



Declared Pest Rate: frequently asked questions

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Through the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act), Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) can receive funding from the Declared Pest Account which consists of funds raised by Declared Pest Rates (DPR).

What is a Declared Pest Rate?

A Declared Pest Rate is a rate that is determined on property/land in a defined (prescribed) area to fund activities to control established declared pests. The Minister determines the rate on chargeable land in a defined area. This is done in partnership with the RBG which operates in the relevant area and the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA).

What is the purpose of the DPR?

The DPR is a mechanism that provides RBGs with ongoing funds to control declared pests over the long term. It is based on the principle of shared responsibility and partnerships between the government and landholders for the control of widespread declared pests. Funds raised by the rates are matched by the State Government under the BAM Act.

What is the origin of the Declared Pest Rate?

It started as the vermin rate in the 1970's under the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976* and has transitioned to the current declared pest rate under the BAM Act.

How is a declared pest rate set?

The BAM Act enables the Minister to determine a rate chargeable on land prescribed by regulation. The rate is determined either as an ad valorem rate or a flat rate to raise money to fund activities for the control of declared pests in a specified area. A rate determined for an area may be:

- A flat rate: where the same amount is charged for each property
- An ad valorem rate: a charge (cents-in-the-dollar) applied on the unimproved value of land as provided by the Valuer General.

The process of planning for the determination of a rate starts with an RBG determining or reviewing their priority declared pests and developing a declared pest

action plan. This is done in consultation with affected landholders through meetings, public forums or attending the group's Annual General Meeting among other activities.

The plan and budget is submitted to DAFWA for review and approval. DAFWA then advises the Minister for Agriculture and Food as to what rate should be determined to raise adequate funds for each RBG to deliver on its plans.

Before setting the rate, the Minister consults with landholders and affected parties in the RBG's operational area by inviting and giving 20 working days for people to make submissions. A public notice is placed in the local or regional newspaper(s). This is done annually and is required under the BAM Act.

Who collects the Rates?

The Commissioner of Taxation through the Office of State Revenue (OSR) is responsible for issuing and collecting DPR notices. In September each year, annual rate notices (invoices) are issued. Payment of the rates amount is due 49 days from the date of issue of the invoice.

The rate funds that are collected are remitted monthly into the Declared Pest Account which is administered by DAFWA.

How is the Declared Pest Account (DPA) managed?

The DPA is managed on a cash basis, meaning funds are only available for transfer to an RBG once they have been received from ratepayers. On average 80% of DPR's are paid within 12 months.

Each RBG is allocated an account within the DPA which earns interest at a rate of 4% calculated quarterly. Interest earnings are deposited the month following the end of each quarter (i.e. October, January, April and July). RBG's receive statements quarterly and an annual statement in July/August for the previous financial year.

Rates are matched dollar for dollar by the State Government based on what is expected to be received in rates.

RBGs must provide DAFWA an annual audited financial statement by 31 October each year detailing their expenditure.

How do RBGs access the rate funds?

DAFWA administers the DPA into which all rate funds collected are deposited and matched. Funds are transferred to each RBG in two tranches usually one in August and the second in March of the financial year.

How are RBG boundaries determined?

When a biosecurity group is seeking to be recognised, the group recommends to the Minister the area to be specified for their operations. DAFWA encourages Biosecurity Groups to form along shire boundaries. Forming along shire boundaries is the easiest and most efficient way to administer the raising and collection of the declared pest rate.

Can RBGs access other funds?

Yes. In addition to the funds from declared pest rates, RBGs can seek and obtain funds from other sources e.g. State Natural Resources Management Office, Royalties for Regions programs and private organisations. However, rate funding is likely to be the most sustainable way for RBGs to fund activities to control declared pests over the long-term.

What are the advantages of an RBG?

An RBG provides a platform for landholders and land managers to work together in a coordinated manner to manage and control declared pests on their land.

RBGs allow shared responsibility and opportunity for partnering between the community, industry, local government (shires) and State Government agencies to control established declared pests. In addition the groups can foster efficiency through making the best use of skills, funds, capability and capacity as well as incentives.

RBGs are DAFWA's preferred partnership arrangement for the management of widespread and established declared pests. The work that RBG's do complements and adds value to pest control undertaken by individual landholders and does not replace individual landholder responsibilities.

Is there a debt recovery process for unpaid rates?

Yes. The Office of State Revenue (OSR) is responsible for managing the recovery of unpaid rates. Rates are due 49 days from date of issue.

Within a month of expiry of the due date, OSR issues a payment demand notice via a letter or e-mail, giving a further 3-4 weeks for payment.

Outstanding debts of two or more years are secured with a Memorial on the Title of the relevant property preventing sale and the registration of a mortgage such as re-financing.

If a landholder advises OSR that they are unable to pay their rates, OSR can encourage landholders to make alternative payment arrangements such as instalments.

For more information regarding biosecurity policy and recognised biosecurity groups, please contact your nearest DAFWA Biosecurity Officer or email enquiries@agric.wa.gov.au, www.agric.wa.au or tel: (08) 9368 3333