

Implementing Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy

Workshop series

A series of 3 workshops held in May 2025 brought people together from across the biosecurity system to focus on what will make a difference to implementing Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy. The 3 workshops were designed to co-develop an implementation plan and evaluation framework.

The workshop series was facilitated by Nous Group and the Biosecurity Strategy Team

The workshop series was attended by members of the Biosecurity Strategy Implementation Steering Committee (BSISC), the Biosecurity Interagency Committee (BIC), the Biosecurity Reference Group (BRG), Traditional Owner Corporations and selected other industry and community groups. Excluding Nous Group and the Biosecurity Strategy Team, there were 30 people at Workshop 1, 50 for Workshop 2, and 24 for Workshop 3.

Workshop 1: Thursday 1 May 2025

The first workshop focused on understanding the journey to develop Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy, identifying what implementation activities are already underway and establishing the critical elements for implementation.

Wurundjeri Elder Annette Xiberras opened the workshop with a Welcome to Country. Beth Jones, Chief Executive of Agriculture Victoria, followed with an overview of Agriculture Victoria's work in biosecurity, and the importance of this series of workshops in May to support the progress of Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy goals and priority actions.

To achieve the development of a draft implementation plan and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework, the Nous Group facilitators led the group through a series of sessions that covered:

1. The case for collective action from industry, community Traditional Owners and government
2. Re-evaluation, reflection and learning from the work done to date and the changing context
3. Defining the principles required for industry, community, Traditional Owners and government working together to implement the strategy
4. Understanding key enablers and barriers that are impacting the system's ability to deliver on the strategy
5. Articulating what industry, community and Traditional Owners need from Agriculture Victoria to enable their efforts.

The discussion highlighted that recent experiences demonstrate pockets of excellence across the biosecurity system, but large system gaps remain. Overall, participants acknowledge that the biosecurity system is working reasonably well.

The strengths of the system were seen in the areas of effective preparedness and coordination on high-risk threats, and evidence of good work and ongoing partnerships between government and industry – exemplified in the recent emergency responses to outbreaks of avian influenza and tomato brown rugose fruit virus.

Gaps and risks in the system identified included areas where exposure to threats transcend the agriculture sector or geographic boundaries, potential shortfalls in critical infrastructure to deal with large scale risks, limited local government engagement, erosion of technical expertise and capacity, and low community awareness.

Principles to guide the strategy implementation:

- People-first and trust building
- Collaboration and coordination
- Flexibility and innovation
- Clarity and measurability
- System-wide thinking
- Care and consideration.

Barriers we may encounter:

- Governance and continuity
- Silos and coordination gaps
- Public disengagement
- Resource constraints
- Cultural and mindset challenges.

The role of Agriculture Victoria in supporting implementation:

- Strategic leadership and coordination
- Trusted connector
- Support and enablement
- Champion system thinking.

Breakthrough ideas to drive implementation:

- National standards and alignment
- Consortium-led implementation (i.e. working groups)
- Industry-led funding models

- Leverage broader funding sources (linking biosecurity, environment, health and consumer outcomes to access- cross-sector funding)
- Interrogate and reimagine resource deployment
- Integrated biosecurity education (biosecurity curriculum in schools and vocational networks).

Workshop 2: Thursday 15 May 2025

The second workshop focused on building out priority action detail and other components of the implementation plan.

This included:

1. Identifying the next level of detail under each priority action (in the strategy) to articulate 'how' each action will be accomplished
2. Refining the principles required for industry, community and government to work together
3. Refining the key enablers and barriers impacting the systems' ability to deliver on the strategy
4. Refining the ask of Agriculture Victoria, as a system steward, to enable the efforts of industry and community.

The workshop facilitators Nous Group used Miro as the primary tool to share and collect information to build out the priority action detail and components of the implementation plan.

Breakout rooms were created for discussion on:

- prevention priority actions
- response priority actions
- management priority actions
- principles and breakthrough ideas
- implementation enablers and barriers.

From the discussion points and recommendations, participants were then asked to outline 'the one thing' that will drive the priority actions forward across the prevention, response and management goals.

Participants were invited to define the principles, identify why this principle is important and provide examples of this principle being put into practice. Principles spanned co-design and co-decision making, respecting everyone's needs and views, system thinking, and adaptiveness and innovation.

Participants examined the breakthrough ideas and considered why these would lead to major change in the biosecurity system. Then the next steps to put this idea into action were identified alongside examples. Breakthrough ideas included: a genuine focus on mutually beneficial

outcomes, cost-efficient delivery through leveraging and sharing, integrated biosecurity education and industry ownership, succession planning for a future workforce.

Barriers to implementing the strategy were defined and participants explored what might solve or reduce the impacts of the barrier. Barriers identified were: fragmented governance, organisational silos and over-reliance on Agriculture Victoria, inconsistent engagement and loss of momentum in biosecurity, public awareness and education gaps, limited farmer motivation and engagement, and funding challenges.

The roles of government, industry, Traditional Owners and community were explored and high-level responsibilities documented. Conversation focused on: ensuring Traditional Owner voices were involved in response planning and delivery to protect cultural sites and ensure Traditional Owner priorities are incorporated into planning; providing industry the support it needs to get biosecurity messages out; and coordinated support between local councils, state and federal government to get the right information out to community to help build their knowledge and awareness of biosecurity.

The wrap up covered how the information would be brought together for the final upcoming workshop.

Workshop 3: Thursday 29 May 2025

The third workshop focused on landing the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework and continuing to refine the detail of 'how' each action will be accomplished.

Workshop facilitators Nous Group led the participants through a series of sessions. Stephen Petris from Nous provided a recap of the process so far. Leonard Wang from Nous provided an overview of the MEL Framework draft including the involvement of an expert panel to build out a first draft.

Breakout rooms were created for discussion on:

- MEL Framework
- Ways of working together
- Partnerships and enablers
- Prevention, response and management
- Getting started.

The discussion explored whether we had the right summary outcomes, indicators and measures included in the draft MEL Framework. We looked at what updates were needed in the ways of working together section of the draft Implementation Plan along with updating partnerships and enablers activities, prevention, response and management sections. Finally, the 'get started' group looked at 'one thing' that can be done in the next 90 days for each strategic goal to make progress of Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy priority actions.

Reflections

Participants were invited to share their reflections throughout the workshop series. Their comments included:

- There are certain areas Agriculture Victoria (or Victorian Government) needs to lead on to bring other stakeholders on board to take action, e.g. management of pests on public land.
- Culture change within the department has been witnessed throughout the statement and strategy development and implementation processes.
- There is a lot of work on biosecurity strategy happening around Australia, and Victoria is seen a leading in this space.
- When there is no economic impact or lack of incentives to respond, such as marine pests, no sector seems to be responsible – citizen science can help this challenge.
- We need smart, measurable targets and to be strategic in our prioritisation in a challenging fiscal environment.
- Improved engagement is required in Councils on biosecurity and agricultural issues. Having an ag-focused staff member is important – community groups can petition their council to resource this area.
- It's important for different sectors to keep coming together and for Agriculture Victoria/State Government to support this to happen.
- Traditional Owners are keen to be part of biosecurity responses. They also have emerging agricultural interests and need to be at the biosecurity table to discuss this element of their business – encouraging education initiatives to help Traditional Owners activate and be a part of future conversations.
- There is strength in diversity, listening and co-design. The strategy takes a wider view of biosecurity, looking beyond land tenure, and demonstrates a shift in recognition and involvement of Traditional Owners in this process.
- Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy Implementation can take inspiration from Victoria's shift in forest management and the marine strategy.
- The importance of recognising the many aspects of 'community' – community can be the people with a direct ownership of the issue, the people impacted by risks or incursions, and the people that can create biosecurity issues.
- How we perceive our ability to make change will influence how we make change. The strategy talks about Agriculture Victoria devolving responsibility and power to stakeholders – the challenge is how do we give that practical effect?
- There is a lot happening in biosecurity at many levels. The diversity of people involved in these discussions has broadened.
- There is a recognition of the importance of building effective networks – and the cross learning that can happen from that.
- There is a recognition of the importance of local government and Catchment Management Authorities, alongside Landcare and Friends Of volunteer and other similar groups, and the contributions they can make.

- If our utopia is that everyone knows the role that they play in biosecurity, then we have to create multiple touchpoints – but that is time- and resource-consuming so we need to prioritise and get the message right. We can encourage creative use of biosecurity champions and spokespeople to counter misinformation.
- It is exciting to have a whole-community (system-wide) response to biosecurity. If we have an incursion at the moment (during drought) it would be a disaster. Biosecurity is so crucial to rural communities.

Next steps

Agriculture Victoria will finalise the drafts and circulate to industry, community and other government partners and stakeholders prior to publishing and distributing in early 2026.

Contact

To request the detailed workshop summaries please email biosecurity.strategy@agriculture.vic.gov.au.