

1.04 Meeting with stakeholders re biosecurity

Date and Time:	Tuesday 13 November 2018, 10.00 am – 11.30 am (includes morning tea)
Location:	Hilli Goat Farm
Meeting with:	Biosecurity Stakeholders
Attendees:	Eric Hutchinson, Administrator PJ Wilson Dean & Megan Fitzpatrick Pat Anderson Emily Ryves Martin Cross Candice Nobbs Matt & Suzie Bigg Merv & Claire Buffett

Key Issues

- The Australian Government, through the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR), became responsible for regulating biosecurity on Norfolk Island from 1 July 2016.
- Many local agriculture producers consider the relatively disease-free status of Norfolk Island is a testament to the practices implemented by the former government on the Island. DAWR considers the Island is fortunate to have retained its relatively disease-free status based on past practices, which were not necessarily science-based risk management measures.
- The recent application of restrictions on the import of live ruminants and the uncertainty and high costs associated with the import of genetic materials are key concerns for the Norfolk Island community.
- Several Norfolk Island agri-businesses have imported genetic material in an attempt to sustain the genetic diversity of their small cattle herds and goat flocks. Farmers have reported that the remoteness of Norfolk Island means that specialised facilities and advice are not easily accessible, flights are infrequent and freight services are not fully reliable, leading to increased costs and reduced success rates.
- Other local biosecurity issues include the processes for import of stockfeed and other agricultural supplies, the recent relaxation of restrictions on fruit and vegetable imports from the mainland, high freight costs and the potential for queen bee exports from Norfolk Island.
- The former Minister with responsibility for Territories, the Hon Dr John McVeigh MP, visited affected agri-businesses during his visit to Norfolk Island in July 2018. Dr McVeigh heard about the Island’s key biosecurity concerns and indicated to farmers that he would take the matters up with the appropriate people on his return to Canberra.

Imports of Live Ruminants and Genetic Materials

- Livestock producers are concerned that the current biosecurity measures are overly restrictive and present a barrier to economic development. The local veterinarian, Dr Candace Nobbs, considers the almost total ban on live ruminant imports imposed by the Government is restricting the introduction of new genetic material and the viability of local

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herds, which comprise approximately 1,300 head of cattle, one small goat herd and one small sheep herd (less than 20).

- The experience of Ms Emily Ryves, a local goat producer who runs Hilli Goat Farm, highlights difficulties for importing genetic material to Norfolk Island. A package containing goat semen was off-loaded from a passenger aircraft because a dog was transported on the same flight. This resulted in decreased viability of the semen and the specialised veterinarian, who had travelled specifically for the purpose of insemination, having a wasted trip at the expense of the small business.
- Although the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (the Department) underwrites air services between the mainland and Norfolk Island, it does not control the airline's cargo protocols. Specific requirements for freight deliveries of high value animal products to Norfolk Island are established between the client's freight forwarder and the airline.
- Work undertaken by the DAWR and the Department has identified five options for the importation of live ruminants and reproductive material into Norfolk Island. The options include:
 1. Importing ruminant reproductive material (semen and embryos)
 2. Importing live ruminants into Norfolk Island and establishing a quarantine station on the island or ruminants undertaking a period of quarantine on the Australian mainland
 3. Importing live ruminants from Australia from properties that have a lower disease risk status with little to no quarantine period
 4. Importing live ruminants from New Zealand
 5. Amending the Biosecurity Act 2015 to treat Norfolk Island ruminant health status the same as the Australian mainland.
- Each of these options carry different levels of biosecurity risk and vary in cost and logistics. **Attachment A** provides an option paper for importing live ruminants and reproductive material into Norfolk Island developed by DAWR.

Imports of Live Horses

- Dr Nobbs is concerned that DAWR has not adequately considered the risk for new pest incursions when setting import conditions for live horses, including pests such as bot fly and paralysis tick, and diseases such as strangles. Dr Nobbs does not believe these diseases are on Island.
- Following a meeting with Dr Nobbs, DAWR has amended the permit requirements for live horse imports from the mainland to Norfolk Island. DAWR has also agreed to work with the Administrator of Norfolk Island and Dr Nobbs to determine state-type agriculture services that may assist the community to balance the need to protect their disease-free status against the need to develop new industry on the Island.

Imports of Stockfeed

- Some primary producers on Norfolk Island are concerned about the biosecurity conditions and permits required for imports of stockfeed. Ms Megan Fitzpatrick of Fitzy's Farm wrote

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to you about the challenges she has faced in importing stockfeed from New Zealand to feed her pasture-raised chickens.

- In Ms Fitzpatrick's case, the formula for one imported stockfeed product (the Chick Grower ration) had changed since the initial risk assessment of the product, and the necessary certification for the product was absent. Following further assessment, DAWR released the goods from biosecurity control on 27 September 2018 and approved Ms Fitzpatrick's new import permit application to import the new Chick Grower formula on 5 October 2018.

Imports of Bare Root Stock, Fruit and Vegetables

- There are divided opinions on Norfolk Island about whether bare root stock should be imported. Those in favour argue that it will increase fruit production, and that there is a low biosecurity risk as there is no soil attached and plant stock is usually quarantined for up to 12 months on Island before being released. Those not in favour argue that diseases are often carried in the plant stem, that they may not be identified until after the plant has died, and that there is a risk of infecting soil around the plant.
- Fruit and vegetable producers have expressed concern that recent decisions made by DAWR to allow fruit and vegetable imports to Norfolk Island present an unacceptable risk to local growers from the introduction of mainland pests, such as Queensland fruit fly. Producers also have concerns over the local economic impacts associated with permitting imported produce.
- In determining and maintaining the appropriate level of protection for Norfolk Island, the Government's scientific risk assessment process cannot take into account the potential economic impact or the effect on market competition caused by importing goods, as this would not be consistent with Australia's international trade obligations.
- Imported produce must also overcome a more than \$4 per kilogram price disadvantage compared to local produce due to increased freight and handling costs.

Queen Bee Exports

- An emerging opportunity is the potential for queen bee exports to become a viable export business for Norfolk Island, particularly through efforts for the Island to be recognised as the world's third 'bee sanctuary'.
- This would require: specific treatment of imported honey to eliminate any threats of imported pests and diseases (such as gamma radiation); testing of Argentine ants for a known disease that impacts bee colonies; inspection of all vessels entering ports; and, a review of current import restrictions of queen bees to mainland Australia.
- DAWR are currently consulting the community on changes to the import conditions for bee products to Norfolk Island, including the importation of honey.

Biosecurity Handling Facilities

- The Norfolk Island Regional Council (NIRC) may request financial support from the Government to provide a new biosecurity inspection facility.

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- DAWR has advised NIRC that, as the owner of the first point of entry to Norfolk Island (the airport), NIRC is responsible for providing appropriate facilities for biosecurity inspection services. NIRC has agreed that DAWR may continue to use NIRC's current (temporary) biosecurity inspection clearing facility until new facilities can be found.
- NIRC have recently advised Air New Zealand, the Government's contracted carrier for scheduled passenger flights, that in the near future, NIRC will not be able to accept biosecurity waste from planes. This waste includes catering and other on-board waste. Air New Zealand are unable to transport this waste back to the mainland and so are investigating options to establish their own waste management facility on Island, while continuing to negotiate with NIRC about continuing acceptance of waste.

Background

- The agricultural industry on Norfolk Island is small, inter-connected and has a history of self-sufficiency, supporting the local residents and businesses. The Island prides itself on its clean and fresh produce and this is becoming a feature of the promotion strategy for tourism, the Island's main industry.
- The biosecurity measures put in place to manage imports of plants and animals to Norfolk Island are based on scientific assessments aimed at protecting the island's unique animal and plant life from exotic pests and diseases. Prior to the removal of self-government in 2016, Norfolk Island had a biosecurity regime with locally-set conditions which were different to those set by DAWR.
- The Norfolk Island farming community does not have the support of a state agricultural department and this reduces the availability of technical advice and practical assistance, in comparison to the services that may be available to similar businesses on the mainland. Consequently, the community's reliance on Government is higher than would be the case for other regional communities.
- The Norfolk Island Quarantine Survey 2012-2014 identified that Norfolk Island is free from many serious plant and animal pests and diseases present in the rest of Australia and recommended that the quarantine barriers in place prior to 1 July 2016 be maintained or strengthened.
- DAWR has commissioned a project aimed at improving its engagement with communities in Australia's external territories on biosecurity matters, including Norfolk Island. The project will recommend strategies to increase community awareness on the need for effective biosecurity management, engage residents in biosecurity surveillance and identify opportunities to improve two-way communication to support the development of sustainable primary industries.

Sensitivities: Nil

Attachments:

A DAWR Option Paper



