

AVA Submission: National Biosecurity Statement

To biosecurityconsultation@agriculture.gov.au

Submission from the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd



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National Biosecurity Statement 2018

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About us

The Australian Veterinary Association is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 9,500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Recommendations

- That the statement specifically acknowledge the industry bodies and organisations who are key biosecurity stakeholders within Australia, or that this be added as an online addendum to the Statement.
- That the statement be presented as a 'call to arms' to all Australians, similar to the New Zealand Government 'Biosecurity 2025 Direction Statement'.
- That governments invest in public education campaigns to convey to the community that the responsibilities and costs of biosecurity should be borne by the entire society who benefit from living in Australia.
- That the costs of biosecurity should be borne by all Australians.
- That there be clearer recognition within the statement of the important roles that veterinarians play in biosecurity.

Background / Discussion

Background

As managers and stewards of animal health and welfare as well as public health, the veterinary profession has a clear interest in a strong and effective biosecurity system, to ensure the wellbeing of the nation's animals and people. Thus, the AVA welcomes the introduction of a National Biosecurity Statement which aims to engage all Australians as stakeholders in maintaining Australia's biosecurity system and upholding the measures that maintain Australia's very favourable animal disease status.

Maintaining a robust biosecurity system is key to providing assurances which protect not only our domestic animal industries but also the reputation of our important export markets, which together create billions of dollars' worth of value to our economy. The Australian Veterinary Association also highlights that good biosecurity is key in the reported 62% of Australian households which own pets.ⁱ

Australia's veterinarians play a vital role in national biosecurity through treatment and prevention of diseases in companion animals and livestock, monitoring of endemic disease, surveillance and detection of exotic disease incursions, and in responding to emergency animal disease outbreaks. The importance of the veterinary profession to Australia's biosecurity system is recognised in the 2017 Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity Review Final Report '*Priorities for Australia's biosecurity system – An independent review of the capacity of the National Biosecurity System and its underpinning intergovernmental agreement*'.ⁱⁱ However, the role of the veterinarian was better highlighted by three recent enquiries: the 2007 Callinan equine influenza

inquiry; the 2008 Beale Review of Australia's biosecurity and quarantine arrangements; and the 2011 Matthews report on Australia's preparedness for an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.

Veterinarians are also integral to the AUSVETPLAN administered by Animal Health Australia.

Discussion

The following conveys AVA's ideas on what should be included in the statement. We have done this by addressing the questions posed in the consultation draft:

• **What does biosecurity mean to you?**

To veterinarians, biosecurity means the structure and governance of our routine work in the management of disease in domestic animals and wildlife and the crossover 'zoonotic' diseases that also affect humans. It also means the consideration of conservation and protection of biodiversity to the Australian Veterinary Association.

To veterinarians, biosecurity means a spectrum of activities spanning a spectrum from the disease status of a single pet in a household right up to animal disease on a global level. At the individual level, veterinary activities prevent pets from catching endemic diseases, and limit spread of zoonoses and zoonoanthroposes. At a local level veterinary biosecurity activity includes quarantining animal disease effectively in a veterinary hospital or in on-farm environments and participating in disease surveillance and reporting activities. At the national level veterinarians play key roles in developing and implementing policy around risk and animal health and managing/preventing the spread of pests and diseases both within the country, and entry into the country, from the movement of live animals and animal products. At the International level, through partnerships and participation in organisations such as the OIE, veterinarians work to raise animal health and welfare standards in the production of safe and wholesome food, and with work human health practitioners to manage the spread and re-occurrence of important zoonoses such as Ebola Virus and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Virus.

• **What is your role within Australia's biosecurity system?**

The Australian Veterinary Association is the principal representative of the Australian veterinary profession. The work that veterinarians undertake is fundamentally the stewardship of animal health and welfare and being key contributors to the protection of public health – but it takes many forms of work. Upon choosing this vocation, veterinarians have signed up to upholding biosecurity through the management and reduction of disease incursion, occurrence and spread and in the production of safe and wholesome food. To this end, veterinarians have multiple roles in the Australian biosecurity system.

Clinical practitioners work with companion animals and horses; and with animals used for food and fibre production, such as cattle, sheep, poultry, and fish and with exotic animals and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems; veterinary pathologists work in identification and research of known and emerging disease agents; while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. Veterinarians also teach in a range of scientific disciplines.

The veterinarian is in the unique position of being responsible for diagnosing disease, a key part of disease surveillance and reporting; indeed, in most jurisdictions in Australia, the act of making a diagnosis is an act of veterinary science. It is AVA policy that making a diagnosis must be a restricted act of veterinary science. The certification of disease status is a restricted veterinary act in all jurisdictions. For these reasons, the veterinary profession needs to be at the heart of biosecurity efforts.

An 'act of veterinary science' means services which form part of the practice of veterinary surgery and medicine, and includes:

- the diagnostic confirmation of, treatment of, and provision of management advice for infectious disease, physiological dysfunction, psychological dysfunction and injury in animals;
- performing invasive or surgical procedures on animals;
- administering anaesthetics to animals;
- the exercise of prescribing rights for veterinary chemicals, medicines or poisons which may be restricted by scheduling or registered label; and
- the provision of veterinary certificates for the international trade of live animals and animal products.

The AVA position is that a formal degree in veterinary science, registrable within Australia, is the minimum acceptable knowledge base and skill set necessary to perform acts of veterinary science competently. This minimum standard is in place to protect animals and the community and is supported by most of the Australian state and territory veterinary practitioner boards. The veterinarian is uniquely qualified to make evidence-based diagnoses on the individual patient and in animal populations. This level of knowledge and expertise is essential to minimize adverse welfare consequences and yield successful outcomes for disease management.

• What responsibilities do you have in building a stronger and more effective biosecurity system?

In addition to the role of veterinarians outlined above, the Australian Veterinary Association has the responsibility of supporting and advocating for veterinarians in the multiple roles that they play within Australia's biosecurity system. We provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training on new and emerging diseases and practices, to ensure the veterinary profession is up to date with the latest developments in animal health. The cross-training that veterinarians receive make them exceptionally skilled and valuable contributors to Australian biosecurity. It is the role of the AVA to continually advocate for better recognition of the veterinarian's unique role in disease diagnosis, surveillance, epidemiology, and the quality assurance and verification services that veterinarians provide.

• What are the benefits of having a nationally agreed statement shared by all and how would you use it?

One of the benefits of developing a nationally agreed statement is that it starts a conversation around what a good biosecurity system will look like, and how this might be appropriately delegated and shared. It will have the benefit of identifying the gaps in biosecurity preparation and capability that have been in place for the last 20 years. The AVA understands that creating a National Biosecurity Statement was a recommendation of the 2017 independent report "Priorities for Australia's Biosecurity System", also known as the IGAB Review. The review found that, while governments and industry have well-developed partnership arrangements for parts of the national system, the foundation principle of 'shared responsibility' is not clearly understood, agreed or broadly accepted across the system.

Similarly, the roles and responsibilities of participants are not well defined or agreed. Agreeing roles and responsibilities will be an important first step in realising shared responsibility. To that end, the review has recommended a National Biosecurity Statement that outlines a common and unifying approach to biosecurity for all system participants. The review has developed a draft National Biosecurity Statement, which includes a simple definition of shared responsibility, as the basis for consultation and further development.

The Australian Veterinary Association agrees with the need to define 'a shared responsibility' in a way that is understood and agreed and that is all-encompassing across the system. When stakeholders do not understand their respective roles in a shared responsibility scenario then gaps can occur. An example being that while there has been a rationalisation of government services and a progressive reduction of investment in veterinary services over the past 20 years (Schipp, 2018) the expected advancement of the private sector into providing such services did not occur, and the AVA proposes this was in-part due to this expectation not being clearly communicated. A gap in surveillance systems was created and although it is now being addressed - it might have been avoided with better communication around 'a shared responsibility'.

• Is there any other information you would like to see in the statement?

The AVA believes that the supportive website can provide information about key stakeholders in the biosecurity system and the roles they play. This would include scientists such as veterinarians, plant pathologists, entomologists, laboratory researchers and industry groups and other organisations such as Wool Producers Australia and Wildlife Health Australia. Linking the organisations online as a conduit to the biosecurity motherhood statement page will assist in dissemination of clear and consistent key messaging and make members of the community and all stakeholder groups realise their connection to and the role(s) they play in upholding biosecurity while undertaking their everyday work.

- **How should we present the statement to achieve our goal?**

The statement should be presented in an online fashion that engages all stakeholders, including the community, similar to the New Zealand 'Biosecurity 2025 Direction Statement' which brings all stakeholders together virtually and outlines the approach the group will take over the medium term. It provides a vision of what the key objectives are, the tasks and workplan associated with achieving each, and in simple language describes what the outcome will be, including what success will look like, and how people can help to get it there. It needs to be made into media that can be easily shared on other organisations' websites and social media channels and be a living site that provides updates and reports on progress.

Finally, we suggest that the examples inserted throughout the current statement be made into an appendix or addendum, as currently the way they are interspersed throughout the document prevents there being a natural flow to the statement.

ⁱ How many pets are there in Australia?, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Australia (RSPCA) website (Current as of 30 October, 2018), Weblink: https://kb.rspca.org.au/how-many-pets-are-there-in-australia_58.html

ⁱⁱ Craik, W., Palmer, D. and Sheldrake, R., (2017) Priorities for Australia's biosecurity system – An independent review of the capacity of the National biosecurity system and its underpinning intergovernmental agreement [LINK](#), Report, Commonwealth of Australia