

New Head of Biosecurity to continue department's important work

By ANDREW TONGUE – Head of Biosecurity, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment



Australia has faced significant challenges this year, from bushfires and increasing biosecurity risks, to COVID-19. The new Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment continues to adapt and respond to Australia's changing priorities and I look forward to working with industry to tackle evolving biosecurity threats, as the new Head of Biosecurity.

I would like to acknowledge Lyn O'Connell, previous Head of Biosecurity, for her significant contributions and accomplishments during her five years in this role.

Lyn has led the Biosecurity Group since joining the department in 2015. Over the years, Lyn has helped deliver significant reforms and overseen the implementation of key legislative changes. This includes the successful introduction of the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, and its subsequent implementation.

Lyn has also championed biosecurity innovation, fostered our science capability and been a strong advocate for the department's engagement with key industry stakeholders.

I wish Lyn well in her new role leading the department's Water, Climate Adaptation, Natural Disasters & Antarctic Group.

Protecting Australia's valuable agriculture sector and unique environment from biosecurity risks is paramount in safeguarding our country's economy, food production and natural assets into the future. I am committed to ensuring we work together to continue strengthening

our biosecurity system, for the benefit of all Australians.

New COVID-19 pre-arrival health assessments for commercial vessels

We are working with the Department of Health and state and territory Chief Human Biosecurity Officers to roll out a new COVID-19 human health assessment process for commercial vessels arriving in Australia.

The new process will enhance pre-arrival human health assessments to strengthen Australia's COVID-19 measures.

The first phase was rolled out in July and introduced pre-arrival questions specifically related to COVID-19 symptoms. This will see a questionnaire sent to vessels that identify illness in their pre-arrival report.

Phase 2 will involve incorporating the questionnaire into the existing Maritime Arrivals Reporting System (MARS) pre-arrival report to improve efficiency.

Vessels that report symptoms consistent with COVID-19 will be assessed by a medically trained Human Biosecurity Officer (HBO) prior to being granted approval to

disembark people, or discharge cargo in Australia.

The department will contact port authorities, the Australian Border Force and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority when an HBO advises a vessel may represent a COVID-19 risk and requires additional assessments or measures.

We will continue to engage with industry as these changes are rolled out. It is important that we work collaboratively to support the effective and smooth implementation of this new process.

Together, we will better manage the safe arrival of vessels to minimise COVID-19 risks.

BMSB seasonal measures and changes for 2020-21

The department has again introduced heightened biosecurity measures for the 2020-21 Brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB) season, in response to the rapid expansion of the pest throughout North America and Europe.

The measures will strengthen the controls we currently have in place to manage the risk of BMSB, while still supporting the safe and efficient movement of cargo.

Despite a successful 2019-20 BMSB season, the risk from this highly invasive pest is increasing. The number of countries known to have BMSB rose from 9 to 33 from 2018 to 2020. This has increased to 37 for the 2020-21 BMSB season, with Ukraine, Portugal, Moldova and Kazakhstan added to the list of target risk countries.

A further 7 countries are identified as an emerging risk. These are Belarus, Denmark, Ireland, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom and Chile. The department will continue to monitor emerging risks and conduct random onshore inspections of goods shipped from these countries.

Measures will apply to certain goods manufactured in, or shipped from, target risk countries. They will also apply to vessels that berth at, load or tranship from target risk countries.

The measures apply to goods shipped from 1 September 2020 that arrive in Australia by 31 May 2021 (inclusive).

The department recommends offshore treatment to reduce delays at the border. The Offshore BMSB Treatment Provider Scheme is open, and the department is already taking applications for treatment providers to be on the scheme for the 2020-21 BMSB season. The department's website will be updated throughout the season with registered offshore BMSB treatment providers.

We also continue to work closely with the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries on the 2020-21 measures to ensure consistency between the two countries, where possible.

Industry engagement and cooperation is a key part of the success of our seasonal BMSB measures and we appreciate your ongoing support.

I know our industry stakeholders are aware of the importance of these measures and why we must safeguard Australia from the risk of BMSB.

For further information on the seasonal BMSB measures, visit agriculture.gov.au/bmsb.

Automatic Entry Processing for Commodities (AEPComm) reform project

The department is committed to working smarter and more efficiently. This includes improving our systems to simplify import declaration processes for our clients.

In 2018 we made improvements to Automatic Entry Processing functionality, through the Automatic Entry Processing for Commodities (AEPComm) reform project. This is benefitting our import industry, with faster clearance times and a reduction in document assessment fees and intervention.

The system improvements were quickly substantiated in September 2018, with the inclusion of AEPComm pathways for goods subject to Brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB) measures. Over the past two BMSB seasons, approximately 28,500 import declarations with goods subject to BMSB measures were managed through the AEPComm system rules.

It has also improved the department's capability to add commodities to AEPComm.

As of 31 July, 7 new commodities were added to the AEPComm approved arrangement, and 3 existing commodity groups have also been expanded to include additional AEPComm clearance pathways.

This is the second major expansion of commodities progressed by the department since the 2018 reform.

The department hosted a webinar on 4 August 2020, which provided industry with information on AEPComm expansion, and was the mandatory Continued Biosecurity Competency (CBC) activity for the 2020-21 period.

For further information on the AEPComm expansion, or to access the webinar recording, visit agriculture.gov.au/aep.

Australian Biosecurity Award nominations now open

Nominations for round 2 of the 2020 Australian Biosecurity Awards (ABAs) are now open. The ABAs recognise significant contributions from a wide range of biosecurity stakeholders and demonstrate the importance of biosecurity awareness and compliance in a broader context.

Previous award winners included key representatives from the cargo and freight industry, including DHL Global Forwarding in 2019. DHL worked with the then Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to support reforms to Automatic Entry Processing for commodities (AEPComm).

If you know a group or individual that deserves to be recognised, nominate them today. For more information on the awards, visit awe.gov.au/ABA.

We all recognise how important biosecurity is to industry and the Australian economy. We all have a role to play and I believe it is important that those making a meaningful contribution to strengthening our systems are acknowledged.



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**Department of Agriculture,
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