Queensland Biosecurity Partners' Forum

Summary report

March 27 – 28 2023, Royal International Convention Centre Brisbane

Background

The annual Queensland Biosecurity Partners' Forum is a key mechanism for co-developing the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy. Relevant industry (including transport and logistics), natural resource management groups, academics and government representatives attend. Under this co-design model, 'partners' (forum attendees) establish the overall direction for the strategy, while a joint government/industry writing group undertakes the drafting of the strategy itself. The Biosecurity Queensland Advisory Council (BQMAC) are custodians of the strategy and retain oversight of its development.

There were 137 registrations prior to the event; however, 65 people actually attended in person while another 43 participated online (108).

This report summarises feedback and outcomes from the 2023 Partners' Forum which will guide the next iteration – Queensland Biosecurity Strategy 2024-2029. A copy of the full report is available on request.

Setting the Scene

The opening session included Welcome to Country, icebreaker discussions and a recorded message from the Honourable Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities Mark Furner.

Reflections, lessons to be learnt and the changing landscape

Malcolm Letts (former Deputy Director General, Biosecurity Queensland) provided an overview of achievements from the strategy, highlighting the need for better evaluation frameworks for the next strategy. Peter Black (Essential Foresight) covered some of the more macro/global context and drivers for the development of the next strategy. This included climate change, technology, global conflict and one health as well as the range of biosecurity threats that have emerged since the last strategy.

Looking Forward

Panel session: the need for transformative step change to manage rising biosecurity risk

This panel session featured Tom Kompas (Chief Investigator, Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis), Lisa Sharp (Director, Herefords Australia), Heleen Kruger (Social Scientist, ABARES) and Rob Delane (Former Inspector General of Biosecurity).

The relationship between future likely damages due to climate change, changes in trade patterns and the implications for risk levels and pathways for biosecurity threats in QLD were discussed. It was noted that different countries will experience different climate impacts, with QLD projected to experience more severe impacts than most other regions in Australia.

The social elements of managing change and biosecurity risk were discussed. A key takeaway revolved around the likely need for additional work to resolve disconnections when new technology runs into existing tools and systems and rules and regulations.

This required work will influence decisions about the use of new technology and tools, and ultimately an ability to capitalise on innovations. An example was discussed about traceability. Australia used to be the leader, but now lags in terms of adoption of new technologies for traceability. Discussions revealed that how mental models impact decisions and change need to be better understood. Benefits need to be clearly identified and communicated to promote change.

Even when change is created, there are plenty of 'evergreen' topics in biosecurity e.g. data sharing and sustainable funding. Improved effort is needed to determine how and what information can be shared.

Discussions revealed that the generalised invasion curve while historically useful as a tool, may now be harmful given its simplistic portrayal of the continuum. The next iteration of the strategy should seek to address this through targeted myth busting.

Further work could be done on incentives within industry and government to build maturity in technology adoption, and enhance understanding of what 'shared responsibility' looks like in practice.

Biosecurity risks and challenges: Queensland's Context

Malcolm Letts (former DDG, Biosecurity Queensland) delivered a short presentation on the strategy's importance and linkages to the National Biosecurity Strategy. Although a Queensland strategy is important, consideration about how the system works, in a future-focused way, and how to avoid mistakes levelled at the National Biosecurity Strategy regarding poor co-development.

The key message from Rachel Chay (incoming Deputy Director General; Biosecurity Queensland) was that federal interception data at the border is not a likely indicator of future post border invasion success, particularly as it fails to account for specific influences in Queensland. This included forecast information around trade (e.g. imports, domestic freight task projections); urbanisation in SEQ; tourism (e.g. diversity post China relations softening, Olympics and cruising growth); future land use changes (reduction in grazing, increase in cropping, forestry and conservation purposes); future climate predictions for Queensland and development and other activity in Northern Queensland.

Cr Hilda Moseby (TSIRC and TRSA) provided lived experience perspectives from Northern Queensland, including importantly the need for community involvement in delivering programs in this area. Cr Moseby indicated that building on-the-ground relationships is essential, noting it takes commitment to build the relationships, and strengthen communication and trust in the information to ensure stakeholders are engaged meaningfully.

The absence of some key Queensland government agencies and stakeholders (e.g. Australia Post) was discussed by several participants with a discussion focussed on how to identify and engage non-traditional partners. Failure to extend invitations to Queensland Health, Safe Food Queensland and Events and Tourism Queensland was recognised as oversights. DES and other state departments were invited but did not attend.

More active thinking is required to determine how all these elements can be included in the planning and process for the strategy refresh (e.g. a futuring exercise), and how to better engage post-border jurisdictional partners to explore commonalities and differences.

Bob Gee (Director General, QDAF) closed the session and thanked Malcolm Letts for his services to DAF and Biosecurity Queensland.

Developing the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy 2024 – 2029

Ensuring coverage across the invasion curve

Malcolm Letts (outgoing DDG, Biosecurity Queensland) introduced the first session of the day with a presentation on post-border biosecurity activities.

Interactive session: exploring current strategy themes

Michelle McKinlay (ABGC) provided an overview of the themes under the strategy and some reflections on whether it was delivering impact. Ms McKinlay challenged whether it was time to refresh, remodel or retire the Queensland strategy and, if it was to continue, whether the themes remained relevant. It was raised that a robust discussion about the Strategy and its future is required. Michelle noted that government needs to improve communication regarding policies that impact biosecurity to allow industry and other partners to better plan.

Silos were called out as a problem ('silo-security') and that the system probably doesn't reward people for the multiple benefits that biosecurity initiatives can deliver (e.g. biodiversity and environmental issues). For example, BQ could discuss with DES a review of their grant program requirements to consider joint biodiversity, biosecurity and environmental outcomes. Discussion highlighted that BQ has steered perhaps too hard away from established vs new incursions, and we need to remember that established pests can teach people how to prevent, prepare for, and respond to new exotic pests and diseases.

It was proposed that BQ should more consciously determine its scope of work and whether or not it has a role in management of endemic pest and diseases, which is likely relevant where there is a clear benefit for preventing and preparing for exotic pests and diseases. The discussion also highlighted that industries that have had major incursions should be involved in identifying learnings for incorporation into any of the strategy and action planning processes.

The first interactive session was designed to look at whether the themes remained suitable for 2029. People self-organised into theme-based tables or chat rooms for those online. All discussions confirmed that most of the strategy remains relevant but there is a greater need for implementation and evaluation, identification of what the tangible actions should be for all partners (i.e. not just government), better approaches to minimising duplication of investment and effort and strengthening of partnership and coordination. Strong feedback suggested there is a lack of aligned vision for what the strategy needs to be and deliver, and what it means (if anything) to each partner, with feedback that the strategy is currently not a document that is used by the partners once they leave the forum.

Wicked problems mentioned during the 2 days were acknowledged as potentially remaining wicked if we don't have a process to work through them.

Theme-specific feedback

Theme 1

Stronger focus on making the Strategy document an 'active' document, something that people can use, which outlines clear roles and responsibilities, integrates action plans and has ongoing exposure. Need for broader partner engagement, including universities, training organisations, other jurisdictions. Some suggestions have been made that other models for biosecurity need to be explored such as the Local Land Services model in NSW or the Registered Biosecurity Groups in WA (noting that these sorts of wholesale changes are outside of the scope of the current exercise).

Theme 2

The discussion clarified that much of what is in the strategy remains relevant. The title of the theme could change to include the word 'needs' [to play their part] as suggested by the group to reflect that not everyone is currently doing this. Some discussion was raised around market-based incentive schemes (e.g. economic experiments etc), biosecurity champions and getting people involved via linking with values.

Communication strategies need to sell the system message (e.g. the likelihood of any animal disease being 47%) and be tailored to address different audience needs (e.g. some need practical information whereas others need to understand they have a role).

It's unclear if COVID had an impact general knowledge about biosecurity, as there are conflicting reports (e.g. NSW shows improvement after COVID, but studies in New Zealand don't show any correlation between COVID and stronger understanding of biosecurity). NSW conducts attitudinal reports periodically (e.g. 2017 baseline and resurveyed in 2021): *is there any likelihood that Queensland's results would be significantly different so as to warrant the expense of this survey or is this something that should be done at a national level?*
The development of an interactive system map based on a supply chain would be a useful artefact.
As a general observation, the discussion was strongly along the lines of biosecurity engagement and social science, with discussion on what's needed to mature the thinking.

Theme 3

Key industry stakeholders feel empowered to act but have identified some gaps in the process particularly around what and when to report, and what to do while awaiting advice after reporting: *how to do you practically discharge your GBO during that interim period?*
There was acknowledgment that biosecurity incursions bring adversity, but more sharing about the benefits of early detection and reporting was considered important: *we do have positive stories*. It was also considered that members of the general public may create or identify biosecurity risk unknowingly or know that it should be reported.
Meaningful engagement with the agronomy sector is required and may involve identification and management of complex issues including conflicts of interest. Potentially a guideline could be created around how agronomists discharge their GBO with some special protection against action by their clients.
Some 'avoided loss' quantification is required to improve engagement and communication on the benefits of acting.

Theme 4 and Theme 6

There was disagreement between the theme 4 and 6 groups about whether they should be merged; however, such a merger would promote better alignment with the National Biosecurity Strategy. Additionally, the addition of a response and preparedness theme would result in too many themes for the strategy.
There is a need to improve clarity on roles and responsibilities and determine what this means for funding allocation. The timeframes for development and registration of new technologies extend beyond the period of the strategy, which posed the question: *what*

relevant elements of the innovation pathway can be included in the strategy, and how can the next steps be progressed?
There is a need to be more global in the vision for ideas, collaborations and innovations, including improved prioritisation for determining investment. Technologies need clear value propositions and ways to inform prioritisation of technologies for varied problems. Greater communication, honesty and roundedness about the possibilities offered by technology is required.
There is a need to be more inclusive of what 'intelligence' is, as it includes modelling, geographic level information, determination of agreements for data sharing and utilisation, building community surveillance capability etc. It also includes considering how information or intelligence is captured and utilised.
For example, investigation of opportunities to work with the APVMA regarding approvals given local governments need to apply/reapply for evaluation of baits and treatments for each incursion.

Theme 5

Requirement for development and adoption of models to support risk reduction prioritisation and building the case for further investment in biosecurity innovation. The language around this needs to be improved in the strategy and used to improve communications on these complex topics.
Consider learnings from the insurance industry, preventative health care and crime areas in identifying opportunities, and bolstering focus on climate change.
Explore further support that might be needed for Local Councils to build their capability for local and regional prevention and management of pests and diseases.
Identify whether the number of focus areas for Theme 5 can be reduced to better target efforts.

Let's explore an additional focus area: preparedness and response

Maxine Whittaker (BQMAC) provided a presentation that outlined the possible need for an additional theme in the strategy around preparedness and response (i.e. in its own right rather than being embedded across other themes).
Partners present then worked in groups to answer the following questions:

- *What does 'prepared to respond' look like?*
- *Tell me what you think 'recovery' and 'resilience' means? What do we need in place to make this happen?*
- *What are the opportunities to make improvements?*

The discussions stalled on the first question on what 'prepared to respond' looks like, highlighting the need for greater understanding and more focused discussions on what the concepts of 'prepared to respond', 'recovery' and 'resilience' mean in the context of biosecurity.
Feedback considered that what may have worked previously for responding may not work now, so there is a need to keep response preparedness activities relevant to current and future response needs. This includes understanding the peak load the system is capable of managing and being realistic about the fact that the cost to 'be prepared' is likely a higher up-front cost than people realise.
Response fatigue was raised regularly as a potential issue in engaging partners in response preparedness activities, and responding to incursions in general, and the impact this might have on the efficiency and efficacy of future responses, particularly as they become more prevalent and complex. This suggests that a strong focus on strengthening the partnership is required on an ongoing basis.
A priority need is to better integrate biosecurity into emergency response preparedness and response systems by engaging more frequently during peace time, and better leveraging existing networks and knowledge to respond in an emergency including with other

stakeholders such as media, community-based organisations. This requires industry and government at all levels to have a better understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and capacity/capability to act, including business-as-usual responsibilities for business emergency planning.
There needs to be better alignment of response approaches at the national level to reduce the impact of jurisdictions taking different approaches for cross-border responses. Conversely, there is a need to better understand and provide the support that local governments and first responders need for planning to respond.
Some industries find it more difficult to recover than others which isn't helped when deed payment mechanisms rely on an emergency pest or disease being eradicated which delays payments to affected farmers. This is further compounded by the fact that recovery from non-deed responses is increasingly complex with no clear guidance.
Resilience means different things to different stakeholder groups, with a common comment being that the term is often over-used with different interpretations. However, a common description was along the lines of resilience meaning the ability to bounce back and learning from an incident (transformation). This raised the question about what the needs are for supporting transition to management for pests and diseases that can't be eradicated.

Establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to Measure Success

Tom Kompas (CEBRA) provided an overview of evaluation in the context of biosecurity which set the scene for group discussions on what evaluation for each of the themes, and the strategy overall might look like. In general, the feedback for evaluation of all themes was heavily focused on the conduct of surveys, which may not often be feasible or meaningful (i.e. biased by those who want to complete the survey). Future consideration should be on how to promote maturing about monitoring and evaluation for complex systems (i.e. biosecurity). Other general feedback included that the evaluation should be holistic and not focused on individual pests or diseases. Triggers for action should also be included to avoid the evaluation framework becoming a 'set and forget' exercise.
The evaluation framework should be transparent about where progress is and isn't being made as poor results can also be useful indicators. The measures need to be set at a realistic level to not overburden the system.

Poll

While the results for this year suggest the metric decreased by around 16% from the 2021 results (with mutual trust still being the highest performer of all of the self-chosen partnership health indicators), the poll was performed at the end of the forum when a significant number of attendees had left, and the poll was therefore only indicative of the thoughts for those remaining in the room. Forum participants verbally noted that polling at the end of the day may have contributed as several participants had left prior to the evaluation session. BQ will look at refining the way polls are conducted for future forums.