BIOSECURITY PLANNING WITH BIOSECURITY QUEENSLAND'S BACKING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TEAM

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ABSTRACT

To help local governments fulfil their legislative obligations, Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) has redeveloped a suite of planning tools useful for the development of biosecurity plans—the **Invasive Species Planning Toolkit**.

The Invasive Species Planning Toolkit is designed to help local governments assess and prioritise invasive species for prevention, surveillance, treatment and eradication. The tools provide a user-friendly, science-based guide to biosecurity planning strategies and actions for effective management. The Invasive Species Planning Toolkit will be available soon on the Department of Primary Industries website.

The Backing Local Governments project—a new BQ initiative—will support Queensland councils in their management of invasive species. In addition to the launch of the revised Invasive Species Planning Toolkit, the team are updating guidance material and templates to assist local governments in fulfilling their obligations under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the Act).

This presentation will share the project's insights with PAWS delegates into current best practice in biosecurity planning and pest prioritisation since commencement of the project in October 2024.

Keywords: invasive species, planning, prioritisation, tools, local government

INTRODUCTION

Invasive species pose significant ecological and economic threats worldwide, altering ecosystem dynamics, reducing biodiversity, and imposing substantial financial costs on managing jurisdictions. The rapid expansion of invasive species is often facilitated by climate change, habitat fragmentation, and human activity, necessitating a structured and adaptive management approach (Ricciardi *et al.* 2017).

Queensland has implemented a range of strategies to address these threats, including legislation, risk-based prioritisation, and community engagement and behaviour change initiatives. Under the Act, local governments play a significant role in invasive species management in the state, with responsibility for both management of invasive biosecurity matter within their jurisdictions and discharging their general biosecurity obligation as a land manager.

Despite this, the Queensland Audit Office's *Managing Invasive Species Report 1: 2023-24* (QAO 2024) identified several areas in which local governments could better

manage invasive species. The report made recommendations for the Queensland Government to:

"…provide greater education and awareness to local councils about how they can use the powers of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* to regulate the risk of invasive species. This should include:

- educating local councils on when and why they should issue biosecurity orders
- sharing better practice learnings about how local councils are regulating the risk of invasive species and the outcomes." (ibid.)

BACKING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

In 2023, BQ's Invasive Plants and Animals program secured funding to establish a project to address these recommendations. The Backing Local Governments project team commenced work in October 2024 and will work over three years to help to improve local governments' biosecurity capacity and capability.

To date, the project team has conducted a comprehensive desktop analysis of current biosecurity plans and programs and surveyed councils on the obstacles and gaps they face in managing invasive species. Work has commenced on the development of resources including forms, templates and procedures to assist local governments in discharging their obligations under the Act.

PLANS AND PROGRAMS

The QAO report found that while 69 of 77 local governments had a biosecurity plan in place (as required under section 53 of the Act), they "varied greatly in quality and completeness" (ibid.). Many plans failed to list important priority species, while others did not appear to have considered species using a risk assessment or prioritisation framework. Since the QAO report's release, several plans have expired that have not yet been renewed, with 27 Queensland local governments now having no current biosecurity plan.

Additional analysis conducted by the Backing Local Government team has found that most councils do not have current surveillance or prevention and control programs in place. These programs are the legislative mechanisms that enable local governments to detect identified priority species and take action with landholders to control invasive biosecurity matter. The absence of publicly available information about these programs suggests programs are not in place, therefore limited proactive engagement and compliance work is being conducted. Alternatively, a program may exist but the chief executive of the Department of Primary Industries has not been consulted as required.

INVASIVE SPECIES PLANNING TOOLKIT

To help local governments fulfil their legislative obligations, BQ has redeveloped a suite of planning tools used in the development of biosecurity plans. The tools, developed by consultancy Wild Matters Pty Ltd in 2020 as part of a joint BQ project

with the Local Government Association of Queensland, are being used effectively by some local governments. However uptake of the tools could be greater and stakeholder engagement conducted by Wild Matters, who were contracted to revise the tools, found several issues related to ease of use.

The revised Invasive Species Planning Toolkit is now available and will be accessible via the DPI website. It is designed for use by local governments but can be used by other entities engaged in invasive species management, such as natural resource management groups, state land managers and even individuals. The toolkit currently consists of three tools, intended to be used in sequence.

Stage 1 – prioritisation

The risk prioritisation tool helps users identify the priority invasive plant and animal species for their local government area, management area or property. It helps identify prevention targets, determine a species' risk and control feasibility and assign the appropriate management objective, i.e. prevention, eradication, containment or asset protection.

The tool helps users take stock of species found in their area, then assess these species for risk considering potential impact, invasiveness and distribution. It also helps assess management feasibility considering the distribution of the species and cost and effectiveness of control options.

Stage 2 – measures

This tool lists the reasonable and practical measures (activities) that can be applied to meet the management objectives determined using the prioritisation tool. Through a series of guiding questions, users of this tool can identify appropriate measures for each management objective determined using the prioritisation tool.

The reasonable and practical measures included in stage 2 are based on best practice management principles. Including them in a biosecurity plan will allow for consistent communication of people's obligations under the Act and reduce the possibility of successful challenges should associated compliance actions lead to court proceedings.

Stage 3 – compliance

The actions tool guides users in the development of an engagement and compliance approach to ensure the measures identified in stage 2 are followed to achieve the management objective. It offers practical ways for users to improve their compliance systems and gain necessary support for their chosen approach.

It explains the suite of activities carried out to encourage (or sometimes enforce) all people to take reasonable and practical measures to reduce biosecurity risk, from voluntary compliance to enforcement.

Stage 4?

Stakeholder consultation conducted by Wild Matters in the redevelopment of the tools identified monitoring and evaluation of biosecurity plans as an area in need of improvement. The Backing Local Government team is investigating ways to incorporate monitoring and evaluation content into the tools including triggers identifying the need to update or review an existing biosecurity plan. This may be a standalone fourth tool or integration of monitoring and evaluation into the existing toolkit.

The existence of monitoring, evaluation (and reporting) frameworks is seen as an indicator of biosecurity system maturity (Arndt 2024), so further development in this area is warranted.

UPCOMING PROJECT ACTIVITIES

To further support local governments, the Backing Local Government team will develop several other resources, identified through the recent capacity and training needs survey.

Resource hub

The survey identified a need for additional resources to assist local governments in discharging their obligations as a regulator. The Backing Local Government team is developing a one-stop-shop for all local government staff, which will include:
- Forms
- Templates
- Standard operating procedures
- Policies
- Fact sheets
- Communications and engagement materials.

The team are also investigating a community of practice to enable sharing of information and networking between local governments and BQ.

Training

A multi-tiered suite of training materials is currently in development, with packages targeting elected officials, executives and managers, and operational staff, with modules covering topics including:
- Introduction to *Biosecurity Act 2014*
- Biosecurity planning
- Using the Invasive Species Planning Toolkit
- Designing strategic and effective programs
- Compliance strategies
- Investigation planning
- Entry and exercising powers
- Field interviewing
- Seizure.

The rollout of training is currently expected to begin late in 2025.

Webinars

A quarterly webinar series is proposed to commence in 2026, designed to share lessons, insights and encourage peer-to-peer contact at a state-wide scale. The webinar series will focus on a variety of hot topics and areas of interest identified by local governments and BQ staff.

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