

National Biosecurity Week - Protecting Australia's biosecurity.

26 August 2024

Australia's biosecurity system protects our agriculture, forestry and fisheries export industries, worth \$51 billion.

Australia's biosecurity system works to protect local animals and plants from pests and diseases. However, with 60,000 kilometres of coastline, and increased traffic through airports and seaports we must all work to minimise the risks of disease.

More than ever before – as highlighted by **foot-and-mouth disease** and **lumpy skin disease** outbreaks on our doorstep – we are dealing with multiple risks, on multiple fronts, at the same time.

Avian Influenza, or bird flu, is caused by influenza A viruses, like those causing human flu. Bird flu mainly affects birds, but can also affect other animals, and, on rare occasions, humans. Migratory wild birds can bring bird flu into Australia which can affect common Australian birds, pet birds and wildlife, but is low risk.

Since 2021, a strain of highly pathogenic bird flu (HPAI) has been spreading globally, causing significant deaths of poultry and wild birds overseas. In 2023, the Australian Government coordinated multiple government and non-government organisations to improve awareness and preparedness for a potential incursion of HPAI.

Japanese encephalitis is another biosecurity threat that first appeared in Victoria in 2022. The virus is spread by mosquitoes in a complex cycle that can involve birds, pigs and spillover hosts like horses, humans and many other animals. This transmission cycle means it is not possible to eradicate Japanese encephalitis in Victoria.

The Australian pork industry, which is worth an estimated \$6 billion annually, still fears it could experience an outbreak of the pig-killing **African Swine Fever** (ASF), and apiarists have fought hard to battle the bee-destroying **varroa mite** that recently entered Australia. On 19 September 2023, the National Management Group (NMG) – the peak decision-making body for the national varroa mite emergency response – made a

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decision that eradication of varroa mite was no longer achievable and to shift the focus of the response from eradication to transitioning to management activities.

The task for Australia's biosecurity system is becoming increasingly complex, creating new challenges for governments, industry and other stakeholders in protecting Australia's biosecurity status.

AMA encourages all Australians, visitors, and industry to be vigilant and recognise these increasing biosecurity risks.

Animal Medicines Australia Executive Director, Ben Stapley noted the role the animal health industry plays in protecting Australia's biosecurity.

"The animal health industry has an important role to play in safeguarding Australia's biosecurity. The use of animal medicines in our livestock industries improves animal health, welfare and productivity and contributes more than \$2.6 billion to the Australian economy each year. Healthy animals are much less susceptible to disease and infection, and good animal health is essential to good animal welfare."

"The animal health industry is critical in any response to a biosecurity outbreak, with veterinary medicines, including vaccines helping to manage the risk and limit the spread of disease."

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