



Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy Consultation

Engagement Summary

Published October 2023

Contents

1 Executive summary	3
2 Introduction	4
3 What we heard in the survey	5
4 What we heard in the submissions	11
5 Next steps	20

1 Executive summary

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA) released the draft Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria on the Engage Victoria website for comment from 17 July to 16 August 2023.

Respondents provided feedback by completing a survey or making a more detailed written submission (or both).

Responses were received from a total 105 individuals and organisations, comprising 99 surveys and 32 submissions.

The draft Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria outlined the drivers for change and defined five strategic goals with 20 key priorities to strengthen the biosecurity system, protecting what matters most to Victorians from the harms of pests and diseases. The five strategic goals focus on partnerships, prevention, response, management and enablers.

The majority of respondents supported the strategic goals of the draft Strategy. Many submitted suggestions and recommendations to improve or clarify the Strategy. A significant amount of respondents' feedback was focused on implementation of the Strategy rather than the draft Strategy content.

The feedback covered five main themes:

1. The need for funding and resourcing for implementation of the Strategy, program continuity and infrastructure support.
2. A stronger focus on biosecurity issues outside of agriculture, such as biosecurity threats and impacts to biodiversity, wildlife and waterways.
3. Calls for better enforcement and more streamlined regulation and legislation.
4. A stronger commitment to improving the management of established pests and weeds, particularly the role of government in pest management on public and Crown land.
5. The importance of evaluation measures, and a call for more information on implementation, roles and responsibilities.

Respondents' feedback has been used to confirm the goals, priorities and issues covered in the new Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria.

There will be ongoing opportunities to get involved with biosecurity reform in Victoria. Once the Biosecurity Strategy is finalised, there will be opportunity to participate in planning for implementation and delivery of the Strategy.

The Implementation Plan will be a 'living document' that will be periodically reviewed to assess progress on the five strategic goals with any adjustments made as required.

2 Introduction

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA) released the draft Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria for feedback on the Engage Victoria website from 17 July to 16 August 2023.

Respondents provided feedback by completing a survey or making a more detailed written submission (or both).

Responses were received from a total 105 individuals and organisations, comprising 99 surveys and 32 submissions. Of the 32 submissions, 23 were from organisations and nine were from individuals.

About the draft Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria

Victoria's biosecurity system protects what we value most from serious harm. Biosecurity is the collective effort to prevent and manage the harms caused by plant and animal pests and diseases, and the impact they have on what we value most from our farms and parks, our pets and gardens, our native plants and animals, the cultural integrity of the landscape, the safety of our food, and the success of our industries.

Victoria's biosecurity system provides protection from harms through prevention and mitigation, preparedness and response, and management and control.

Biosecurity risks are intensifying, putting significant pressure on the system. It is crucial that all Victorians work together to reduce biosecurity risks.

The draft Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria outlines five key strategic goals to help us strengthen Victoria's biosecurity system:

- **Goal 1: Partnerships** – strengthen ways of working together to protect what we value most.
- **Goal 2: Prevention** – make mitigating biosecurity risk everyone's business.
- **Goal 3: Response** – broaden the base for preparedness and response.
- **Goal 4: Management** – reduce the impacts of established weeds and pests through local action.
- **Goal 5: Enablers** – strengthen the enablers for system-wide action.

Twenty priority actions were also outlined across the five goals, pointing to specific ways we can support collective action.

3 What we heard in the survey

Section 3 summarises the results from the 99 completed surveys.

What is your main sector or area of interest?

Survey respondents represented a wide range of sectors and interests, including government agencies, farming sector, peak bodies or community interest groups (Table 1). Those who selected 'other' indicated a mix of interests including conservation, academia, farming, beekeeping, supply chain, agri-finance and community.

Table 1: Survey respondents' main sector or area of interest.

Sector	Number of respondents
Other	17
Peak body	14
Government – state	13
Interest group (e.g., community Landcare or gardening group)	13
Government – local	10
Large-scale farm	10
Animal health and welfare sector	6
Marine sector	2
Government – federal	1
Hobby farm	1
Recreation sector	2
Research sector	3
Small-scale / craft farm	3
Traditional Owner or First Nations community	2
Wholesale or retail sector	1
Not provided	1

Which best describes the area you live in?

Survey respondents were spread across metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, with more than 60% living in rural or regional areas (Table 2). Those who indicated 'other' were responding on behalf of organisations who operate on a Victoria- or Australia-wide basis.

Table 2: Where survey respondents live.

Area	Number of respondents
Rural area	37
Regional area	24
Metropolitan area	19
Urban fringe	11
Other	8

Which best describes your geographical location?

There was a reasonably even spread of survey respondents from North, East, West and metropolitan Victoria, and a smaller number from interstate (Table 3).

Table 3: Survey respondents' geographical location.

Location	Number of respondents
Western Victoria	26
Metropolitan Melbourne	23
Eastern Victoria	22
Northern Victoria	18
Interstate	10

How would you describe your level of understanding of biosecurity?

The majority of survey respondents described their level of knowledge as intermediate (Figure 1).

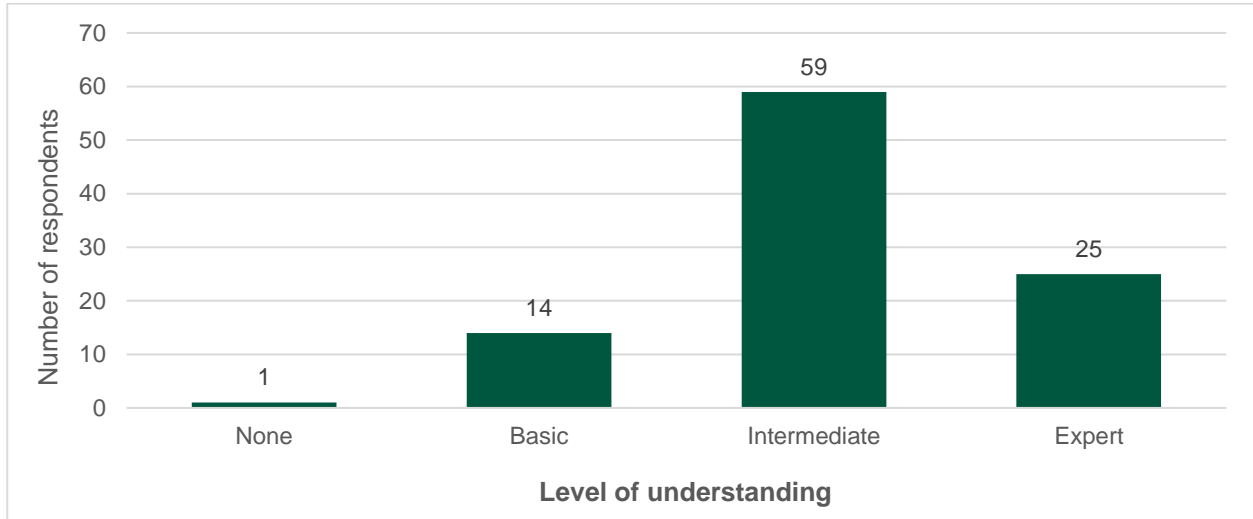


Figure 1: Respondents' rating of their level of understanding of biosecurity from none to expert.

How well do we (government, industry, community) currently manage biosecurity risks in Victoria?

On average, respondents scored the current management of biosecurity risks in Victoria at 2.9 out of 5 (where 1 means 'poorly' and 5 means 'very well'; **Figure 2**).

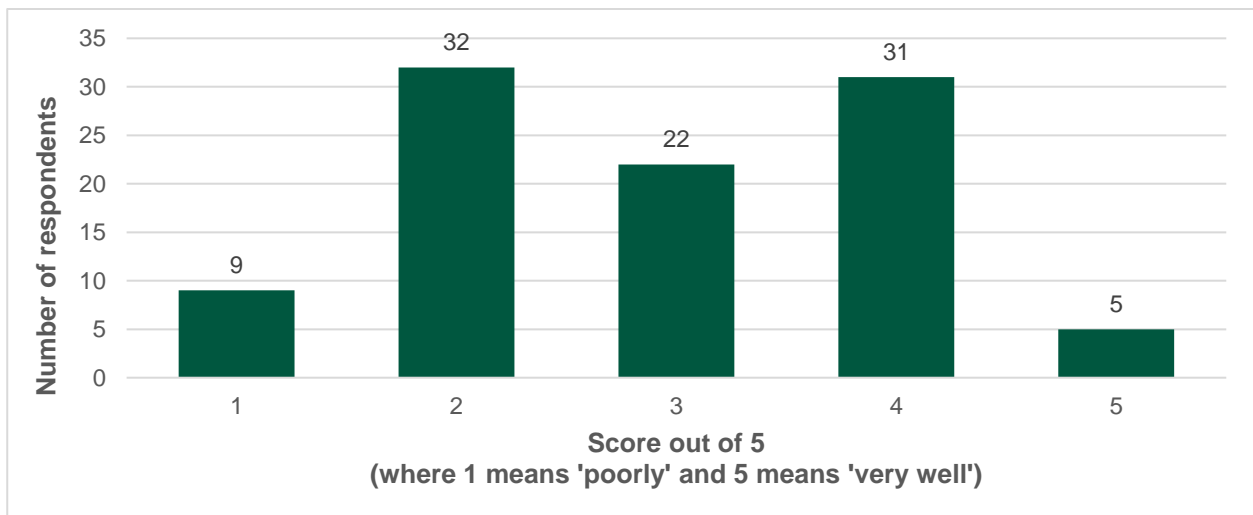


Figure 2: Survey respondents' rating of how well we currently manage biosecurity risks from poorly to very well.

How much do you support the draft Biosecurity Strategy content?

On average, respondents rated their support for the draft Strategy content at 3.6 out of 5 (where 1 means 'do not support' and 5 means 'highly support'; **Figure 3**).

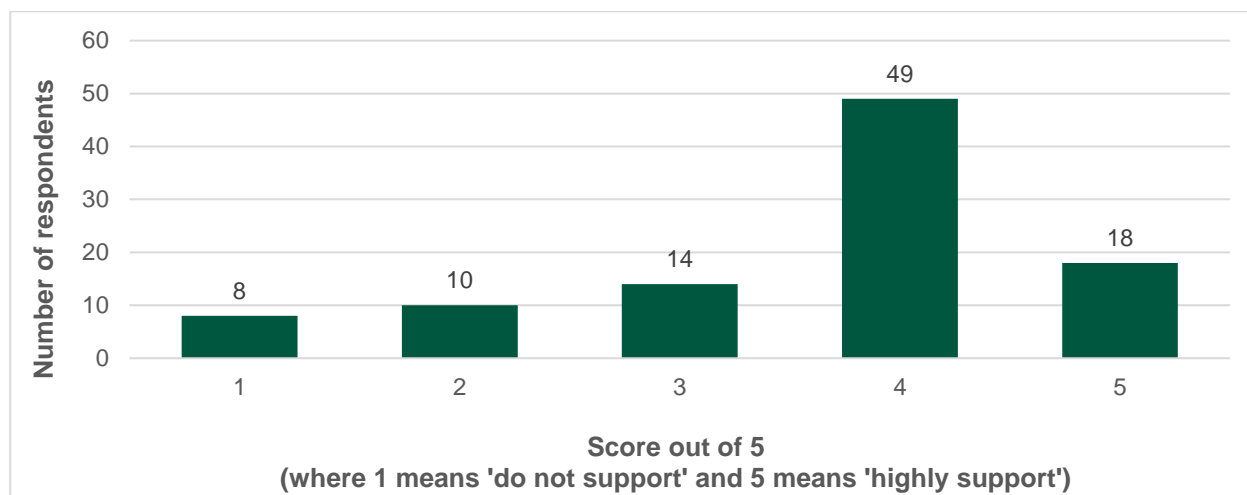


Figure 3: Survey respondents' rating of their support for the draft Biosecurity Strategy from 'do not support' to 'highly support'.

In your view, is there anything missing from the draft Biosecurity Strategy's strategic goals and priorities?

A diverse range of views were shared. Some of the areas highlighted as 'missing from the draft' included:

- Commitment to funding and resourcing for Strategy implementation.
- Clarity on governance for Strategy implementation including roles of First Nations groups.
- Strategy monitoring and evaluation measures.
- Managing lack of compliance with biosecurity regulations and supporting industry quality assurance programs.
- Reforms of 'out-of-date' legislation.
- Actions for supporting safe trade and recovery from incursions.
- Better management of established pests and weeds.
- Stronger focus on environmental biosecurity, including waterway, marine and wildlife concerns, and on the impacts of climate change on biosecurity.
- Stronger prioritisation of regional, local and industry engagement.
- Research, development and investment in technology.
- Surveillance and diagnostic systems.

In your view, what is the most important thing to get right to strengthen the biosecurity system in Victoria?

A range of views were shared. Some of the areas highlighted as 'important to get right' included:

- Sustainable funding for implementation based on stronger risk assessment that considers economic and environmental impacts and non-agriculture threat pathways.
- Compliance across the system, from private and public land and water managers through to linear reserve managers and service providers, and stronger penalties for infringements.
- Clear roles and responsibilities for agencies, including better coordination of responses and communication between agencies.
- Improved awareness of, and education about, biosecurity including among metropolitan populations.
- Reformed legislation in a single Biosecurity Act.
- Stronger collaborations across all levels of the system, including with First Nations groups, small-scale farmers, ecologists, veterinarians.
- Stronger focus on environmental biosecurity threats and the resulting social and cultural impacts.
- Ongoing engagement with farmers and community, particularly for prevention and for established pest management.
- Investment in research, diagnostic services and technologies.

Is there anything else you would like to say about the draft Biosecurity Strategy?

Comments covering diverse topics were provided. A selection demonstrating key themes is included below.

- 'I don't think it is very clear about what will be different in future or will be improved compared to the present... Implementation of the strategy needs to be backed with significant new funds from the Victorian Government, in addition to industry-based contributions.'
- 'The strategy is an excellent piece of work, and the level of collaboration with stakeholders and community is impressive.'
- 'It doesn't make sense that the State Government cuts funding for AgVic when the costs are so high for failure of prevention of the pest plants and animals.'

OFFICIAL

- ‘This is a loaded topic for Traditional Owners. There is so much at stake and it feels at times we are being asked to fix what others have broken.’
- ‘The only shortfall is not having evaluation built into the strategy, if you don't measure the performance of the strategy, it is difficult to say it is successful.’
- ‘A lot of time and money spent controlling pest animals and plants without a whole-of-ecosystem function approach. Emerging threats are a priority, waterway health is underestimated.’
- ‘More consultation with farmers needs to be done.’
- ‘Review the Country plans for each mob and converse with them about how each Country plan could allow space for the Biosecurity Strategy to align with our goals and outcomes.’
- ‘The strategy basically only applies to terrestrial sectors, particularly agriculture, where the sector is acutely aware of the implications.’
- ‘Overall, this is a comprehensive strategy that will enable all aspects of biosecurity management for any pest in any environment. Please ensure its properly funded and implemented (and not just another strategy that sits on a shelf).’
- ‘We look forward to ... the opportunity to assist in the Strategy’s implementation as CMAs are well placed having a long history in the areas of local planning and delivery, community engagement and emergency response.’
- ‘I just wanted to express my concern around biosecurity issues associated with the recent changes to camping access within Victoria.’
- ‘The strategy needs to value people and their work within and with a community. It's the building of the relationships and the understanding of all the parties involved that will make this biosecurity strategy work. The biosecurity strategy and the team at Ag Vic need to show the leadership and support to help the communities in the regions strengthen their approach to biosecurity.’

4 What we heard in the submissions

Section 4 summarises the sentiments expressed by the 32 respondents who made detailed written submissions.

Of the 32 written submissions, 23 were from organisations and nine were from individuals. Respondents' main sector or area of interest varied, with a large proportion from peak bodies (**Table 4**). Of the eight who indicated 'other' the majority had interests in environmental advocacy.

Table 4: Submission respondents' main sector or area of interest.

Sector	Number of respondents
Peak body	9
Other	8
Animal health and welfare sector	4
Government – local	3
Government – state	3
Interest group (e.g., community Landcare or gardening group)	3
Large-scale farm	1
Research sector	1

Overall sentiment rating

Overall, 65% of the respondents who made detailed submissions were mostly supportive (with some suggested changes) or highly supportive (with minimal changes) of the draft Strategy (Figure 4).

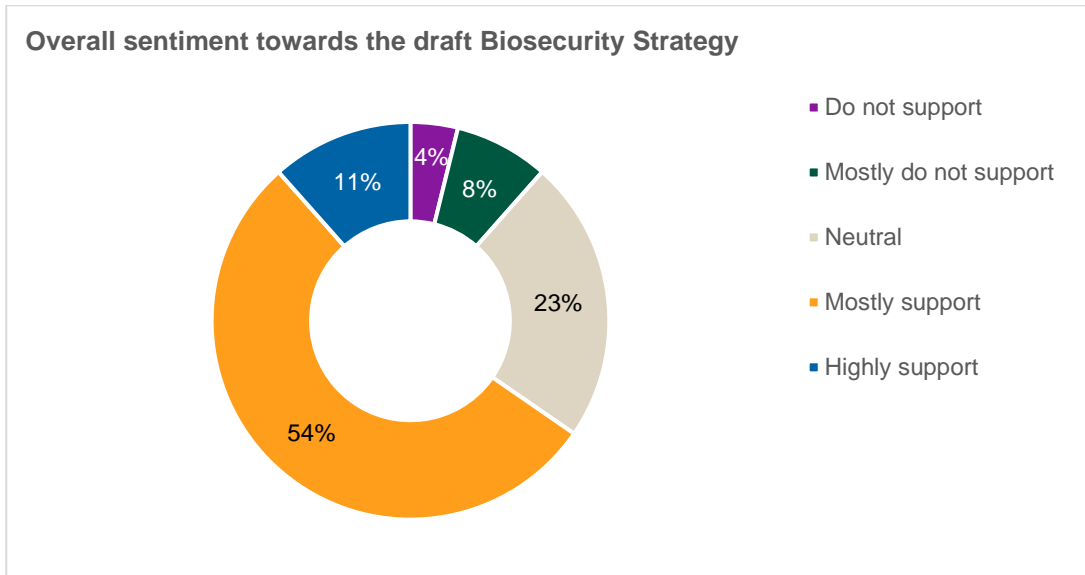


Figure 4: Submission respondents' overall sentiment towards the draft Strategy, based on assessment of the detailed written submissions.

Support for the draft strategic goals and priorities

The written submissions highlighted a range of topics and themes in the draft Strategy and strategic goals and priorities that respondents were supportive of, including:

- establishing more shared decision-making and priority-setting arrangements, backed by sustainable investment
- building strong partnerships across the biosecurity system, including supporting place-based collaborations and community- and industry-led action
- developing a Strategy implementation plan aligned to strategic goals, including effective monitoring and evaluation
- embracing principles of shared responsibility and collective effort, including clear articulation of roles and responsibilities
- collaborating and cooperating across levels and sectors – local, regional, state/territory, national and international – including aligning with the national biosecurity strategy
- establishing collaborative governance with Traditional Owners to protect key cultural and ecological assets and involve their valuable knowledge and expertise
- identifying and supporting local level biosecurity champions and involving community leaders in policy- and decision-making

- prioritising risk-based assessment underpinned by science
- increasing surge workforce capacity, including using Industry Liaison Officers from other states, local councils and catchment management authorities
- running more emergency response training and joint training exercises, including with local- and regional-level leaders
- shifting the Victorian Government's role to that of system steward, including provision of leadership, facilitation and power sharing with non-government participants
- developing contemporary, flexible and strong legislation that prioritises prevention, early action and stronger compliance powers.

Concerns and recommendations

The majority of respondents supported the strategic goals of the Strategy, but many raise concerns on specific topics, or made recommendations to clarify the Strategy. Many of the suggestions relate to specific ways in which we can improve biosecurity in Victoria and will be considered as part of the Strategy Implementation Plan.

Respondents' concerns and recommendations are summarised under a range of themes, with examples of specific suggestions listed for each to demonstrate the range of feedback.

Sustainability of funding and programs

- Funding for biosecurity action must be sustainable, long term, independent of budget cycles and transparent.
- Resource allocation needs to be a transparent and inclusive process, with farmers and industry bodies involved in decision making.
- Greater government investment at local and regional levels could be part of the solution.
- Funding allocations must acknowledge the already substantial investment that farmers, industry, veterinarians and private land managers make in biosecurity.
- The allocation of resources is disproportionately weighted to new and exotic threats, with not enough committed to established pests and environmental threats.
- Risk creators need to pay their fair share of costs for border protection, surveillance, preparedness and response.

- Funding should be allocated to research and development to improve technologies and tools.
- More and ongoing funding and resourcing needs to be dedicated to biosecurity management on Crown land.
- The current funding and resourcing for prevention and diagnostic efforts on wildlife and zoonotic diseases is insufficient.

Systems, regulations, frameworks and infrastructure

- A centralised system for landholder-collected data on vertebrate pests is needed to inform policy and research and to monitor effectiveness of management programs.
- New traceability systems should be implemented to manage threats and improve animal welfare, e.g., horse identification scheme.
- Monitoring and surveillance systems must provide producers with confidence in data storage, privacy and use.
- Disease surveillance could be bolstered by linking permitted control of wildlife with research / diagnostics for wildlife diseases.
- Surge workforce for animal disease outbreaks could be bolstered through more training opportunities, e.g., for veterinary, laboratory and diagnostic technicians, local councils.
- Essential infrastructure and diagnostic tools need to be developed to support preparedness and response, e.g., truck washes, DNA profiling.
- Biosecurity emergency response plans are needed for Crown land; Wildlife Health Australia could be more involved in response planning.
- More subsidised surveillance programs like the Victorian Significant Disease Investigation Program could better harness the skill set of industry and citizens, and boost capacity of early detection.

Partnerships, inclusion and under-represented perspectives

- First Peoples and small-scale farmers need to have a seat at the decision-making table.
- Better sharing of Traditional Owners' and First Peoples' perspectives will increase cultural awareness.

- The Biosecurity Reference Group needs stronger environmental and indigenous representation.
- The national feral pig management program provides a strong example of how partnerships with indigenous communities can optimise management strategies and better value cultural knowledge and traditions.
- Victoria's Cross-Border Commissioner could be better utilised in biosecurity partnerships and collaborative initiatives.
- Farmers and local communities should be involved in prioritising biosecurity threats and responses.
- The Strategy needs meaningful and inclusive objectives and measurable goals for partnerships with Traditional Owners.
- The actions and goals could more clearly recognise the links between agricultural production, biosecurity, environmental health and human health.
- The Catchment Management Authorities could be better utilised and funded to improve community awareness and drive behaviour change

Biodiversity, wildlife and waterways

- The Strategy needs to be more balanced between threats to the environment and agriculture, with attention to impacts and integrated actions across the whole landscape – natural and modified.
- Biosecurity impacts on native plants, wildlife and ecosystems has been overlooked in the Strategy.
- Biosecurity actions that protect the natural environment, including threats to and from wildlife, marine environments and waterways, need to be more prominent.
- More ambitious goals are needed for management of biosecurity threats to biodiversity, with control of feral animals on Victoria's islands and peninsulas a key opportunity.
- Concerns about the control of dingos through wild dog control programs.

Biosecurity regulations and legislative reform

- Biosecurity regulations have become burdensome and inefficient for industries; a stronger approach would focus on disincentivising non-compliant behaviour of risk creators outside of industry, e.g., illegal trade.

- The Strategy should set out a roadmap for new and specific biosecurity legislation.
- Specific areas recommended for inclusion in reformed legislation include:
 - stronger compliance and enforcement powers, and a wider range of early intervention tools
 - accountability mechanisms for control of invasive species across tenures
 - an obligation to consider animal welfare when managing biosecurity risks
 - more secure and sustainable funding mechanisms
 - regulations that support partnership approaches
 - classification of feral horses and deer as pests
 - incentives to enhance biodiversity in agricultural and other ecosystems, as a means of building resilience to biosecurity threats
 - exclusion of native species from biosecurity legislation, including dingos and dingo hybrids
 - standardisation of traceability data collection and access
 - obligations for contractors, utility and farm service providers to manage biosecurity risks on public and private land.

Established invasive species

- Programs are often sporadic and disjointed; continuity and coordination of funding and effort is needed for effective established pest management.
- The Strategy highlights landscape-scale and cross tenure collaboration, plans and action on established pests but more detail is needed on how this will be funded and organised.
- More emphasis is needed on the role that established pests have as vectors for spread of diseases and weeds.
- More support (funding, resources) is required for local and state-wide community pest management initiatives and demonstration of control strategies.
- Stronger enforcement powers are needed to ensure management of established invasive species across land tenures.

- Public land managers should be active in community-led approaches, so that activities are coordinated, and government sets an example through best practice.

Education, engagement and capability

- Biosecurity education resources need to be developed for specific stakeholder groups to describe how people can play their part, e.g., horse owners, urban residents.
- Education material and resources for building awareness should be accessible, using widely understood terms, e.g., the term 'biosecurity practices' may be meaningless to many citizens and land owners.
- Ongoing engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders at a range of levels should be resourced, including through local-level extension services and in collaboration between government and industry bodies.
- Local, regional and industry preparedness and response capability needs to be supported, including through leveraging existing regional programs for other emergency threats, provision of training during peace time and scenario-based exercises.
- Specific examples of how local councils can play a role in protecting local environmental, cultural and biological assets, including through land use planning, would build councils' capability.
- Bureaucratic barriers to community- and volunteer-led efforts can be minimised through government taking a stronger role coordinating and maintaining these initiatives.
- There needs to be stronger recognition of social licence issues for control of some pests, e.g., feral cats and horses, and targeted education to address this.

Strategy implementation and accountability

- Greater clarity is needed on who is responsible for implementation, to ensure that the burden does not fall disproportionately on specific sectors, and on the implementation timeline and outcomes of each goal.
- Consultation on the implementation plan and future action plans should be undertaken.
- Victorian Government funding, resourcing and prioritisation of Strategy implementation is needed.

- Ongoing research into biosecurity threats to agriculture and the development of innovative prevention and management strategies should be a key component of Strategy implementation.
- Processes for evaluation and review of progress against strategic goals, including community and industry engagement in implementation, should be defined.
- Stronger monitoring and evaluation of past exercises and outbreaks would support industry benchmarking and identify opportunities for improvement.

Quotes from the submissions

Below are a selection of quotes drawn from the written submissions to indicate the range of perspectives, recommendations and concerns in the feedback.

‘People and our governments generally want to build a future that is fair for all, but can be stuck in old ways of thinking and doing that make it difficult to know how to build that future.’ – Advocacy group

‘The group would like to reiterate the importance of long term programs with stable and consistent funding (that overrides changes of the government of the day) to adequately support the effectiveness of extension programs in regions to best deliver the 20 priority actions.’ – Community organisation

‘The strategy should balance regulatory measures with proactive, collaborative, and risk-based measures to ensure a resilient and effective biosecurity system.’ – Industry peak body

‘The harm and impact of invasive species and disease is having a significant impact on Victoria’s agricultural economy as well as the natural environment and community safety and well-being.’ – Advocacy group

‘When industries take leadership and demonstrate a willingness to invest and act, there is an opportunity to work with those industries to design regulations which support producers who are actively undertaking biosecurity on farm and provides a mechanism to ensure good practice is embedded across entire industries.’ – Industry peak body

‘We appreciate the extensive engagement with industry, community, and stakeholders to further understand where to focus effort and resources to reduce any potential biosecurity threats.’ – Advocacy group

'Agriculture Victoria has succeeded in establishing trust by implementing a partnership approach in building the Strategy, but equality in all things biosecurity and the flexibility to act might require a radical re-thinking by the Victorian State Government, which has legislation in place that might not be as flexible as needed.' – Industry peak body

'We have feral foxes living on Crown land who come NIGHTLY to kill our chickens and peacocks and what is the government doing? NOTHING! In short, this government cares more for pests than people!' – Community member

We support the overall thrust of the draft Biosecurity Strategy, but consider it needs significant improvement to provide the basis for adequate, vigilant, efforts to sustain and improve biosecurity in Victoria.' – Community organisation

'Biosecurity is a shared responsibility that needs a comprehensive and all-encompassing approach that is led by the government to manage and mitigate risks effectively. The strategy acknowledges this, aiming to address biosecurity as a state-wide concern that involves all sectors and aspects of the community.' – Industry peak body

'Resourcing for biosecurity needs to be commensurate with the size of, and growth in Victoria's economy and population, and with increasing volumes of international and interstate trade. Any push for short-term cost cutting in this area should be regarded as irresponsible as past experience has amply demonstrated that the challenge and expense of dealing with subsequent problems will likely far outweigh the costs of preventative action forgone.' – Community organisation

'The strategy should broaden its scope to include individuals new to living in rural areas to raise awareness and prevent potential biosecurity threats.' – Local council

'Equitable funding between governments, industry and risk creators is needed.' – Industry sector

'The responsibility for coordination of biosecurity efforts needs to be funded appropriately and not delegated to community groups or other government agencies without proper funding, coordination and support.' – Community member

'For shared responsibility to work, communications must be targeted in language that everyone knows, understands and for actions that can be easily incorporated into everyday lives.' – Industry peak body

'A sustainable funding model will be critical to ensure the actions can be delivered ongoing and that a monitoring and evaluation process is established to ensure continual improvement.' – Catchment management agency

5 Next steps

Feedback from the consultation will be used to confirm the goals, priorities and issues of the new Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria.

The release of final Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria is planned for late 2023.

Once the Biosecurity Strategy is in place, work will begin on an Implementation Plan to achieve its goals. There will be further opportunities to provide feedback on the Implementation Plan.

The Implementation Plan will be a 'living document' that is periodically reviewed to assess progress on the five strategic goals with any adjustments made as required.

For more information contact the [Biosecurity Strategy, Preparedness and Coordination Unit](#).