



WALGA

Influence. Support. Expertise.

Submission on the National Biosecurity Reform Agenda

June 2026

About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, member based, not for profit organisation representing and supporting the WA Local Government sector. Our membership includes all 139 Local Governments in the State.

WALGA uses its influence, support and expertise to deliver better outcomes for WA Local Governments and their communities. We advocate to all levels of Government on behalf of our Members, and provide expert advice, services and support to Local Governments.

WALGA's vision is for agile and inclusive Local Governments enhancing community wellbeing and enabling economic prosperity.

Acknowledgement of Country

WALGA acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, culture and community. We embrace the vast Aboriginal cultural diversity throughout Western Australia, including Boorloo (Perth), on the land of the Whadjuk Nyoongar People, where WALGA is located and we acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Introduction

WALGA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the [National Biosecurity Reform Discussion Paper](#), developed by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. In providing this submission, WALGA notes that the short timeframe provided for consultation prevented us from undertaking comprehensive engagement with Western Australian Local Governments. WALGA requests that longer consultation periods be provided in future.

WA is facing increasingly complex and concurrent biosecurity threats impacting our economy, urban environments, natural ecosystems and local infrastructure. Local Government has a significant role in biosecurity management, as land managers, regulators, community representatives and through their emergency management responsibilities. Local Government also has a central role in the emergency management framework across a range of emergency events.

Effective national arrangements to facilitate a coordinated and cost-shared approach to manage nationally significant environmental biosecurity incidents are essential. The [National Statement on Biosecurity](#) does not differentiate between Local and State Governments' roles, however in the case of a biosecurity emergency, responsibility clearly sits with the State and Australian Government. The biosecurity National Agreements need to reflect Local Government's role as a key stakeholder within the emergency management context.

WALGA has been actively engaging with the Australian and Western Australian Governments on governance frameworks, legislation and policy mechanisms to strengthen biosecurity systems. Key requirements include:

- adequate and sustainable funding across the biosecurity continuum
- the roles and responsibilities for all system participants are clearly articulated
 - for Local Government, this should be clearly aligned to legislated responsibilities with additional support roles that Local Governments may provide dependent on local capacity and priorities, and resource support from the State or Australian Government.
- an increased recognition of environmental biosecurity
- an increased emphasis on education and enforcement activity.

The Discussion Paper identifies that although there has been progress under the [National Biosecurity Strategy](#), the national biosecurity system is coming under increasing pressure and costs and complexity of managing biosecurity risks are growing. This aligns with the experience of Western Australia Local Governments in relation to the Polyphagous shot-hole borer (PSHB) response, H5 Bird Flu preparedness activities and ongoing management of Cane Toads.

Agriculture Ministers have identified six strategic risks to Australia's biosecurity system to guide the national reform agenda, relating to:

- sustainable investment and funding
- social licence
- global factors and instability
- workforce capability and capacity
- legislation and policy.

To address these risks, the Discussion Paper sets out seven reform themes, actions associated with these reforms and proposed timeframes for implementation. The themes are preparedness, response, recovery, workforce capability and capacity, operational capability and capacity, legislation and regulation and funding.

This submission provides feedback on the scope of reform themes and their relative priority (Part 1), the detail of the reform themes including sequencing of implementation (Part 2) and the integration into the National Biosecurity Strategy (Part 3).

Part 1 – Overall reform prioritisation

WALGA considers that the reform themes address many of the strategic biosecurity risks, with prevention of new incursions, early intervention and sustainable investment as the highest priorities.

Prevention of biosecurity incursions is not specifically mentioned in the Discussion Paper, although the National Biosecurity Strategy does reference mitigation of biosecurity risks before they reach our border through work with overseas counterparts, robust regulation, inspections and quarantine processes at our borders. With many species damaging to agriculture and the environment yet to arrive in Australia, and increasing risk due to global factors and instability, the reform agenda should place greater emphasis on prevention measures. The biosecurity invasion curve clearly demonstrates that prevention achieves the greatest outcome at the lowest cost.

It is essential that national emergency response arrangements enable fast, agile action that provides the best chance of eradication, should a pest or disease breach robust border biosecurity. Existing arrangements should be reviewed as a matter of urgency to ensure they remain effective and fit-for-purpose.

Biosecurity must be elevated to a national priority of the Australian Government and recognised as a core budget provision receiving increased investment and long-term financial security. There is a step-change in the frequency and scale of biosecurity incursions, which requires commensurate investment. Invasive species cost Australia around \$24.5 billion a year, with costs increasing exponentially over the past forty years ([CSIRO, 2021](#)). However, the 2026–27 Australian Government Budget for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry does not include the required investment and reduces national pest and weed control programs by nearly \$200 million across the next five years. The development of new funding mechanisms and optimisation of existing funds is critical.

The Local Government sector contributes significant investment in biosecurity management activities such as surveillance, regulation and compliance, weed and pest control activities, contributions to emergency responses and support for community education, which should be recognised in any review of system-wide resourcing. The delivery of these activities requires specialist staffing and operational capacity, which can be a barrier for small, regional or remote Local Governments. The proposed biosecurity reform agenda has the potential to create significant additional financial and resourcing pressures for Local Government if not supported by dedicated funding.

WALGA also considers alignment of the reform themes with the emergency management framework to be a key opportunity to capitalise on successful governance arrangements and operating experience already in place (this is covered further in WALGA's commentary on the National Biosecurity Strategy Implementation).

WALGA supports immediate reform to:

- **Strengthen prevention and early intervention arrangements**

- Elevate biosecurity to a national priority with increased investment and long-term financial security
- Ensure Local Governments are funded where they are required to deliver defined functions under State or Australian Government biosecurity arrangements.

Part 2 – Proposed reforms by theme

Preparedness

Proposed medium-term reforms for 2027–28	Proposed long-term reforms for 2029–30
Jurisdiction uplift in preparedness	On-farm and business preparedness program
National biosecurity threat assessment	National action plan for identified risks and annual exercise to stress test the system
National surveillance data sharing agreements	National surveillance data sharing legislative change and platform
Continue the uplift of the national database for cattle, sheep and goats	National traceability system for plant products

The Discussion Paper notes that a biosecurity preparedness framework is currently being developed. To enable the framework to be operationalised, the national biosecurity threat assessment is considered an important first action, as it will support targeted investment in risk-based preparedness, such as surveillance and community engagement. A necessary condition for this to be effective is to have robust data sharing agreements in place. Developing action plans for key risks and testing the system regularly is also considered a high priority. This will assist in efficient and timely deployment of emergency responses by establishing governance frameworks, identifying relevant legislation and defining stakeholder roles and responsibilities.

WA's experience with the Polyphagous Shot-hole borer (PSHB) eradication response identified a range of issues which would potentially have been addressed and streamlined the response, if the following preparedness activities had been completed:

- Relevant legislation: The interaction between the requirements of the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act) and legislation responsible for cultural heritage (State and Aboriginal), biodiversity and native vegetation, and planning and development.
- Large range of stakeholders: Because of the urban nature of the response, there were a large range of different stakeholders to be mapped and their level of engagement determined.
- Limited data sharing: Local Government and research institutions were not identified as data sharing entities for the WA biosecurity legislation, which affected what information could be shared on the location of infested trees, limiting the effectiveness of the response.

WALGA supports immediate reform to:

- Undertake the national threat assessment
- Develop national surveillance data sharing agreements that include Local Government
- Develop national action plans for identified risks and undertake annual exercises to stress test the system.

Response

Proposed medium-term reforms for 2027–28	Proposed long-term reforms for 2029–30
Updated environmental and plant response arrangements based on review findings, considering consistency with animal response arrangements	Aquatic pest and disease response arrangement
Approach to address broader issues of emergency response arrangements funding, gaps, flexibility and scope	Adoption of new technologies to increase eradication efficiency
Inclusion of containment/impact management in emergency arrangements	
Aquatic pest and disease response arrangement	

WALGA supports reforms to enable faster, adaptable and evidence driven emergency response arrangements at the national level. WALGA notes this is being progressed through the review of the three national biosecurity agreements, including recent consultation on the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA) which WALGA made a [submission](#) on. The review of these agreements should not be limited to Australian and State and Territory Governments and current deed signatories. As identified in the National Statement on Biosecurity there are other important stakeholders in the biosecurity system. Local Government should be included in national governance and decision-making models, in recognition of the sector’s position as a key delivery partner supporting on-ground responses and the valuable operational insights and local knowledge.

WALGA supports reforms to the national emergency arrangements including containment provisions, where eradication is not feasible but there is national benefit to containment. A nationally coordinated governance and cost-share model is the most effective way of minimising significantly higher costs and impacts should a nationally significant pest or disease become widespread in Australia. The Western Australian experience with PSHB is an example of where containment is essential to the national interest but is not currently supported under the national cost sharing arrangements. Predictive modelling has shown that PSHB is capable of very high population growth on the east coast of Australia, particularly Queensland.

There is high value in supporting the adoption of new technologies to improve surveillance efficiency at the landscape scale; this could be applied for ongoing surveillance as well as eradication purposes. For instance, remote sensing technology has proved effective at detecting the location of PSHB susceptible species and identifying vascular stress, supporting early intervention and treatment.

WALGA supports immediate reform to:

- Environmental and plant response arrangements
- Addressing broader issues of emergency response
- Inclusion of containment / impact management in emergency arrangements
- Adoption of new technologies to increase efficiency.

Recovery

Proposed medium-term reforms for 2027–28	Proposed long-term reforms for 2029–30
Biosecurity recovery framework (consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery) which identifies existing support mechanisms and programs	Recovery programs for biosecurity, drawing on existing national arrangements, if required

Local Government is recognised by both State and Commonwealth policy as a key player in emergency management. Local Government, as the closest level of government to the community, brings critical local knowledge, relationships, and place-based understanding. Their role spans the full prevention, preparedness, response and recovery spectrum (PPRR). In Australia, State Government bears fundamental responsibility for Emergency Management. While Local Governments are critical partners, in an emergency their primary role is in incident support to the Controlling Agency, and in coordinating community recovery. WALGA advocates that where responsibilities are delegated to Local Governments, resources must also be provided.

The national arrangements for biosecurity do not currently align with many elements of the WA State Emergency Management Framework, including the State Hazard Plan Plant and Animal Biosecurity as well as the State Emergency Management Policy. This is a missed opportunity to capitalise on the structure and experience in place within the sector, and creates confusion with regards to roles, responsibilities and resourcing.

For example, State Emergency Management Policy *s5.12 Funding Arrangements for Emergency Response* states a Local Government can reclaim expenses from the controlling agency for activities undertaken in response, where authorised by the controlling agency. This provision is not integrated with National Biosecurity emergency funding arrangements. In Western Australia, Local Governments are responsible for community recovery under that WA Emergency Management Act. However, a Biosecurity Emergency is not eligible for funding through the Disaster Recovery Funding

Arrangements. Western Australia has no State based recovery funding arrangements, and funding for Local Government is not considered in the National funding arrangements for biosecurity.

WALGA supports immediate reform to:

- Biosecurity recovery framework that includes funding for Local Governments
- Recovery programs for biosecurity.

Workforce capability and capacity

Proposed medium-term reforms for 2027–28	Proposed long-term reforms for 2029–30
Forecast of biosecurity workforce needs, including market analysis to identify skills shortages	Initiatives to deliver workforce strategy and address workforce gaps
Biosecurity workforce strategy to guide education, training and vocational organisations	

WALGA supports the forecasting of biosecurity workforce needs to identify required skills and any shortages. However, in undertaking this forecasting it is important to identify professions which may not solely focus on biosecurity. The PSHB response in WA identified that there was a shortage of qualified arborists, with Local Governments experiencing difficulty in filling positions that provide in-house expertise to support effective PSHB management. There is also the need to ensure contractors engaged by land managers to provide services are competent in the biosecurity management requirements. For arborists, this includes proficiency in diagnostic sampling, biosecurity compliant materials handling, hygiene protocols for machinery and equipment, and pesticide use licences.

WALGA supports immediate reform to:

- Forecasting biosecurity workforce needs, including consideration of allied professions.

Operational capability and capacity

Proposed medium-term reforms for 2027–28	Proposed long-term reforms for 2029–30
Better connected national system, where research and innovation are shared and not duplicated	National research and innovation program aligned to priorities which supports accelerated adoption of research
Integrate First Nations knowledge, citizen science, and frontline insights	Address legislative barriers to data sharing and systems-supported data sharing
Have better and earlier data sharing supported by governance	Integrate capability planning into investment decision making
National capability assessment, including infrastructure and technology	

WALGA supports greater sharing of biosecurity data between jurisdictions and stakeholders. WA's experience with PSHB demonstrated that limitations within the State's biosecurity legislation hindered the sharing of data on the location of infestations on private property, or lure trap locations with positive detections. This has prevented Local Governments from efficiently allocating time and resources to 'hot spots' of infestation and monitoring for potential incursions from adjacent land not under their management.

The legislative barriers to data sharing also hindered the ability of Local Government and partners to undertake valuable research. For instance, Curtin University was awarded \$680,000 in June 2025 through the WA Agricultural Research Collaboration PSHB Research Program. The project will develop a population dynamic model, undertake host occupancy analysis, and recommend where and when surveillance should occur to optimise detection. However, research is awaiting the provision of State held data, with the required regulatory amendment under WA's *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* in progress.

There is the potential to better leverage the wider community in biosecurity management through surveillance and citizen science projects. For example, PSHB was first identified in WA through a

community member who reported a symptomatic tree via the State Government's MyPestGuide App.

WALGA supports immediate reform to:

- Better and earlier data sharing
- Address legislative barriers to data sharing.

Legislation and regulation

Proposed medium-term reforms for 2027–28	Proposed long-term reforms for 2029–30
Address inconsistent regulations that create regulatory complexity and inefficiency	Address inconsistent regulations that create regulatory complexity
Address inconsistent regulations that impede domestic trade	Address inconsistent legislation that impedes domestic trade

The WA Government is progressing reforms to the BAM Act which provides the legal framework for biosecurity management in Western Australia. The Review commenced in 2022 and concluded in December 2023, with the independent panel making 33 recommendations to address the immense and sustained pressure on WA's biosecurity system. This included the need for new emergency provisions in the BAM Act to activate special powers for rapid response. In October 2025 the Government released their response, which fully supported 8 of the recommendations and acknowledged the significant and broad scale change needed.

The ongoing review of the BAM Act will be timely to allow any changes to ensure efficiency.

Funding

Proposed medium-term reforms for 2027–28	Proposed long-term reforms for 2029–30
Principles for national cost sharing across preparedness, surveillance, response, and recovery	Changes to national cost sharing, if required
Assessment of alternative funding mechanisms	Changes to funding mechanisms, if required

The Western Australian experience with PSHB provides an essential case study of a complex biosecurity response. An urban environment, diverse range of species and environments impacted, multiple types of land tenure, many stakeholders and strong community interest. This tested the national arrangements and identified areas for improvement across preparedness, surveillance, response and recovery, together with the adequacy of funding mechanisms.

WA's experience with PSHB has shown the importance of national cost-share arrangements to support State Government eradication activities, facilitate a cohesive approach to management and mitigate the varying financial and resourcing capacity of land managers. However, it also highlighted those stakeholders who could not be funded to be part of the response. Local Governments contributed to the response, but there was significant variation due to the capacity of the Local Government. For example, well-resourced Local Governments were able to allocate between \$200,000 - \$1 million per financial year to PSHB management, while others were limited to utilising existing tree maintenance budgets that were already at capacity.

WA is not adequately resourced to respond to increasing biosecurity threats. While the WA State Government provided an additional \$15.3 million over 2025–26 to 2029–30 for biosecurity emergency response activities in this year's budget, it falls short of the \$20 million additional funding per annum WALGA identified is required.

WALGA supports immediate reform to:

- Principles for national cost sharing
- Assessment of alternative funding mechanisms
- Changes to national cost sharing
- Changes to funding mechanisms.

Part 3 – National Biosecurity Strategy implementation

WALGA supports a range of immediate action in relation to the national biosecurity approach which includes greater alignment to the WA State Emergency Management Framework and clear inclusion of Local Government in future agreements.

The National Biosecurity Strategy focuses on coordination of the actions being undertaken at the State and Territory level and improved overall governance is an essential element to guide this.

Currently, the Strategy does not include measurable outcomes in relation to biosecurity, so it is not clear how the success of interventions will be measured. For example, the National Biosecurity Strategy Annual Report 2025 does not identify whether risks have been mitigated through the priority areas and associated actions.

WALGA recommends that the National Biosecurity Strategy focus on immediate changes to governance frameworks to:

- Increase alignment with State emergency management frameworks
- Include Local Government in national agreements
- Provide measurable outcomes to assess effectiveness of the Strategy.