

# Auditor-General of Queensland

## Executive Summary

### Report to Parliament No. 5 for 2008

### Protecting Queensland's primary industries and environment from pests and disease

### A Performance Management Systems Audit



# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 Audit overview

Australia currently holds a 'clean and green status' which means more productive and healthier primary industries and environment and a competitive advantage in accessing export markets. Australia as an island continent, was regarded as having a natural barrier to pests and disease prior to mass air travel and international trade.<sup>1</sup>

Queensland's primary industries and environment are now more vulnerable to biosecurity threats, some of which could have devastating economic, social and environmental effects. Recent outbreaks of pests and disease in Queensland include equine influenza, red imported fire ants, citrus canker and Asian honey bees.

Queensland has a diverse and economically significant animal and agricultural production industry. In 2007-08 the total value of Queensland's primary industry commodities is forecast at approximately \$12.3b<sup>2</sup>. More than 60,000 people are employed in the state's primary industries<sup>3</sup> which remain the lifeblood of many rural and remote communities.

Because of the potential impact of disease outbreaks on the Queensland community and economy, a performance management systems audit (PMSA) has been undertaken to determine whether adequate systems are in place to prevent, detect and respond to plant and animal biosecurity threats to Queensland's primary industries and environment.

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F), through Biosecurity Queensland, is the agency responsible for protecting Queensland's primary industries and environment from pests and disease by detecting and managing biosecurity threats once they have entered the state. However the protection from biosecurity threats involves many parties at international, national, state and local levels including government, industry and community all operating in a complex system.

While prevention, detection and response strategies can be developed to mitigate the risk of biosecurity threats, the risk of the entry of pests and disease cannot be totally eliminated. Pests and disease could enter Australia through a number of pathways including wind, water, migratory birds, illegal smuggling or accidental cargo. As the global movement of goods and people is increasing, so is the risk of pests and disease not being detected prior to entering the country.

## 1.2 Audit opinion

Biosecurity Queensland was established on 1 March 2007, however the Queensland Government has been responsible for managing biosecurity threats for a considerable time. I therefore expected the systems protecting Queensland's primary industries from pests and disease to be largely in place. I found that Biosecurity Queensland is working towards establishing the appropriate systems to prevent,

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1 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australia in Brief*, [www.dfat.gov.au/aib/coming\\_to\\_australia.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/aib/coming_to_australia.html).

2 Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, *Prospects Update*, June 2008.

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census*, 2006.

detect and respond to biosecurity threats and has achieved control and eradication of a number of recent outbreaks including citrus canker and equine influenza.

However, some of the systems to manage biosecurity threats remain incomplete, in part due to staff resources being diverted to emergency situations.

Work that remains incomplete includes:

- the review and update of the legislation relative to biosecurity matters to ensure clarity and consistency and to reflect current operational best practice
- a comprehensive strategy for Biosecurity Queensland clearly articulating its objectives and outcomes
- a risk management framework to identify and prioritise biosecurity threats to Queensland to better inform the decisions being made regarding setting priorities and the effective use of resources
- a communication plan to recognise the diversity of stakeholders and the need to increase awareness on biosecurity matters
- a workforce plan to ensure the sufficient and appropriate resourcing for all Biosecurity Queensland's functions including the ability to maintain ongoing service delivery and systems at the same time as responding to emergencies.

Since its establishment in 2007, Biosecurity Queensland's capacity has been stretched in dealing with emergency responses to consecutive outbreaks. As a result deficiencies in corporate and governance systems have not been addressed in a timely manner.

The better prepared Biosecurity Queensland can be, the more likely it will be able to either prevent an outbreak or efficiently respond in a timely manner and eradicate the threat.

I consider it critical to the protection of Queensland's primary industries and environment that all systems are in place to prevent, detect and respond to biosecurity threats with the aim of eradicating a pest or disease. Having mature systems in place will ultimately reduce the pressure on staff during emergency responses.

## **1.3 Key findings**

The key findings from the audit are summarised below. Detailed findings are in Section 3 of the report.

### **The review and update of legislation**

As a result of consolidating the roles and responsibilities of DPI&F, the Department of Natural Resources and Water (DNRW) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Biosecurity Queensland is now responsible for 14 different pieces of legislation as well as being affected by other legislation administered by its parent entity DPI&F.

Audit noted that the provisions of the Acts for which Biosecurity Queensland is now responsible are not always consistent nor do they reflect current operational best practice. Having to administer multiple Acts addressing similar issues can lead to delays and inconsistent practices across biosecurity programs.

In its report tabled in March 2007 the Service Delivery and Performance Commission recommended that all legislation dealing

with biosecurity be reviewed and updated with drafting instructions prepared for government consideration by 31 October 2007. However, this timeframe has not been met. Biosecurity Queensland reviewed the legislation in June 2008 and audit was advised that drafting instructions are expected to be submitted to government by 31 December 2008.

## **A Biosecurity Queensland strategy**

DPI&F's 2007-08 Ministerial Portfolio Statement (MPS) acknowledged that a separate strategy needed to be developed for Biosecurity Queensland by December 2007.

At the time of the audit this strategy had not been completed. Biosecurity Queensland has prepared a discussion paper on the proposed strategy and the draft strategy is scheduled to be provided to government for approval in early 2009.

Elements already developed include national agreements, the biosecurity emergency operations manual and stakeholder network, however they have not been consolidated to form a single strategy.

Audit understands the delay in developing the strategy is partly due to responding to the equine influenza outbreak. However, the development of a strategy is necessary to enable Biosecurity Queensland to effectively achieve its objectives.

## **The identification and prioritisation of biosecurity risks**

Biosecurity Queensland recognised the need to make decisions based on risk in DPI&F's 2007-08 MPS and set itself a target to develop a risk management framework in the same year. However this was delayed, partly because of resources being diverted to respond to the equine influenza outbreak. A concept paper on the framework is being developed and further work, including a pilot, is planned for 2008-09.

The significant work already done at industry and national level on the identification of major biosecurity threats to animals and plants is being used by Biosecurity Queensland in developing its own framework.

A risk management framework would identify which pest or disease warrants the development of a state specific contingency plan to enhance Biosecurity Queensland's preparedness for a potential outbreak.

## **A communication strategy**

Biosecurity involves a range of stakeholders, including all levels of government, industry bodies, individual commercial primary producers and members of the wider community.

Audit found no evidence of a documented communication strategy which would facilitate communication with all stakeholders. Audit acknowledges that the Queensland Biosecurity Emergency Operational Manual includes a generic communication plan to be actioned in emergency response situations.

Biosecurity Queensland uses a network of industry peak bodies as a forum for consultation on key issues including contingency planning, strategic direction and review of emergency response. However not all primary producers are members of an industry body. This makes

it more difficult for Biosecurity Queensland to ensure small or non commercially focused producers are aware of biosecurity issues. Therefore some stakeholders may not be included in consultation or receive timely information on an outbreak.

## **Workforce planning**

Biosecurity Queensland's responsibilities span across a number of primary industry related areas including animal welfare, use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals and market access, as well as the protection of environmental and social amenities. In recent years Biosecurity Queensland has been responding to a number of consecutive, and at times concurrent, outbreaks of pests and diseases.

When an outbreak occurs, it is often an "all hands on deck" situation. Additional people are initially sourced from within Biosecurity Queensland and DPI&F, before external people are engaged.

Regular diversion of staff to emergency responses has a number of impacts including:

- reduced ability to meet the objectives of specific work programs
- rescheduling of functions such as surveillance, research and corporate activities
- deferral of training programs.

Biosecurity Queensland has arrangements in place to secure the assistance of technical staff who would be required in certain types of outbreaks. However there are no formalised arrangements to engage additional field staff, which can be a substantial requirement in an outbreak. The Biosecurity Group Business Plan for 2005-08 identified the need for a workforce plan, however currently no such plan is in place.

## **Management of Local Government Area Pest Management Plans**

Biosecurity Queensland has effective systems in place to monitor and manage affected areas to ensure that further outbreaks are identified and managed as part of the initial emergency response plan. An example of outbreaks currently being managed and monitored are citrus canker, red imported fire ants and equine influenza.

From 1 July 2005, all local governments in Queensland have been required under legislation to implement a state approved Local Government Area Pest Management Plan (LGAPMP). Biosecurity Queensland is responsible for reviewing these plans and records the details of the LGAPMPs in a database. The audit identified that the database is not fully functional and at the time of the audit it was not possible to input new information or update old information.

According to other records, 31 councils in existence prior to the recent local government amalgamations did not have a current approved LGAPMP. Following the local government amalgamations effective from March 2008, Biosecurity Queensland's records show that 15 out of 73 councils do not have plans in place for their new regions as required under the Act. Transitional arrangements allow amalgamated councils to continue to utilise existing pest management plans for the areas within the newly defined local government areas.

## 1.4 Summary of recommendations

It is recommended that the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries:

1. complete and submit the drafting instructions regarding biosecurity legislation to government without further delay
2. finalise and implement a strategy for Biosecurity Queensland, which clearly states the objectives and how they will be achieved
3. implement a formal risk management framework to prioritise threats and ensure resources are used effectively
4. based on the risk assessment, consider developing additional state specific contingency plans
5. develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy for Biosecurity Queensland, which identifies all stakeholders and the most appropriate method of communicating with them
6. develop a workforce plan to ensure continuity of service delivery at all times, including the ability to simultaneously respond to multiple emergencies
7. rectify the issues with the database used to record the Local Government Area Pest Management Plans to ensure it is fully operational
8. ensure all councils provide a current Local Government Area Pest Management Plan for Biosecurity Queensland review and approval.

## 1.5 Response from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries

On 12 August 2008, the Acting Director-General provided the following response:

*“Biosecurity Queensland, established on 1 March 2007 as a business group of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F), brings together the Queensland Government’s biosecurity resources and functions relating to primary industries and the environment.*

*Since then, Biosecurity Queensland has successfully eradicated equine influenza, helping Australia become one of the few countries to eradicate the disease. The agency is also concurrently dealing with a number of major new incursions (Hendra virus, Asian mussels and Asian honey bees), continuing the major eradication programs previously being run by DPI&F (Red Imported Fire Ants, citrus canker and electric ants) and undertaking a wide range of weed and pest animal programs.*

*There has been no detection of citrus canker since May 2005 and eradication is expected to be officially declared in early 2009. No other country has come as close to eradicating*

*fire ants, with Queensland recognised internationally for its expertise in this area.*

*Biosecurity incidents are expected to become more frequent as the movements of products and people around the world increases, climates and environment change, trade agreements become more common and market requirements intensify.*

*As such, Biosecurity Queensland is developing a biosecurity strategy which will define the systems, strategies and capabilities needed to prepare for, investigate, respond to and recover from biosecurity risks. Starting from the proposition that 'biosecurity is everyone's business', it will focus on how government, industry and the community can more effectively work together to minimise the biosecurity risk facing Queensland.*

*The Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries released a Queensland Biosecurity Discussion Paper on 24 July 2008. Public consultation closes at the end of September 2008, with the final strategy expected to be presented for Government consideration by the end of the year.*

*Biosecurity Queensland is also reviewing the legislation for which it is responsible to ensure it supports the policy objectives that are expected to be contained in the new Biosecurity Strategy. With the aim of developing a single biosecurity act, the new legislation is expected to be more flexible and less complicated than the current suite of legislation. It will contain a stronger focus on risk management, shared responsibility and duty of care.*

*Work on the Biosecurity Strategy and legislative review was delayed as resources were diverted to the equine influenza emergency response. Timelines for the Biosecurity Strategy and legislative review have also been brought into alignment to ensure a consistent policy framework is applied to any new legislation.*

*Biosecurity Queensland is developing a risk management framework to provide greater consistency in prioritising biosecurity investment across a wide range of economic, environmental and social objectives. No models currently exist that captures the complex interrelationships and risk factors that exist in biosecurity and work is underway looking at models from other sectors or disciplines that may be applicable. It is expected that a pilot project will be in place by the end of 2008.*

*Biosecurity Queensland is also developing a community engagement capability within the agency, focussed on improving communication with industry and the public in all aspects of biosecurity – from helping prevent or identify a biosecurity threat through to emergency response. This function will build on the successful communication strategies and community engagement models employed during the equine influenza emergency response and currently used in the fire ant program.*

*Biosecurity Queensland and the DPI&F have considerable experience and expertise in mounting emergency pest and disease responses. Nevertheless, it is recognised that emergency response systems are always open to enhancement.*

*Biosecurity Queensland commissioned an independent review of its emergency response systems which found that while the current approach 'demonstrates the capability of the highly dedicated staff and relatively small group of experienced incident management staff', Biosecurity Queensland 'would be severely taxed if it had to cope with either simultaneous major outbreaks or a serious incident such as foot and mouth disease'. The report contained a series of recommendations relating to organisational structure and capability, IT systems, policies and procedures, and physical resources.*

*Biosecurity Queensland is currently developing a work program for the reform of its emergency response system, starting with the establishment of an emergency response unit, training of a number of first response teams and development of a basic IT system. This work will be funded internally through diverting existing resources currently employed in lower priority activities. Additional resources will be required to fully implement the recommendations of the independent review."*

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