

# Biosecurity Management in Western Australia

Stage 1 of the statutory review of  
the *Biosecurity and Agriculture  
Management Act 2007*

Discussion Paper

June 2022

# Acknowledgement

*The WA Local Government Association (WALGA) acknowledges the many traditional owners of the land on which we work throughout Western Australia. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. WALGA acknowledges the continuing knowledge and cultural practices that they bring to the Local Government and biosecurity management sectors to support resilient and sustainable land management.*

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# 1. Introduction

Local Government plays a key role in biosecurity management in Western Australia. Local Governments' involvement in biosecurity ranges from assisting with early detection and reporting of pests and diseases, participating in State responses to biosecurity incursions, managing declared pests on lands owned under State law, working in partnership with Recognised Biosecurity Groups on control activities for declared pests, developing and enforcing pest management local laws, and supporting community groups to implement management actions for pests and diseases. It does this through organisational leadership, building and utilising strong networks and partnerships with stakeholders, and delivering on-ground action.

The *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act) came into effect in May 2013 with the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Regulations 2013*. The Minister with responsibility for administering the Act is required to carry out a review every ten years from commencement.

In March 2022, the State Government appointed an independent panel to undertake the statutory review. The panel has been tasked with assessing the BAM Act's operation and effectiveness, including the role and effectiveness of the Declared Pest Rate and Recognised Biosecurity Groups to determine if this model is fit for purpose, adequacy of penalties imposed, the appropriate use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals, safety and quality standards for agricultural products, and ability to adapt to increasing pressures such as climate change, along with other key matters. The review will determine any amendments required to the legislation. The panel will report to the Minister by March 2023.

[Stage 1 of public consultation on the BAM Act Review](#) is open from Thursday 16 June to Wednesday 27 July. Stage 1 will identify the major themes and issues for the panel to consider. Feedback received will inform Stage 2, which will be a participatory process for all stakeholders to further explore the themes and issues. Stage 3 will include broader engagement to get feedback on the findings and potential solutions.

Any operational matters that are raised by stakeholders during the consultation period will be reported by the panel to the administrator of the Act, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), and be considered through a separate process.

## 2. Purpose of this discussion paper

This discussion paper is intended to provide context and background information on biosecurity management in Western Australia and relevant matters for Local Government, to assist the sector in providing input to Stage 1 of the BAM Act Review consultation process. Feedback on the Paper was requested from the sector and will inform WALGA's ongoing biosecurity advocacy, development of a draft submission to the BAM Act Review later in 2022 and an update of [WALGA's Biosecurity Management Policy Position \(2017\)](#) if required.

### **3. Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007**

The BAM Act and associated regulations are the legal framework that supports biosecurity and agriculture management for the Western Australia by providing the essential powers and duties that enable:

- leadership in the biosecurity system
- shared responsibility, including funding arrangements and cost recovery for some areas of biosecurity
- surveillance for pests, weeds and diseases
- prevention and timely responses to incursions
- long-term management of pests, weeds and diseases that have established in WA.
- management of the sale and use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals

In December 2013, an assessment by the Office of the Auditor General, [\*Managing the Impact of Plant and Animal Pests: A State-wide Challenge\*](#) found that the BAM Act was failing to achieve state-wide pest management, due to the lack of an integrated approach across the State, lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities of government agencies, limited monitoring of pests and no enforcement of the regulations, among other reasons.

The State Government responded to the Auditor General's report by developing the [\*Invasive Species Plan for Western Australia 2015-2019\*](#) and the [\*Western Australian Biosecurity Strategy 2016-2025\*](#).

The WA Biosecurity Strategy sets the overall direction for the management of emerging and ongoing biosecurity issues within the State, and is underpinned by three principles:

- biosecurity is a shared responsibility
- effective risk management underpins decision making
- policies and programs are transparent, consistent and evidence based.

In 2020, the [\*Auditor General conducted a follow-up audit\*](#) which found that State Government had not effectively addressed all the findings from the 2013 audit, although some progress had been made.

### **4. WALGA biosecurity advocacy and policy position**

Based on sector engagement and the outcomes of the 2013 and 2020 Auditor General reports, WALGA has advocated as a matter of urgency for a review of the BAM Act, including in the following submissions regarding National and State biosecurity management arrangements:

- [\*Post-border biosecurity reform: recommendations to the State Government \(2017\)\*](#)
- [\*Submission to the IGAB on biosecurity review: discussion paper \(2017\)\*](#)

WALGA's current Biosecurity Policy Position was endorsed in 2017 and replaced the previous position from 2006. It was developed following workshops across the State that engaged a range of stakeholders, including Elected Members, the Biosecurity Council, State Government, Recognised Biosecurity Groups and NGOs.

The WALGA Biosecurity Policy Position states:

1. *Local Government believes that State Government has responsibility for the following parts of a biosecurity system:*
  - *pre-border and border biosecurity measures and contingency funds to deal with new pest outbreaks*
  - *assistance to the private sector for newly established, industry-specific pests*
  - *assistance to land managers for newly established pests (where the incursion has occurred despite the land owner's best biosecurity management effort)*
  - *establishment of a biosecurity network and regional cooperative arrangements*
  - *enforcement of regulations*
  - *compliance with regulations on State Government managed land*
  - *specific research projects and specialised diagnostic services, and*
  - *enhancement of barrier fences.*
2. *Local Government are not supportive of Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs).*
3. *Local Government calls on the State Government to either reinstate the Agriculture Protection Board or develop a model similar to the NSW Local Land Services Act 2013 approach, and in consideration of either model that:*
  - *there are State Government approved strategic and operational plans which can be understood by landowners and other stakeholders, including Local Governments*
  - *there is direct contact with Local Governments, State Government agencies and departments, and major industry groups*
  - *that either model is resourced by State Government to undertake the required activities*
  - *that either model be funded under the current funding arrangements as outlined in the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007, and*
  - *that it assists in the delivery of national, state and local priority species management.*
4. *That as matter of priority, the Government undertake a review of the operation and effectiveness of the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 and its regulations.*

At the WALGA Annual General Meeting on 19 August 2019, the following motion was carried:

*WALGA revokes its current policy position of not supporting the establishment and operations of Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) and that the decision on whether to support RBGs is to rest with individual Local Governments.*

In considering the AGM motion in March 2020, the WALGA Environment Policy Team noted the commitment of the Agriculture Minister to a review of BAM Act in 'this term of government' and agreed that:

*‘WALGA retains its current biosecurity policy position of not supporting the establishment and operations of Recognised Biosecurity Groups subject to the outcomes of the review of the Biosecurity and Agriculture management Act 2007’.*

In summary, the 2017 WALGA Policy Position remains current and will be reviewed in conjunction with WALGA’s consultation on the BAM Act Review.

## 5. Biosecurity management themes

**11 key biosecurity management themes** have been identified that underpin WALGA’s Biosecurity Policy Position, reflect issues raised by Local Governments and those found by the Auditor General’s 2013 and 2020 assessment reports, and respond to additional matters identified in Stage 1 of the BAM Act review:

- Strategic direction and regional priorities
- Agency responsibilities
- The Declared Pest Rate and Recognised Biosecurity Groups
- Environmental biosecurity
- Responses to incursions
- Management of declared pests in urban areas
- Problematic non-declared pests
- Sustainable funding model
- Compliance and enforcement
- Monitoring, research and innovation
- Community education and involvement.

WALGA is seeking feedback on these themes, as well any additional important issues that Local Governments consider should be included.

### **Theme 1: Strategic direction and regional priorities**

Since 2013, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) has sought to improve the strategic direction for biosecurity management by establishing a framework, strategy and plan for collaborative management of pests across WA. However, the 2020 Auditor General’s Report noted that formal arrangements between various entities are not always effective, and stakeholder efforts do not always align. Furthermore, only 34 per cent of actions in the *Invasive Species Plan for Western Australia 2015-2019* had been completed. Crucially, the 2020 Auditor General’s Report found DPIRD had not ranked the highest risk pests or reviewed threats according to risk to ensure the efficient use of resources.

There remains a gap in the identification and prioritisation of biosecurity threats per region across Western Australia, to direct biosecurity investment and on-ground efforts. By comparison, in New South Wales, under the *Local Land Services Act 2013* model, geographically defined regions are each supported by a Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) developed with relevant agency expertise and community knowledge. RPMS’s provide a statutory five-year road map with targets for the management of declared (and key non-declared) pest plants and animals within the region, supported by operational plans.

The Australian Government has established geographically defined Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations across Australia, that act as delivery agents for the National Landcare Program. In WA, there are seven NRM regions.

Each NRM region delivers programs that contributes to the biosecurity management through protection, conservation and recovery of the land and marine/coastal environments and their associated biodiversity. Although the work of each regional NRM organisation is not coordinated, the existing geographical regions may be a useful existing structure to adapt or integrate with a new biosecurity management framework.

The State Government could also develop state-wide strategies for the management of priority declared pest species to guide investment and focus the efforts of RBGs. This has been completed for wild dogs (WA Wild Dog Action Plan 2016-2021), feral pigs (WA Feral Pig Strategy 2020-2025) and large feral herbivores such as donkeys, horses and camels (WA Large Feral Herbivore Strategy 2020-2025). DPIRD is currently developing a Pest Parrot and Cockatoo Strategy.

### **Theme 1 recommendation**

A strategic framework be developed that enables the prioritisation of biosecurity threats in geographically defined regions and sets targets for declared pest management is required to improve biosecurity investment and direct control efforts.

## **Theme 2: Agency responsibilities**

The WA Biosecurity Strategy is underpinned by a framework of collaboration between government, industry and community. Central to the BAM Act is the Biosecurity Council, established in 2007, which is an independent advisory panel comprising specialists from a diverse range of backgrounds, which may include State and Local Government, industry, natural resource management and regional communities, to provide strategic advice on biosecurity matters to the Minister and the Director General.

Local Government is represented on the Biosecurity Council through the membership of an Elected Member or senior officer following a nomination and assessment process undertaken by the WALGA Selection Committee, and Ministerial appointment. A Biosecurity Senior Officers' Group (BSOG) comprised of Senior Executives from State Government agencies develops and recommends cross-government and state-wide strategies for biosecurity management. WALGA represents the sector on the BSOG.

DPIRD is the lead agency in WA with responsibility for biosecurity. Duties include undertaking surveillance and diagnostics to support early detection and diagnosis, managing eradication and containment programs for species declared under the Act, and executing enforcement actions and regulatory interventions. DPIRD collaborates with other agencies, including the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and the Forest Products Commission to undertake biosecurity activities on public lands under their jurisdiction.

DPIRD is responsible for administering the BAM Act, as well as other legislation that is relevant for biosecurity, including the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994*. DBCA is responsible for administering the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act) and associated regulations, and also has responsibilities under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* and BAM Act.

Some species of fauna which are protected under the BC Act can cause significant damage or can have major impacts on other native species, mostly because they have established outside of their natural range or are overabundant due to human influence. Under the BC Act, these species are referred to as 'Managed Fauna' and the areas where they can be taken are defined as 'Managed Fauna Areas'. There are restrictions on taking Managed Fauna, and in some circumstances a licence is required. Where possible, the listing of species as Managed Fauna aligns with the listing of declared pests under the BAM Act.

The 2020 Auditor General's Report found that DPIRD is primarily focused on protecting agriculture, DBCA on protecting biodiversity, and Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) focused on pests that threaten their core businesses. There have been a number of concerns expressed with the responsibilities for biosecurity management, including:

- lack of a clarity on the lead agency, or a shifting of responsibilities between agencies and lack of collaboration, on implementation of actions required to address biosecurity threats
- confusion around licence requirements where a number of acts provide for the management of a problematic pest species
- a lack of State Government control of declared pests on land under their jurisdiction.

### **Theme 2 recommendation**

The roles and responsibilities of each department responsible for biosecurity management need to be a clearly defined and communicated, a formalised structure for different agencies to work together established, and increased investment made in declared pest management on State Government managed land.

### **Theme 3: The Declared Pest Rate and Recognised Biosecurity Groups**

A Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG) is a body recognised by the Minister for Agriculture and Food for the purpose (or part thereof) of controlling declared pests in a specified area. Under the BAM Act, the State raises a rate, known as a Declared Pest Rate (DPR), from landholders in specific local government districts known as prescribed areas. The DPR funds raised are matched dollar-for-dollar by the State and deposited in a Declared Pest Account (DPA). RevenueWA is responsible for issuing and collecting the DPR, which is then administered by DPIRD.

Ministerial recognition of RBGs enables funds in the Declared Pest Account (DPA) to be transferred and used by these groups to implement declared pest control programs. The Minister authorises the Director General to issue a Directions Notice to an RBG for the use of those funds, which includes the groups approved operational plan. The DPR can only be used by RBGs for the control of declared pests and related activities (e.g. education) within the areas for which the rates were collected. The DPR is set annually by the Minister following consultation with stakeholders in prescribed areas. In 2022-23, DPIRD anticipates that \$6.1 million (rates raised and matched funds) will be made available through the DPA.

This model is the key mechanism under the BAM Act to support landholders to fulfil their obligations to manage widespread and established declared pests at a landscape scale in WA. Through a community coordinated approach RBGs supplement the role of landholders, but do not replace landholder responsibility for controlling declared pests. As of September 2021, there were [14 RBGs in WA](#), covering the majority (over 95%) of the State's land area. Across the State, RBGs are managing 14 plants and nine animals that are declared pests, with priority pests different for each RBG. There are 65 Local Governments that have a DPR prescribed in their district.

The current mechanism's predecessor formed from the Agriculture Protection Board (APB), established under the *Agriculture Protection Board Act 1950*. The subsidiary committees, the Zone Control Authorities (ZCAs) and Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) were established under the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976*. A rate was raised from pastoral lease land only and matched by the State, with funds deposited in a Declared Plants and Animals Trust Fund. The pastoral ZCA made recommendations and approved budgets for these funds for pest control operations, which were undertaken through the APB and the then Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA).

Following the disbandment of ZCAs, the DAFWA financially supported the formation of new Incorporated Associations called 'biosecurity groups' to undertake community-led pest management activities. This support enabled the community to form groups, apply to the Minister to be recognised as an RBG, and establish the DPR as a sustainable source of funding.

The DPR in pastoral areas is effectively a continuation of the previous pastoral lease rates, with a new mechanism for expenditure of those funds via RBGs. The application of the DPR to agricultural and south-west areas of the State is the first time a rate of this nature had been implemented in these areas. Declared Species Groups that formed in these areas transitioned to RBGs over time.

As the number of RBGs grew, the collaborative basis proved beneficial at bringing together government and other key stakeholders (e.g. NRM groups, landcare groups) and gaining the support of the local community to coordinate declared pest control action across different land tenures. Some RBGs also work with neighbouring RBGs, with the intention of aligning pest control programs where possible across larger areas. Some RBGs have entered into MOUs with State Government to undertake control actions on State Government land, however this arrangement has been implemented on an ad hoc basis.

The 2013 Auditor General's Report noted that the policy to move to a more regional and community-based approach through RBGs had been poorly developed and implemented by the State. There was no overarching implementation framework or guidelines for the establishment of RBGs, and as a result they formed slowly with each having considerable autonomy in their governance and corporation structures.

The 2020 Auditor General's Report found that DPIRD had yet to establish a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to demonstrate whether RBGs are an effective regulatory approach.

In its [2020-21 Annual Report](#), the Biosecurity Council noted that it had reviewed its position on DPRs and recommended that the current DPR approach be 'reviewed in

terms of its strategic intent, how it is being implemented, the operational (on-ground) delivery and the return on investment the approach is delivering to the State'.

Issues raised with the DPR and RBG model include:

### Declared Pest Rate

- DPIRD's policy for RBGs enables any entity or body, including NRM organisations or Local Government, that includes the purpose of controlling declared pests within a prescribed area, to be recognised by the Minister and have access to the DPR. However this has not been well communicated and does not operate in practice.
- The DPR provides financial stability, but in some cases is not sufficient to meet the expenses required to implement RBG's operational plans. Consequently RBGs may seek funds from other sources, including Royalties for Regions, NRM grants, DPIRD capacity building grants, and financial contributions from participating Local Governments.
- Under Section 130(4) of the BAM Act, Differential DPRs may be determined in respect of different land and different classes of land. This may allow higher rates on certain landholders, through use of ad valorem rating systems or a tiered rating approach. However, it doesn't allow RBGs to differentiate rates based on locally relevant factors (e.g. RBGs that wish to have increased DPRs in certain patches within a prescribed area due to pest prevalence or landholder support).
- DPRs are not currently raised in the Perth metropolitan, and some of the wheatbelt and south-west region.
- Local Government is the first point of call for landholders that object to the levying of a DPR on their properties, but do not have control regarding the Ministers decisions on the rate beyond the annual consultation process.
- A region with the same pest management issues may consist of a Local Government area where a DPR is eligible to be raised, and an adjacent Local Government area that is not eligible, resulting in differences in regional pest control activities and reduced effectiveness in controlling the pest.

### Pest control programs

- RBGs operate with a lack of strategic guidance on target pest species. The focus on local pest management issues is intentional, but potentially excludes consideration of broader biosecurity threats for region.
- RBGs can be limited in their ability to respond to new pest incursions, as they are only authorised to use the DPR to control declared pests. However, funds from other sources can be used for other biosecurity purposes not limited to declared pest control.
- There is a lack of support for the authorisation of Registered Pesticide Permits to RBGs, to enable them to be able to undertake declared pest control on State Government land (note that while this affects biosecurity management, the permit process is governed by legislation administered by the Department of Health rather than under the BAM Act)

### Governance

- RBGs operate as incorporated associations, and require a good understanding of the requirements as set out by the *Associations Incorporation Act 2015* for reporting and insurance obligations.
- Processes for RBGs to engage with key stakeholders, including Local and State Government, at the strategic decision-making level may be limited.
- RBGs rely heavily on community capability and resourcing. They often involve significant volunteer time and effort from the community and RGB staff. In agricultural areas, the amalgamation of farms into larger conglomerates is leading to a reduced volunteer pool.
- RBGs are not statutory bodies, and therefore do not have any statutory powers to undertake compliance activities, which may not meet the expectations of local communities.
- RBGs undertake annual monitoring of the effectiveness of control programs, and may partner with research bodies to establish landscape scale monitoring programs. However, there is limited ability to feed information on the spatial and temporal distributions of declared species into State decision-making processes on biosecurity investment.

### **Theme 3 recommendation**

If the Declared Pest Rate and Recognised Biosecurity Groups are to continue to be key mechanisms for the management of widespread and established declared pests, changes are required to improve their operation and effectiveness to better support the concept of shared responsibility.

### **Theme 4: Environmental biosecurity**

The 2020 Auditor General's Report found that pest management on non-agricultural lands appears less likely to be carried out or enforced. Currently, DPA funds (via the RBGs) are directed primarily toward asset-based protection from agricultural pests. It also noted that further expansion of RBGs into more densely populated and farmed areas in the South West and Wheatbelt could increase protection in areas of high biodiversity. Biosecurity management has largely focused on primary industry and productivity, with environmental biosecurity not adequately considered.

#### *Case study: Amazon frogbit listed as a declared pest*

Amazon frogbit is a floating freshwater plant from Central and South America, that is kept and traded for use in fish ponds, aquariums and water features. It can rapidly invade and smother waterways, which has serious impacts on native fauna and flora, as well as limiting recreational activities.

The South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare, along with a number of Local Governments, sought to have Amazon frogbit (*Limnobium laevigatum*) listed as a declared pest under the BAM Act, following its spread through a number of waterways in Perth including Little Rush Lake, Yangebup and Bayswater Brook from December 2017 to January 2018. The weed was in close proximity to the confluence with the Swan River and ecologically significant Eric Singleton Bird Sanctuary, and a priority for management action to avoid further spread and damage to the environment.

While the weed was declared as a pest under the BAM Act by the Minister in 2018, no control category was assigned. However, the declared pest status provides a mechanism for RBGs, NRM and community groups to apply for funding from various sources to undertake control programs.

#### **Theme 4 recommendation**

A more balanced view of biosecurity that has a greater focus on environmental biosecurity is required, through increased recognition and management of pest species that have significant ecological impacts.

#### **Theme 5: Responses to incursions**

In WA and across Australia, the biosecurity invasion curve illustrates how the greatest return on investment is achieved through prevention and early intervention, compared to asset-based protection once pests are widespread and established. The idea behind the curve is that it is more cost effective and feasible to stop pests becoming established. However, to have a robust biosecurity system, multiple controls are put in place across the continuum and each step needs to be adequately resourced. Local Government plays a key role in biosecurity management across this spectrum, which needs to be recognised and adequately resourced.

Legislative and regulatory control of declared pests currently occurs across three categories that align with the stages of managing pests and the generalised invasion curve:

- Category 1 (C1) – Prevention of declared pests that can establish and spread in WA.
- Category 2 (C2) – Eradication and containment of declared pests present in WA that are not widespread and which can be eradicated or contained.
- Category 3 (C3)– Asset based protection to manage the impact of declared pests that are widespread and established in WA and which cannot be eradicated.

While DPIRD has allocated greater resources to prevent or eradicate new biosecurity incursions as quickly as possible, which is widely regarded as the most cost-effective use of public resources compared with containment or management, this approach has generally not had the desired success. The 2020 Auditor General's Report found that pest emergencies, such as the discovery of Red Imported Fire Ants at Fremantle Harbour, divert significant resources away from DPIRD's planned pest activities. The potential for pest emergencies can be expected to increase with the increasing risk of new pest incursions.

#### *Case study example – Polyphagous shot-hole borer*

DPIRD is responding to increasing detections of the Polyphagus shot-hole borer (PSHB), a wood-boring exotic beetle, following the first ever Australian detection in East Fremantle in August 2021. The beetle bores into host trees and causes severe damage, with some affected trees dying within two years of infestation.

Widespread establishment of this pest in WA will have a significant impact on public amenity, native vegetation and industry, with many species of trees potentially affected. WALGA's analysis of street tree lists from four metropolitan Local Governments identified that over half the species used are potential hosts for PSHB.

There is currently no effective treatment method, apart from removing affected vegetation.

To manage the ongoing surveillance program by DPIRD and to stop the spread of this pest, a Quarantine Area Notice was put in place in September 2021 for parts of the suburbs of Fremantle, East Fremantle, North Fremantle, Palmyra and Bicton. The beetle has continued to be found outside these areas and the Quarantine Area Notice now covers 21 Local Government Areas. It is thought that the pest was present for several years before detection, and is now being found across a wider geographic area due to dedicated surveillance efforts.

Local Governments are assisting in the response to PSHB by monitoring trees for signs of PSPB activity, providing locations of known host trees, facilitating safe green waste management from the quarantine area and sharing information with local communities to encourage people to “look and report”. DPIRD is continuing to use traps in select Local Government areas to assist with detection and monitoring of spread.

#### **Theme 5 recommendation**

Increased and more equitable distribution of funding is required to ensure each step of the biosecurity continuum is adequately resourced for all stakeholders, including Local Government.

#### **Theme 6: Management of declared pests in urban areas**

The *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management (Declared Pest Account) Regulations 2014* list the prescribed areas where a Declared Pest Rate can be raised. There are 66 Local Government districts that are prescribed, all in regional areas. The land type, in combination with the land size, in a prescribed area determines whether the property will be rated. The rating method, rate chargeable and land prescribed is recommended by the RBG in consultation with landholders and the community and then is set by the Minister after a period of public consultation. The Government Gazette published the minimum lot size for the financial year commencing 1 July 2021, which ranged from 1 ha to 100 ha, depending on the prescribed area. To date, this has generally excluded landholders in metropolitan areas and rural town centres. A minority of RBGs (i.e. the Southern Biosecurity Group and the Blackwood Biosecurity Incorporation) apply a DPR on urban residential land.

The Western Australian Organism List provides the species that are declared pests and the Local Government areas and boundaries where these species require control. Urban Local Government Areas have declared pests that are categorised as C3, meaning management should be applied to alleviate the harmful impact and reduce numbers and distribution. The lack of State investment in Declared Pest management in urban and peri-urban areas has significant impacts on agricultural and horticulture/viticulture industries, the environment and public amenity.

#### *Case study example – Introduced Corellas*

Many Local Governments from Geraldton to Busselton, have significant problem with two species of corellas - the little corella (*Cacatua sanguinea*) native to the

Pilbara and Kimberly region of Western Australia, and the Eastern long-billed corella (*Cacatua tenuirostris*), an introduced species from eastern Australia.

These birds cause noise impacts, fouling and damage to infrastructure and trees. Local Governments with high corella populations regularly receive complaints from residents on the nuisance they create, including disruption of sleep due to noise at roosting sites. In 2017, the Little Corella was declared a Category 3 (C3) pest in parts of the South West under the BAM Act.

Between 2016 and 2019, in response to the sector's needs, WALGA, with funding provided by DBCA and Local Governments undertook a Coordinated Corella Control Program in Perth, Peel and the South West to assist with the cross-boundary management of this species. During this time over 4,400 introduced corellas were euthanised in accordance with DBCA licence conditions.

Management constraints, limited funding available relative to the magnitude of the problem, and the low availability of secure and unimpeded sites for the trapping and humane control of these species has made achieving a significant and sustained reduction in the number of introduced corellas difficult. Since the program ceased, Local Governments have sought to continue with a regional approach to corella control, however additional funding and State Government support is needed.

#### **Theme 6 recommendation**

Declared pest management in all urban areas requires support through an appropriate funding mechanism.

#### **Theme 7: Problematic non-declared pests**

A review of the declared pests of Western Australia was completed by DPIRD in May 2016, which reduced the number of declared vertebrate animal pests from 44 to 30, and the number of declared plant pests from 61 to 56. The review resulted in changes to the control or keeping categories. For 15 of the declared plant pests, the control category was changed to unassigned. RBGs and land managers are still required to control these species, however they are considered a lower priority for investment compared with the higher control categories of C1 (exclusion), C2 (eradication) and C3 (management).

It is possible that further species may be delisted, and while still problematic at a local level, are not prioritised for management through their declaration status. The 2020 Auditor General's Report found that the process for declaring pests was still not transparent to stakeholders and recommended that DPIRD should schedule regular reviews of the declared pest list to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

Land managers are left to fund the control of problematic non-declared pests. To control problematic pests that are undeclared, or have become delisted under the BAM Act, Local Governments can prescribe species as 'pest plants' (this doesn't apply for animals). Under the *Local Government Act 1995*, Local Governments can gazette a pest plant local law that gives it legal authority to enforce control measures on all private land. The Act also provides for a specified area rate that can be used to control the pest.

### **Theme 7 recommendation**

The process for the listing of declared pests needs to be timely and transparent to ensure that land managers, including Local Government, are not resourcing the control of an increasing number of problematic non-declared pest species.

### **Theme 8: Sustainable funding model**

Under the BAM Act, there are two main biosecurity funding mechanisms; a land-based rating scheme known as the Declared Pest Rate (discussed under Theme 3) and Industry Funding Schemes. Declared Pest Rates are used to address priority pest risks in the area where the rates were collected, while money raised from agricultural producers through Industry Funding Schemes is used by industry to address biosecurity priorities, including diseases.

Under the BAM Act there has been an increasing focus of State Government resources on the prevention and eradication of pests not yet established in the State and a move to a community coordinated approach through RBGs to manage and control of widespread and established declared pests.

Biosecurity threats and impacts are increasing with new pest and disease incursions, and the range of many existing declared pests expanding. In its 2020-21 Annual Report, the Biosecurity Council stated:

*“Excluding human-related biosecurity emergencies, WA has been in a state of biosecurity emergency since 2017. In 2020 there were five plant biosecurity incidents and one animal incident being addressed concurrently in the State. By way of comparison, there were four plant/animal biosecurity incidents in the six years to 2014 and 17 in the following six years. This is a step-change in the frequency and scale of biosecurity incursions.”*

It is essential that biosecurity management is sufficiently and sustainably resourced to effectively meet these challenges into the future. Consideration of future funding should include:

- The level of adequacy of current biosecurity expenditure
- Gaps and opportunities
- Cost-sharing principles being applied in WA
- Funding mechanisms used elsewhere and alternative approaches.

### **Theme 8 recommendation**

A sustainable and equitable funding model is required to manage the increasing biosecurity management threat.

### **Theme 9: Compliance and enforcement**

The 2020 Auditor General’s Report found that “while the responsibility for managing the threat of invasive species is a shared one, the State Government is charged with a regulatory role that cannot be delegated entirely.” The Report noted that DPIRD had significantly reduced compliance activity since the 2013 audit, despite an increase in staffing, and that a better balance between regulatory enforcement

and community engagement to increase voluntary compliance was needed. The Report recommended that DPIRD should finalise policies for enforcing compliance with regulations and evaluate its approach to ensure objectives of the BAM Act are being met.

Local Governments have expressed frustration regarding limited compliance and enforcement action from the State. Feedback from some RBGs noted that, as community based organisations, it would be a potential conflict of interest to deliver the pest control programs as well as undertake compliance and enforcement activities. In some instances, Local Government has been delegated authority by DPIRD to undertake compliance and enforcement actions.

#### **Theme 9 recommendation**

DPIRD's responsibility for compliance and enforcement needs to be adequately resourced and enacted.

### **Theme 10: Monitoring, research and innovation**

Strategic monitoring and reporting on the temporal or spatial distribution of declared species is required to determine the success of control efforts, inform investment decisions and ensure adaptive management. As noted in the 2013 and 2020 Auditor General's Reports, the State's ability to determine the spread and abundance of high priority pests, or impact of control programs, is still not comprehensive or shared amongst stakeholders. This means that DPIRD does not have an overview of pest populations and their impact to provide a sound basis for resourcing decisions. Useful data collected by agencies, industry and RBGs is not collected in a single, searchable database.

The use of applications for data collection has increased over time, with DPIRD developing the MyPestGuide family of apps in 2014, and DBCA developing the Weed App in 2017. The 2020 Auditor General's Report found that these assist with the availability of information, but are unlikely to help with the creation of an accurate or complete record of priority pests.

New technology will form an important part of enabling early detection. For example, remote sensing technology for weeds and feral pigs is increasingly being used as a survey method in remote areas or difficult terrain. eDNA monitoring represents a revolutionary new survey method, that takes advantage of the genetic material that aquatic animals shed into the environment (from skin particles, faeces and urine) to detect species presence and estimate their relative abundance.

Organisations such as the WA Biodiversity Science Institute provide a valuable role in facilitating end user driven, relevant research on priority biosecurity matters, with examples of research programs including '*Addressing weed threats to biodiversity*' and '*Mitigating feral cat impacts on biodiversity*'.

#### **Theme 10 recommendation**

Strategic monitoring, use of new technologies and the establishment of data management systems are required to inform biosecurity investment decisions and support adaptive management.

## Theme 11: Community education and involvement

The community play an integral part in a strong biosecurity system. The WA Biosecurity Strategy notes that education and raising awareness of biosecurity responsibilities is a fundamental element of achieving voluntary compliance.

As the closest level of government to the community, Local Government plays a key role in providing education and support for community involvement in biosecurity management. Enhancing the capacity of landholders and members of the community to understand their responsibilities, recognise, act upon and plan for animal and plant pests is an integral part of biosecurity management.

Citizen science programs are a valuable opportunity to involve community members in monitoring and surveillance activities. For instance, DPIRD promotes [RabbitScan](#), a resource for landholders in communities across Australia to record rabbit sightings, control activities, and the presence of rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV), a biological control agent. DPIRD also hosts the biennial [Pantry Blitz](#), a community surveillance program that provides invaluable evidence on the presence of pests and diseases in WA to support early biosecurity responses and continue the State's access to valuable export markets.

The social licence to operate is an increasing consideration for organisations undertaking pest control activities, including Local Government. A concerted education and engagement program is required to ensure a better understanding of, and continued support for, pest control programs. Promotion of the ethical approach to the humane, safe and effective control of pest species is required, as well as the significant impacts on industry, the environment and amenity if left uncontrolled.

Community surveillance provides early detection of threats and has been the method by which a new incursion is first recognised. It can also play an important role in on-going eradication or containment programs. Community surveillance allows for cost effective and rapid biosecurity responses, and public awareness campaigns designed to improve reporting have been a focus of State Government for new or emerging biosecurity threats.

### Theme 11 recommendation

A stronger focus on community education to increase understanding and awareness will improve engagement with biosecurity management programs and assist with timely incursion responses.

## 6. Next steps

The Independent Panel will be undertaking Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the public consultation on the BAM Act Review over 2022-23. WALGA will work with the Review Panel to facilitate direct sector consultation opportunities during Stage 2 and 3, including workshops to explore the themes and issues identified in Stage 1.

Additional opportunities for sector consultation will be sought as required throughout the BAM Act Review timeframe.