



Biosecurity Council visit to Augusta

3 - 6 August 2020

Background

The Biosecurity Council of Western Australia has committed to holding annual regional meetings. The intent of the regional meetings is to:

- Engage with local/regional stakeholders on biosecurity matters
- Build networks/relationships with key biosecurity stakeholders
- Provide a conduit to government/DPIRD for local/regional biosecurity stakeholders.

For its second regional meeting Council agreed to visit Augusta, located in the South West Region of Western Australia. The region is home to a large and diverse horticultural sector, aquaculture enterprises as well as livestock, for which biosecurity is important. In addition, it is a biodiversity hotspot with large tracts of natural bushland and aquatic environments making environmental biosecurity paramount.

Declared pest rates have recently been introduced in parts of the region to provide funding for community-driven activities targeting established pests. As the Minister requested Council advice on declared pest rates and biosecurity groups (which coordinate expenditure of declared pest rates), holding the regional meeting in Augusta facilitated discussions with stakeholders on this topic.

The Biosecurity Council visited Augusta from 3 - 6 August 2020.

Itinerary

Monday 3 August. Council travelled to Augusta, stopping at the DPIRD Bunbury Office to discuss the declared pest rate / recognised biosecurity group (RBG) approach with the Manager of DPIRD's Office of RBGs and the Director of Invasive Species and Environment Biosecurity. This meeting formed part of Council's work on Biosecurity Funding Mechanisms.

Tuesday 4 August. Council toured DPIRD's Pemberton Freshwater Research Centre, guided by DPIRD Research Scientist (Aquaculture Research and Development), Andrew Beer and Research Centre Manager, Terry Cabassi. Terry provided an overview of the work being undertaken at the Research Centre and the process used to propagate trout. Andrew discussed the freshwater aquaculture industry of the south-west and the biosecurity practices and potential issues for the industry.

Council toured Newton Orchards apple packhouse, led by third-generation apple grower, Nicole Giblett. As well as seeing first-hand the process involved in preparing the product for consumption, Council and Ms Giblett discussed biosecurity risks associated with the apple industry and the actions Newton Orchards undertake to mitigate the risks and support early detection. Opportunities for organisations such as Newton Orchards to better contribute to biosecurity surveillance were identified, for example the role they could play in detection and reporting of pest damage in fruit and the value of further visual identification guides to assist this.

Steve Bendotti (owner) and Paul Kerry (manager) of Bendotti Exporters took Council on a tour of its potato processing factory, discussing the process of turning potatoes into a range of products. Biosecurity risks to potato growers and market implications were discussed, as well as the monitoring undertaken during processing to ensure the product is free from pests and diseases to meet phytosanitary standards for trade.

Over lunch, Council met with Bevan Eatts who discussed how he has implemented technology at a grower level for paddock-to-plate product traceability.

The day ended with a tour of a truffle nursery and grading facility. Council had the opportunity to view how truffles are harvested in the field before visiting the grading facility to learn about the grading process and discuss the biosecurity concerns of this niche industry.

Wednesday 5 August. Council held its quarterly meeting, including the following presentations:

- WA Dairy Industry – Jessica Andony, Western Dairy
- Aquatic Animal Health and Biosecurity – Katie Webb, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- National Forest Pest Surveillance Program in WA – Paco Tovar, Plant Health Australia.

Biosecurity stakeholders were invited to meet with Council to discuss their views on the status of biosecurity in WA and any biosecurity-related concerns. Invitations were sent to a range of stakeholders, and meetings were held with:

- Wines of WA
- Lower Blackwood LCDC
- Blackwood Biosecurity
- Peel Harvey Biosecurity Group
- WAFarmers
- Shire of Augusta Margaret River
- South West Catchments Council
- Leschenault Biosecurity Group.



Biosecurity Council members and stakeholders.

Thursday 6 August. Council toured the Ocean Grown Abalone facilities where the owner/manager (and Council member), Brad Adams, talked through the process of ocean-grown abalone production, harvest and processing. Biosecurity risks associated with marine aquaculture and actions taken by the company to ensure it is mitigating biosecurity risks to the marine environment were key topics discussed.

Council held its quarterly workshop to discuss the key areas of advice it is working on.

Key biosecurity issues

The departmental presentations, stakeholder meetings and field visits provided excellent opportunities for Council to discuss the biosecurity of the South West Region with key stakeholders. The challenges, specific issues and opportunities identified through these sessions are documented below (in no particular order).

Delivering effective biosecurity

1. The need for sustainable funding for pest-control programs. Short-term funding was identified as an issue by two stakeholder groups. Reliable funding over a suitable timeframe better supports effective pest control projects. Short-term projects were thought to be ineffective in terms of reducing the negative impacts of established pests long-term, and were also identified as having the potential to lead to reduced community support if participants cannot see that they are making a difference.
2. Monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation of biosecurity efforts was identified by a number of stakeholders as being critical to demonstrate the long-term impact of funding/projects. Some of the recognised biosecurity groups noted the importance of a monitoring and evaluation framework for activities to control widespread and established pests using the RBG/declared pest rate model. The Council has discussed this further with DPIRD and understand that work to develop a framework has been prioritised. This will form an integral part of the next phase of RBG development in the State. A greater understanding of the distribution of pests across landscapes was also seen as important to help develop effective control strategies and prioritise resources.
3. Coordination, collaboration and partnerships. Collaboration and partnerships were seen as important for supporting effective pest control across land tenures, and to facilitate the sharing of resources between groups to gain efficiencies – particularly as that there is not enough resources to address all the declared pests present in the region.
4. Biosecurity awareness and understanding. A number of stakeholder groups identified the need to encourage better biosecurity practices by people and organisations in the region. It was also identified that there is a need to better promote general information on the declared pest rate/recognised biosecurity group approach (for example, what recognised biosecurity groups do and how declared pest rates are being used to benefit the community). These groups thought that such communications/promotion were better if they came from DPIRD. It was also suggested that DPIRD could work closely with Local Government regarding biosecurity risk and preparedness strategies that could be put in place, and provide more information to assist with pest/disease identification and surveillance by producers and food processors.
5. Who pays? Although many stakeholders felt that there is general community support for activities to address biosecurity issues in the region, a number of stakeholder groups stated that people just don't want to pay for it. It was suggested that a levy where everyone contributes a small amount of money (similar to the Emergency

Services Levy) may be a more equitable and acceptable way to secure community funding for biosecurity activity, and could be considered as an alternative model to declared pest rates.

Administration of biosecurity groups

6. **Accountability.** A number of recognised biosecurity groups highlighted the challenges of being responsible for large amounts of rate payer/government funds and the health and safety of staff, and the accountability associated with these. These were seen as critical issues given recognised biosecurity group boards are volunteer. The Council noted that there seemed to be a disparity between what a group can do and what it is expected to do. It was questioned whether recognised biosecurity groups had enough resourcing to appropriately administer the group – and staff burnout was noted as an issue.
7. **Roles and responsibilities.** A number of stakeholder groups stated that further clarity around roles and responsibilities for biosecurity delivery would be beneficial. In particular, some landholders do not understand the role/responsibilities of DPIRD and that of the recognised biosecurity groups. This is of particular concern to the groups who receive contact from landholders about declared pest rates. These groups felt that these issues should be addressed by DPIRD. There are a number of different organisations addressing established pests, and there is some uncertainty where everyone fits in the system. Further education here would be beneficial.
8. **Engaging with landholders.** All recognised biosecurity groups involved in the stakeholder discussions identified landholder engagement as one of, if not the main, activity that they undertake. For some groups, it was also identified as a challenge given the diverse range of landholders and, in some cases, absentee landholders. The time taken between establishing a recognised biosecurity group and community acceptance (in regard to the associated declared pest rates) was highlighted. The Council has discussed this with DPIRD and understands that further governance training for RBGs is in the process of being developed. This is in addition to the guidance and support already provided for consultation activities, and should further assist RBGs to understand their obligations around community consultation and how they can achieve this.
9. **Security of funding.** Biosecurity groups rely on accessing the full amount of declared pest rate to deliver their operational plans. Several groups noted that they are only able to access the declared pest rates that have been paid, as well as full government funding for the invoiced rates. Where rate collection is lower than the invoiced declared pest rate (approximately 60% in the worst cases), groups are not able to deliver all the planned activities. This has implications for the effectiveness of pest control measures and community engagement outcomes, and also in relation to community perceptions of the value they are getting from their investment.
10. **Compliance.** Compliance was seen as an important tool for encouraging landholders to address declared pests on their properties by some of the recognised biosecurity groups. These groups want DPIRD to undertake a greater compliance role for

widespread and established pests, and feel greater compliance would facilitate behaviour change in the community.

Industry-related issues

11. Complacency. Although biosecurity was seen as important and the impact that pests/diseases can have on production was recognised, a number of stakeholders thought that there was a level of complacency at the producer level. Biosecurity is a lower priority in the day-to-day operations, and smaller operators are not on the ground daily to monitor for pests/diseases.
12. Area freedoms. The geographical isolation of WA means that the State is free from many pests/diseases present in other parts of the country. From an international trade perspective however, Australia is considered as a whole. Some stakeholders feel that this means products are able to be imported into Australia that may pose risks to WA industries (but little risk to eastern states industries). There may be opportunity for DPIRD to better promote the uniqueness of the WA situation to enable better protections for WA industries. Johne's disease was also noted by two stakeholder groups as an issue – WA is free from the cattle strain of the disease; however, northern WA producers want to relax the border requirements to facilitate movement of cattle whilst southern producers want to maintain border controls.
13. Opportunities. The wine industry identified an opportunity to initiate a propagation site in WA to reduce its reliance on importing plant material. New material is critical to improving production efficiencies; however, the process to import new material carries biosecurity risk and can be time consuming. For agricultural industries, kangaroos and emus are becoming an increasingly important issue, with many producers investing in infrastructure to minimise the damage caused by these native species. It was suggested that professional shooters could be used and a local pet food industry re-established to make use of any culled animals.

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