made if an outbreak should occur here. For example, if you look at the movement controls, just about everything requires a permit, but do we have the capability to process them all?? Highly unlikely so the system will grind to a halt. We saw this on a smaller scale during the Equine Influenza response.

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¹ Glanville., Millar., 2019. National Biosecurity Funding and Investmet – A Discussion Paper

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