

Title	Biosecurity
Policy type	Element of the Agriculture and Primary Industry Policy
Policy Working Group	Agriculture and Primary Industry
Policy history	New policy
Status	Final Draft – to be circulated for comment
Date	20/1/2010
Feedback	Formal submissions and comment should be emailed to rodney.gauld@democrats.org.au

Overview

Biosecurity is the protection of our environment, society, and economy from the negative impacts of pests and diseases. The Australian Democrats are committed to maintaining and improving the very high biosecurity status that Australia commands in the world. This status is due to Australia's geography and to maintaining our national borders to manage the risk of entry of exotic pests and diseases.

Australia is a member of the global community and has an important role in participating in global free trade markets; the Australian Democrats are committed to maintaining this role without damaging our biosecurity status. We recognise that Australia is not a fortress and nil risk is not realistic, however, risk can be mitigated to very low levels. The maintenance and improvement of our national biosecurity system based on principles of transparency, consistency, and a sound scientific basis can protect our valuable biosecurity status for the benefit of the unique Australian environment, our people, and our economy.

The Issue

The policy ensures appropriate actions are developed, funded and undertaken that address all facets of the biosecurity continuum through the development of an effective and functional National Biosecurity System. This includes funding and implementing activities undertaken pre-border to manage biosecurity threats to Australia off-shore, supporting and maintaining a comprehensive quarantine border nationally, and addressing biosecurity threats and incursions that may enter Australia or are already here. We are all biosecurity stakeholders and to be successful in our biosecurity endeavours shared responsibilities have to be understood and accepted.

The Proposal

The Australian Democrats will:

- Negotiate regional differences with respect to biosecurity status under the international World Trade Organisation Agreements. The geographic and biological diversity of Australia means that biosecurity risk profiles vary across Australia from region to region. For example, Tasmania as an island has a physically different biosecurity risk profile to other States hence regional differences apply that may necessitate different rules for managing biosecurity risk.

Australian Democrats National Policy

- Expand access to the basis of biosecurity decision-making with clear recognition and response to primary producer concerns. At present import risk analysis reports are available for consultation with stakeholders however operational working documents are confidential government to government. This makes it very difficult for major stakeholders such as primary producers to consider how biosecurity risk mitigations will be put in place on ground or to have their say.
- Establish scientifically based decision making processes with respect to biosecurity risk and management with the exclusion of political interference.
- Implement a system of bonds for potential risk-makers (and some beneficiaries) to ensure equity of payment in response actions etc. This action is designed to enhance the current system of cost-sharing agreements that provide the basis for a sharing of costs across the public and private sector when responding to biosecurity emergencies.
- Establish post-border surveillance systems in conjunction with the States and Territories to ensure early detections. This would include an emphasis on environmental biosecurity surveillance in addition to the primary industry sectors.
- Establish cost:benefit decision making processes for pest control and eradication that takes into account environmental and social factors as well as economic ones.
- Improve accountability of the Australian Biosecurity System to the people of Australia, including implementation of recommendations from the 2008 Beale Review into quarantine and biosecurity.

The Goal

Implementing the proposals put forward by the Australian Democrats will result in thorough and effective management of biosecurity risks posed to the Australian environment and production sectors in the most cost effective manner possible. The end point of an effective Australian Biosecurity System will pay dividends in return to Australia, its environment, its people, and its economy.

Timeline

A five year program is anticipated to implement proposals enhance the national biosecurity system.