



Australia's biosecurity system in 2024

By TINA HUTCHISON, First Assistant Secretary, Biosecurity Operations Division, Australian Government – Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Tina Hutchison shared her thoughts on the operation of Australia's biosecurity system in 2024.

As Freight & Trade Alliance members are no doubt aware, the first months of 2024 saw Australia's biosecurity system running at speed with ports and airports around the country reporting trade volumes at pre-COVID levels.

Continued new and irregular supply and value chains into Australia will contribute to increased pest and disease risks already increasing with growing trade. There are also ongoing logistical challenges at Australia's ports that are adding time, cost and frustration to the movement of goods through the border. Further to this is a real threat of increasing deliberate attempts to circumvent biosecurity requirements to secure economic return.

We will need to work together to ensure our approach to biosecurity is both efficient and effective.

To this end, the department is focussed on rebuilding and reskilling its workforce, in realising benefits for industry and our biosecurity officers from the government's \$145m investment in reforming our outdated cargo system, and in working with industry to increase the use of industry arrangements and remove unwarranted regulatory noise and cost from the system.

We will be looking to strong industry partnership and support in these efforts.

Sustainable Biosecurity Funding

This government's priority is to boost agricultural trade while safeguarding Australia against the impact of biosecurity incursions on trade, jobs, regional Australia, health and our way of life.

The 2023-24 Federal Budget delivered on its election commitment to sustainably fund biosecurity with a commitment of over \$1 billion in biosecurity funding over the next four years, and upwards of \$260 million in new, permanent funding each year from 2027-28. This means the department is

in a position to take a long-term lens in its efforts to build and sustain biosecurity policy, operational and technical functions as biosecurity risk management requirements and opportunities change. This year will see the beginning of real improvements in critical areas of our business – not least of which rebuilding our workforce capacity and systems to enable improved border clearance outcomes.

A significant proportion of this funding will come from border fees and charges, along with an increased contribution from Australian taxpayers and through a new biosecurity protection levy on Australian primary producers. This recognises the broad range of beneficiaries to a well-resourced and effective biosecurity system. However, the government has committed to ensuring these arrangements remain appropriate through regular review and through greater transparency and accountability regarding how the funds are used.

To this end, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has recently announced the establishment of a new Sustainable Biosecurity Funding Advisory Panel to provide advice to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry about biosecurity priorities. Freight & Trade Alliance has been invited to be a member of this advisory panel.

Biosecurity cost recovery fees and charges will also be a standing item on the Department's Cargo Consultative Committee.

Digital capability for commercial cargo clearance

The Simplified Targeting and Enhanced Processing System, or STEPS, will roll out **\$145.2 million over three years** to improve industry's experience of commercial cargo clearance. These projects offer exciting partnership opportunities with industry to co-design digital platforms to deliver faster, transparent, commercial cargo clearance.

For industry, STEPS will provide greater visibility of consignments referred for biosecurity and imported food clearance at the border; with easier, transparent, digital business-to-government transactions, more efficient biosecurity clearance and throughput.

For government, STEPS will bring together data and information from our regulatory and corporate systems allowing us to work smarter and effectively deploy our resources to the areas of highest risk.

Our conversations with industry have already begun. These will be key to ensuring valued investments are made.

People, partnerships, and strategic industry engagement

Our relationships with industry are central to strengthening the biosecurity system now and into the future. We recognise that our industry partners and stakeholders share the government's objectives to build a prosperous economy and to safeguard Australia's unique assets.

We know our industry participants and stakeholders have valuable, workable ideas and strategies, to achieve this. We are engaging industry in a range of ways to improve voluntary compliance, sustain and improve partnership arrangements and co-design biosecurity initiatives to streamline border management processes.

In 2024 we intend to share our biosecurity priorities and plans, be responsive and accountable as an organisation and genuinely engage with industry in true partnerships on the things that matter to them. Freight & Trade Alliance members will be an important part of this conversation.



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