New department brings biosecurity and the environment together

By ANDREW METCALFE AO, Secretary – Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Our department has a new name—the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

> *As a department we remain committed to the continuous improvement of our biosecurity system*

This integration links key functions crucial to the Australian agricultural sector and the environment—strengthening our capability to deliver sustainable natural resource policy outcomes.

As a department we remain committed to the continuous improvement of our biosecurity system.

A strong biosecurity system underpins Australia's clean, green status and our international reputation as a reliable producer of high-quality food and fibre.

The same biosecurity system also protects our natural assets and unique environment from pests, diseases and weeds present in other parts of the world.

Damage to our way of life and environment-based tourism activities could have significant economic impacts for Australia and our communities.

Ensuring Australia's biosecurity system is robust and effective goes beyond managing risks at the border.

Biosecurity activities offshore, at the border and post-border each form an integral component of a strong and successful system.

Managing biosecurity is a big and growing job. That's why we work in partnership with industry, government and the community.

I saw a great example of this partnership when I visited our post-entry quarantine (PEQ) facility in Melbourne recently where our biosecurity officers are working closely with industry and state government partners to test their operations for managing bee imports.

Once complete, this work will pave the way for the safe importation of queen bees—a key part of the genetic improvement program aimed at improving the sustainability of local bee populations.

Ensuring Australia's biosecurity system is robust and successful is also about being smarter with our resources and looking for new ways to keep pests and diseases out.

To support the system in the future and accommodate increases in travel and trade, we are harnessing innovation and technology to enhance screening and detection capabilities across the traveller, mail and cargo pathways.

We are currently trialling world-first 3D X-ray technology and developing algorithms to automatically detect biosecurity risk material.

Since their deployment in late 2018, our 3D X-rays have successfully increased detections. The seizure rate is double that of traditional X-ray technology at Melbourne Airport and triple the rate at the Melbourne mail centre.

At Melbourne Airport, the X-ray has screened 13,133 bags and automatically detected 3,600 biosecurity risk items. These items include pork products, which can carry African swine fever (ASF). This capability is particularly important with ASF on our doorstep.

Our long-term plans for a robust biosecurity system also include tough regulatory actions against those who put the system at risk.

Many of you would be familiar with recent cases of visa cancellations for incoming passengers who failed to comply with biosecurity measures and vessels being turned away on the grounds of unacceptable biosecurity risk following exotic pest detections.

These cases illustrate our strengthened regulatory stance—the stakes for us are too high to do otherwise.

As I settle into this role, I look forward to working with you to develop a stronger biosecurity system that continues to deliver outcomes that benefit us all.