

Biosecurity

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council

Meeting 181

22 November 2023

Policy Statement

General Principles

1. The VFF actively promotes a collaborative and proactive approach to biosecurity management and control, as the Victorian farming community are key stakeholders frequently placed at the forefront of the biosecurity continuum.
2. The VFF believes that biosecurity is a shared responsibility, involving industry, research institutions, federal and state governments, and the community working together.
3. The VFF believes all community members should have a general duty to ensure that they do not spread pests, weeds and diseases. All persons and corporate bodies must be responsible for managing biosecurity risks that are under their control, or that they are aware of. This duty should be enforced by law.
4. The VFF believes that Victorian farmers act as the first line of defence against persistent threats to biosecurity, and are suitably placed to deliver best practices in accordance with their respective industries. Farmers should be acknowledged by the government for the important contribution that they make to minimise biosecurity risk on farms.
5. The VFF recognises that a well-resourced national biosecurity system will safeguard Victorian agriculture, the environment and the community from imminent threats to biosecurity while preserving domestic, international, import and export market access. However, the VFF insists that the cost of biosecurity protection and management resources including, but not limited to training, staffing, compensation and scenario planning must be appropriately and practicably shared across the whole community.
6. The VFF supports the introduction and national streamlining of traceability arrangements in the primary industries, provided these enhance, and do not impede agricultural productivity in Australia.
7. The VFF supports a biosecurity system that prioritises stringent and coordinated biosecurity management across the supply chain. This is necessary to preserve and protect the prosperity of Victorian agriculture from the persistent threat of endemic, established and exotic pests, weeds and diseases.
8. The VFF believes that where a farming system may be compromised by a biosecurity breach or incursion, mechanisms for preparedness funding, cost recovery and compensation frameworks can be implemented immediately to minimise losses incurred by farmers.

On-farm biosecurity management

9. The VFF believes that the creation of biosecurity management plans is integral to safeguard farmers, as they are the conduit between best practices and the maintenance of strict biosecurity controls. Moreover, the VFF endorses the installation of visible biosecurity signage to protect the Victorian farming community from threats to biosecurity.
10. The VFF strongly opposes any unauthorised entry and/or trespass onto properties as this violates biosecurity plans, and places production systems at greater risk of biosecurity breaches.

Endemic, established and exotic pests, weeds and diseases

11. The VFF supports ongoing surveillance of endemic, established and exotic pests, weeds and diseases at the international, interstate and intrastate levels, recognising that surveillance is key to early detection of threats to biosecurity which could detrimentally impact Australian agriculture.
12. The VFF believes that there must be shared responsibility of importers, exporters and government in the screening, surveillance, monitoring, chemical treatment or destruction of import products coming into Australia to protect agriculture from exotic pests, weeds and diseases.

Preparedness and emergency response

13. The VFF strongly supports a rapid response to biosecurity threats or outbreaks through unified early detection, control and communication between the farming community, industry and government, emphasising a practicable and measured approach to dealing with threats to biosecurity as they arise.
14. The VFF acknowledges that practical containment strategies are the gold standard for managing a disease outbreak or biosecurity breach, and supports extensive training and staffing by the government, industry and the farming community to conduct a coordinated biosecurity response.
15. The VFF believes that close consultation must continue in the event of zoonotic disease, noting that a cohesive biosecurity response by the agricultural and the primary and allied health sectors is key to mitigating impacts to human, plant and animal health during a biosecurity incursion.
16. The VFF affirms that the delivery of scaled emergency preparedness exercises or practical stress testing must involve local, state and Commonwealth governments, while including the farming community as key stakeholders in the biosecurity emergency response.
17. The VFF believes that in the interest of enhanced preparedness, personal information must only be used by the government to identify localities impacted by a biosecurity emergency. The VFF

strongly opposes the use of personal information contrary to this sole use, and insists that the privacy of farmers must be protected at all times.

Market access and reducing market disruption

18. The VFF believes that sufficient mitigation of biosecurity threats enables continued domestic and international market access for Victorian farmers. The minimisation of market disruption to agriculture must be a priority in the design and implementation of industry and government biosecurity protocols.

Biosecurity funding arrangements

19. The VFF opposes any government-enforced tax, levy or charging arrangement on farmers to fund biosecurity activities that are imposed without the agreement of the affected agricultural industries.
20. The VFF underscores that primary producers already fulfil their financial responsibilities in supporting the Australian government's biosecurity activities. Additional levies and taxes should be imposed on importers, as they are the primary source of biosecurity risks.
21. Contributions should promote growth in the primary industries and manage risks effectively. It is essential that any new levy proposal or amendment is supported by industry bodies and is formulated with clear, efficient, and practical implementation plans in line with the system's principles.
22. The VFF supports the ability of agricultural industries to establish statutory levies for biosecurity activities and emergency response in line with the Commonwealth Government's 12 levy principles established in 1997.
23. The VFF believes that any tax, levy or charge imposed by the government to fund biosecurity activities must be directly hypothecated to those activities agreed with industry, and not allocated to government consolidated revenue.
24. New levy proposals and amendments to existing levies must meet the Commonwealth Government's 12 levy principles, explicitly indicating the allocation of funds and demonstrating the benefits this expenditure will bring to levy payers.