

22 August 2024

Mr Adam Fennessy PSM
Secretary
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Fennessy,

Submission to the National Biosecurity Strategy Action Plan consultation

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's National Biosecurity Strategy Action Plan ('the Plan').

ALGA is the national voice of local government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the country. ALGA is a federation of state and territory local government associations. This submission should be read in conjunction with any separate submissions received from state and territory associations as well as individual councils.

Local governments are key delivery partners in Australia's biosecurity regime. Local governments - whether they be urban, regional, rural or remote - play a role in supporting public awareness and education, contributing to surveillance, undertake regulation, undertaking weed and pest control, and contributing to emergency response for biosecurity incidents. They also provide information and local insights to other tiers of government to support national biosecurity outcomes.

In broader context, local governments in aggregate are one of the most significant land and environment managers and are also key funders for environmental and biosecurity outcomes which underpin economic and social wellbeing. As a sector, councils spent \$6.75 billion in 2021/22 on biosecurity, biodiversity (including pest and weed management), water management, and waste management. By comparison, states and territories spent \$6.62 billion and the Commonwealth \$6.7 billion over this period (ALGA 2024). The local implementation of biosecurity as interconnected with broader environmental protection signals that the national biosecurity system should have a greater recognition of pest species that have significant ecological impacts. In agricultural areas, local governments are also critical to the socioeconomic resilience of their communities during drought through financial assistance, environmental protection, social connectivity and liaison with other levels of government.

The supports provided by local governments for biosecurity, land and water management, emergency response, and broader community resilience are likely to come under increasing pressure. Climate change is projected to see many parts of Australia in drought for longer (ABARES 2019) and will increase the range and volume of existing biosecurity risks (HoR Standing Committee on Agriculture 2022).

Australia is considered to have one of the most effective biosecurity regimes globally and the most recent Action Plan for the National Biosecurity Strategy will enhance this regime if fully

implemented and funded. However, the Action Plan would benefit from more explicit acknowledgement of the full range of ways that local governments contribute to biosecurity, as it currently only refers to local governments in respect to needing to incorporate local knowledge.

Explicit attention to local government roles is required particularly in the following ‘priority areas’:

Stronger Partnerships: Engage local governments in review and articulation of roles and responsibilities. These roles should be paired with analysis of the financial contribution of each tier of government and industry to ensure that implementation costs are borne appropriately. Local governments are facing challenges in being engaged consistently and genuinely in response to biosecurity outbreaks while other stakeholders such as industry bodies appear to face fewer roadblocks. For example, in Western Australia the polyphagous shot-hole borer (PSHB) quarantine area has been declared across 25 local government areas in metropolitan Perth. Despite proactively monitoring and addressing infected trees, local governments have not been fully engaged by other governments to support in a coordinated eradication effort. Local government is not engaged in the national decision making structures for biosecurity response, despite undertaking action in this area. Local government staff can improve surveillance when trained appropriately to do so. Information sharing with local governments from states and Commonwealth needs to be improved to enable local government collaboration to address such threats as the PSHB.

Highly Skilled Workforce: Include local governments in assessing workforce gaps, and how these are distributed and addressed across urban, regional, rural and remote settings. The Commonwealth is also examining its role in capacity building associated with net zero transition in several sectors, local and regional conservation, and industrial transition. Associated skills and capacity enhancement should be developed in reference to other policy areas, as appropriate, to reduce consultation fatigue and improve program and investment alignment.

Coordinated Preparedness and Response: Invite local governments to contribute to regional planning activities which incorporate biosecurity threat priorities in geographically defined regions. The use of new technologies, monitoring, and data management is a positive step. The Commonwealth should ensure upskilling and support is offered at no cost to local government staff to enable them to comply with any upgrades to national surveillance and early detection arrangements.

Sustainable investment: Invite local governments to contribute to assessing funding needs and prioritisation across the biosecurity continuum, provide funding for declared pest management in urban areas, and incorporate an assessment of existing cost shifting into review of cost sharing arrangements. Cost sharing agreements should also account for climate change, skills, and demographic projections to ensure it is sustainable into the future.

Thank you for your continued engagement with ALGA. We welcome this iterative engagement on this important policy initiative. Please contact Eleanor Robson, ALGA's Director Policy Environment & Climate, at eleanor.robson@alga.asn.au if you require further information.

Yours sincerely,



Amy Crawford

Chief Executive Officer

Australian Local Government Association

References

Australian Bureau of Agricultural Research and Research Economics [ABARES] 2019. [*ABARES Insights Issue 6: Effects of Drought and Climate Variability on Australian Farms.*](#)

Australian Local Government Association [ALGA] 2024. [*Submission to the Inquiry on Local Government Sustainability.*](#)

House of Representatives [HoR] Standing Committee on Agriculture 2022. [*Inquiry into food security in Australia, Chapter 6: Climate change and biosecurity.*](#)