



QUEENSLAND
FARMERS'
FEDERATION

Review of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity

Prepared by:

Name: Jo Sheppard, QFF CEO

E: qfarmers@qff.org.au

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The united voice of
Queensland agriculture

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This submission is provided to:

Dr Michele Allan AO, Independent Reviewer of the IGAB

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Email/website: igabreview2024@aff.gov.au

Our members

- Canegrowers
- Cotton Australia
- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland
- eastAUSmilk
- Australian Cane Farmers Association
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Pork Queensland
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallowa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Lockyer Valley Water Users

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

Our members are agricultural peak bodies who collectively represent more than 13,000 farmers who produce food, fibre and foliage across the state.

QFF's peak body members come together to develop policy and lead projects on the key issues that are important to their farmer members and the Queensland agriculture sector.

Together, we form a strong, unified voice leveraging our effectiveness by working together to drive policy and initiatives that support a strong future for Queensland agriculture.

Submission

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Review of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity.

We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

General Comment: The narrow scope of this review loses a valuable opportunity to review the recommendations of the 2019 review and assess how they have been implemented and with what impact. To exclude the components of the system such as capability, funding, national strategy, biosecurity risks, legislation and previous recommendations is puzzling and it is considered that the review will be unlikely to achieve its purpose of evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of the 2019 IGAB.

Discussion Paper Questions

4.1 Implementation and effectiveness of the IGAB agreement- Is the IGAB functioning as intended?

- **Are there specific clauses that impede or promote the successful operation of the IGAB.**

QFF feels the clauses are fundamentally sound, but some could be clarified and referenced to supporting components of the agreement e.g. no reference to cost sharing deeds.

- **How does the IGAB promote collaboration between Commonwealth and state and territory governments?**

An agreed position of response and the funding of that response allows a coordinated approach to disease and pest incursions into Australia. However, it is a signatory only between governments. Agricultural industries are only included in cost sharing agreements with the relevant bodies (Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia). Other sectors such as downstream supply chain businesses, environment bodies, human health and the community can be impacted and are not included at all. While this can be complicated to capture, there would be benefit in exploring how these could be included.

- **Is the ‘opt in, opt -out’ nature of the document conducive to a national approach to managing biosecurity?**

The agreement speaks in general terms and does not seem to be an opt in or opt out document but relies upon a process that is based on consultation and agreement. As there are different capacities to pay, there should not be any compulsion involved.

- **Does the document structure of the IGAB allow for easy implementation and is it easy to comprehend?**

A contents page would be helpful. Also, as an overarching document, references to supporting processes such as the cost sharing deeds would be useful to understand how it all comes together.

- **Are the governance clauses effective or ineffective? How could these be amended?**

The governance clauses are sound, but more clarity is required at the cross over issues of zoonotic diseases and whose role it is. Whether the governance is working would require a review of the performance and terms of reference of the various committees

4.2 Cross-jurisdictional cost sharing and funding arrangements – What changes, if any, could be made to the current cost sharing and funding arrangements for cross-jurisdictional activities outlined in the IGAB?

- **Clause 33d says that each party commits to fulfilling financial resourcing to maintain an effective biosecurity system and being accountable for their commitments under this agreement and emergency responses deeds and agreements.**

This is where the agreement could refer to a more detailed document that clarifies what they are agreeing on. For example, the agreement focuses on emergency responses as per the deeds but as the discussion paper says that other biosecurity activities such as preparedness, surveillance and containment are managed on an ad hoc basis. In particular, there needs to be a definition of a minimum set of biosecurity parameters that need to be met with each jurisdiction. Otherwise, you have the situation where there may be excellent surveillance in one state and below standard in another where a pest or disease could go undetected for a period of years.

- **QFF proposes that** a minimum set of standards are defined by the AHA and PHA which may include:
 - A targeted surveillance strategy that covers the risk for that jurisdiction
 - Effective legislation to mitigate risks
 - Standardised diagnostic capacity to diagnose samples within a stated period of time or agreed access to other diagnostic facilities in other jurisdictions or the private sector in the same time frame
 - Sufficiently trained staff to manage and contain a low-level incursion for 7 days before assistance can be accessed from elsewhere
 - Reporting that gives assurances that the whole of the jurisdiction is covered by the biosecurity measures put in place (i.e. not just one part of the state which is closest to the laboratory).

- **An agreed process for coming to decisions when there are conflicts.**

A compromise situation where not all jurisdictions agree to fund a response needs a review to see whether a revised plan can be put in place. This decision-making process should be time limited so that ongoing responses are not kept in an uncertain period of time waiting to know how much funds they have to plan a successful response. This scenario has happened with fire ants hindering its eradication process.

4.3 COVID-19 and the IGAB – How did COVID 19 affect the functioning of the IGAB?

- **How the IGAB could be futureproofed from pandemics such as COVID-19:**

States and jurisdictions did the best they could with emerging and limited knowledge of the virus and the lack of a comprehensive health plan like AUSVETPLAN. IGAB could reach out to the human health sector and ask to be included in any human health plans that are put together. If differences in approaches are discussed now, and a consensus approach debated before the crisis is in full swing, then there is a higher likelihood of containment, good outcomes and reduced anxiety by the population. There is a lot to be gained by a One Health approach particularly if avian influenza H5N1 causes a human pandemic. A debrief of the COVID-19 response with the human health sector would be beneficial if it has not already occurred.

Yours sincerely

Jo Sheppard
Chief Executive Officer



This submission is provided by the Queensland Farmers' Federation

PO Box 12009 George Street, Brisbane Qld 4003
Level 8, 183 North Quay, Brisbane Qld 4000
ABN 44 055 764 488

Contact QFF

E: qfarmers@qff.org.au
P: 07 3837 4720
W: www.qff.org.au

