

Biosecurity Reference Group

Terms of Reference

February 2024



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1 Context

The Biosecurity Reference Group (BRG) will work with Agriculture Victoria, within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), to provide advice that will support the implementation of Victoria's new Biosecurity Strategy.

The [Biosecurity Strategy](#) was co-developed over 2023 with stakeholders and partners from across industry, Traditional Owners, community and government. It presents a comprehensive system-wide approach, promoting collaboration and partnerships to manage biosecurity risks more effectively amid an intensifying biosecurity risk profile.

The development of the Strategy was closely guided by the first iteration of the BRG, established in 2022 for a limited term to provide input on key biosecurity reform activities and projects. It is intended that the implementation of the Strategy will continue to uphold and build cooperative governance, decision-making and stronger partnerships to drive progress and achieve our biosecurity objectives.

The BRG will be one of the co-governance groups working with Agriculture Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy team to guide where and how to focus efforts for Strategy implementation. Other co-governance groups guiding implementation include the Victorian Government Biosecurity Interagency Committee, and DEECA committees and forums for Traditional Owners.

A Biosecurity Strategy Executive Steering Committee of Executive and Independent Directors is responsible for providing guidance to the BRG, oversight and accountability of Victorian Government contributions to the Biosecurity Strategy, and monitoring and oversight of the Biosecurity Strategy implementation.

1.1 Definitions

Additional attendees means a person/s who are invited to attend a meeting/s, on an occasional or standing basis, to present a topic or item and who does not participate in the BRG's deliberations;

Biosecurity Interagency Committee is Victoria's consultative group across government agencies on matters related to biosecurity;

Biosecurity Strategy Executive Steering Committee is a committee of DEECA Executives and independent directors responsible for providing guidance, oversight and accountability to the BRG and Biosecurity Strategy implementation;

Biosecurity Strategy means Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy¹ released in November 2023;

BRG means the Biosecurity Reference Group;

¹ Published at www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/2023-biosecurity-strategy

Chairperson is an ex-officio position filled by the Executive Director Biosecurity Victoria.

DEECA means the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action;

Delegate means a person who attends a meeting on behalf of a member, with the approval of the Chairperson;

Ex-officio means a person who attends the meetings by virtue of some other office or position that they hold;

First iteration of the BRG means the inaugural BRG appointed from February 2022 until November 2023;

Member means a person appointed to the BRG by the Chief Executive Agriculture Victoria, and includes the Chairperson as described in the Terms of Reference;

2 Purpose

The BRG will provide a formal channel for community and industry representatives to inform and advise where and how effort and resources are invested for Strategy implementation. Members will provide recommendations, input and advice to Agriculture Victoria, to ensure that implementation activities remain true to the Strategy's aspirations of 'deciding together, setting priorities together and working together'.

This includes:

- identifying and testing new initiatives;
- guiding monitoring and evaluation;
- providing advice to strengthen existing work;
- and facilitating partnerships, collective action and investments that support Strategy implementation across the system.

The BRG is an advisory body, with their input to inform and drive the work of the Biosecurity Strategy team and influence decision-making on implementation activities.

The BRG membership is intended to incorporate diverse expertise from Victoria's biosecurity system, covering key sectors with an interest in biosecurity including Traditional Owners, agriculture, supply chains, community and environmental sectors. The BRG will be one of several formal engagement functions required to bring diverse perspectives to Strategy implementation.

In terms of the [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#), the BRG initiative sits at 'collaborate' on the spectrum: partnering with stakeholders to formulate solutions and incorporating advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.

3 Remit

The main tasks for the BRG are:

Stage 1 of Strategy implementation: March 2024 – October 2024:

- A. Guide development of the Strategy monitoring and evaluation framework** to improve how we measure performance of the biosecurity system. This may include:
 - Identifying performance measures and providing feedback on the framework draft
 - Advising on approaches to data collection and reporting.
- B. Identify innovation gaps and how best to address them** to guide development of small-scale, quick-win partnerships and projects. This may include:
 - Identifying gaps and opportunities in innovation aligned to the Strategy's 20 priority actions
 - Guiding the development of small-scale / pilot projects and partnerships to deliver quick-wins against the priority actions.
- C. Provide advice and input to Victorian Government biosecurity programs** to strengthen alignment to the Strategy goals. This may include:
 - Providing a forum to test program approaches
 - Advising on further channels for stakeholder consultation and collaboration.
- D. Provide advice and input to non-government biosecurity initiatives** as requested by members and other participants in the biosecurity system. This may include:
 - Providing a forum to test, strengthen and extend community and industry initiatives.
- E. Advocate within members' own sectors, regions and / or organisations** to facilitate new partnerships, collective action and investments that support Strategy implementation. This may include:
 - Influencing stakeholders to increase awareness of biosecurity risks
 - Leveraging funding and resources to support Strategy implementation activities.

Stage 2 of Strategy implementation: November 2024 – March 2026

In addition to continuation of the tasks in stage 1, this stage will involve the BRG in **identifying opportunities for next stage of implementation** to support further investment in Strategy strategic goals and priority actions.

4 Scope

BRG members will not have decision-making powers or functions but will provide advice and recommendations. Members' feedback will be considered by Agriculture Victoria alongside that of other governance groups listed in section 1. Advice and

input will be sought on initiatives, programs and investments related to the 20 priority actions in the Biosecurity Strategy.

5 Membership

5.1 Group composition

The group will be comprised of up to 15 appointed members (in addition to the Chairperson) with demonstrated knowledge or expertise in areas related to biosecurity as described in Section 14. The position of Chairperson is an ex-officio position filled by the Executive Director Biosecurity Victoria.

5.2 Selection of members

Members will be recommended for selection by the Biosecurity Strategy Executive Steering Committee following an expression of interest process, in accordance with the protocol outlined in section 14 of this Terms of Reference. Appointments will be approved by the Agriculture Victoria Chief Executive.

Expertise across the group's membership is intended to be broad and deep. Members will be selected based on their ability to contribute constructively to the tasks outlined in section 3 and the required skills and experience outlined in section 14.

Additional expertise can be co-opted as required; for example, additional attendees may be invited to attend on an occasional or standing basis for specific topics or to tap into the expertise of other governance groups. The Chairperson will invite additional attendees as required to provide specific skills or technical input.

6 Roles and responsibilities

6.1 Members

The role of individual members is to:

- provide independent, expert advice to Agriculture Victoria
- be an advocate for the system-wide implementation of the Biosecurity Strategy
- understand the Biosecurity Strategy and the purposes of BRG
- share information and knowledge with other members
- share information arising from the BRG discussions with their organisations and communities when appropriate (other than items identified as confidential, as per section 12)
- commit to attending each meeting and for unavoidable absences, send an appropriate delegate (with the approval of the Chairperson)
- respond to issues raised out-of-session where possible
- declare any conflicts of interest with respect to any item on the agenda
- participate in the BRG in a professional and ethical manner

- act in the best interests of the BRG and Victoria’s biosecurity system.

6.2 Chairperson

The responsibilities of the Chairperson are to:

- review and approve draft agendas before distribution
- preside at meetings, including maintaining order and guiding the meeting through the agenda
- encourage participation of all members
- facilitate an orderly and constructive discussion between members on matters within these Terms of Reference and any matters referred to the group by Agriculture Victoria
- review and approve draft minutes and actions before distribution
- act in the best interests of the BRG and Victoria’s biosecurity system.

6.3 Biosecurity Strategy project team

Agriculture Victoria will provide secretariat and project support for the BRG through its Biosecurity Strategy project team. The project team is responsible for:

Secretariat services

- circulating agendas and papers by email before each meeting
- drafting and circulating meeting minutes and action items by email after each meeting
- circulating out-of-session items and facilitating input by the Chairperson and/or members
- scheduling meetings
- arranging travel for members as required for face-to-face meetings.

Project support

- preparing and circulating implementation planning documents and proposals
- facilitating engagement across the sector, as needed, on implementation activities
- supporting the development and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation framework
- coordinating pilot projects where resourcing is available.

7 Meetings

The BRG will meet up to six times per year out, or as needed at the discretion of the Chairperson. Meetings will be scheduled a minimum of one month in advance where practicable. Meetings will be a mix of face-to-face and online and will be up to four hours long or as determined by the Chairperson.

Meeting agendas and papers will be circulated one week in advance where practicable, and draft meeting actions and outcomes will be circulated after each meeting.

Members may be sent occasional out-of-session activities, for example, feedback on activities that may be required due to a deadline in advance of the next meeting. Responses are preferred but optional due to their unscheduled nature.

8 Term of appointment and review

Membership will be for up to two years, or at the recommendation of the Biosecurity Strategy Executive Steering Committee subject Chief Executive Agriculture Victoria approval.

A review of the BRG initiative will be undertaken prior to the end of the term of appointment, with recommendations to be made regarding continuation of the BRG, scope, membership and responsibilities.

Members are eligible for reappointment subject to the consideration of the Chief Executive, Agriculture Victoria.

9 Remuneration and expenses

BRG members participating in their capacity as a community group volunteer are eligible for remuneration. The BRG is categorised as Schedule C Band 3 under the Victorian Government's Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines. Eligible members will receive sitting fees consistent with the range under the Schedule C Band 3. Consideration will be given to annual remuneration increases based on criteria determined under the Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines.

All members, whether remunerated or unremunerated, are eligible for reimbursement for any out-of-pocket meeting expenses. These will be paid at rates that apply to DEECA employees for the provision of allowances for travelling and personal expenses, in accordance with the DEECA Domestic Travel Policy.

Any travel and accommodation required for face-to-face meetings will be arranged by the BRG Secretariat. Reimbursement of each member's expenses must be agreed to in advance with the Chairperson via the Secretariat.

10 Delegation

Members shall not delegate attendance at meetings without the approval of the Chairperson in advance of the meeting day. When proposing a delegate, members should ensure they are suitably experienced, and have appropriate knowledge and responsibilities.

Delegates will have the same roles and responsibilities as members, as outlined in section 6.1. Delegates are responsible for sharing outcomes of any meeting they attend with their member.

11 Probity

Members will be required to undertake probity checks as determined by DEECA and must complete a declaration of private interests prior to the first meeting.

12 Confidentiality

Any information (written or verbal) that is confidential will be identified by the Chairperson at the start of the agenda item and must not be shared beyond the BRG without the direction or approval of the Chairperson.

Clarity may be needed where information (verbal or written) is confidential but can be shared within members' organisations or teams. In these cases, instructions that the information should not be shared any further beyond members' organisations or teams would be required.

Information or material shared by members should declare any restrictions relating to the circulation or use. Confidentiality of BRG discussions and documents remains when a member is no longer part of the group.

13 Conflict of interest

Where BRG members face real or potential conflicts of interest, or the perception of a conflict, these will be declared to the Chairperson and Secretariat as early as possible as they arise.

At the beginning of each meeting, a member shall declare if they an interest in respect to any item on the agenda. Where a declaration of conflict of interest is made, it will be recorded in the minutes. All declared interests will be recorded in the Register of Interests which will be shared with members before each meeting with the meeting papers.

Where a conflict of interest is declared, the Chairperson will determine how the conflict will be managed in accordance with the DEECA Conflict of Interest policy.

14 Selection of members

Expression of interest

Selection of members will be through an open expression of interest process based on curriculum vitae and short written application. The process will also include targeting key stakeholder groups and using network referrals to reach potential members.

All members of the first iteration of the BRG (2022-2023) will be invited to be reconsidered for membership.

Candidates will be recommended for selection by the Biosecurity Strategy Executive Steering Committee, taking into account the expertise of the person, government diversity objectives and that the membership of the BRG will adequately balance the criteria described below. There will also be due consideration of the skills and knowledge needed by members to fulfil the remit of the Reference Group required by the Terms of Reference. Members will be appointed by the Chief Executive Agriculture Victoria.

Key selection criteria

Candidates must be able to demonstrate the following skills and experience:

- 1. Demonstrated skills, experience and established networks in at least one of the following relevant areas:**
 - land or water management
 - agriculture sector
 - First Nations Country, culture and people
 - community or regional or rural development
 - environment sector
 - food or fibre supply chain
 - biosecurity stakeholder engagement or communications
 - biosecurity science and technology
 - managing biosecurity risks.
- 2. An ability to represent the interests of their broader sector, not just the interests of their organisation or business.**
- 3. An ability to contribute openly, cooperatively and effectively as part of a small, diverse group.**