Department of Primary Industries

Office of the Director General

OUT20/15674

23 December 2020

Mr Greg Piper MP
Chair
NSW Legislative Public Accounts Committee
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Piper

NSW DPI response to Public Accounts Committee supplementary questions

I refer to the Public Accounts Committee correspondence on 4 December 2020 regarding supplementary questions related to the Auditor General's Performance Report on Biosecurity Risk Management.

Please find enclosed the NSW Department of Primary Industries response to the supplementary questions.

Yours sincerely

**SCOTT HANSEN
DIRECTOR GENERAL**

Encl.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS – PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE HEARING - BIOSECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT

RESPONSE FROM NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

NO.	QUESTION	ANSWER
Recommendation 2 The Audit recommended that the Department analyse and report on cost, resourcing and activity level at the project level for biosecurity incident responses and incorporate data from partner agencies.	
1.	The Department advised that it created a new position for reporting the costs of emergency activities across the Department and relevant partner agencies. a) What is the status of this new position? Have there been any resulting reports?	In mid 2019 the Department realigned its emergency management response and recovery functions with other rural resilience and assistance areas to consolidate efforts to support the agricultural industry recovery from a natural disaster. Under the leadership of a newly created position (Director, Emergency Operations) the DPI Emergency Management Unit (EMU) has made structural improvements to better deliver support services to combat agencies in the event of an emergency involving the agriculture or animal services functional area. This has included a dedicated role to better support reporting of Departmental costs associated with response and recovery activities through an annual performance statement, and quarterly/monthly performance reports to key governance structures. DPI also produces a monthly report on biosecurity and food safety resource expenses that includes emergency and non-emergency circumstances.
2.	The Department advised that it drafted frameworks to guide emergency management reporting and data collection. a) Please provide an update to the Committee in regard to data collection and reporting. b) How is the collected data being used to improve budget forecasting for emergency response and compliance activities?	The Emergency Management Unit is looking at the following improvements in its emergency managements operations reporting framework: reporting needs, reporting schedule, response reporting template, and dashboards. DPI's Biosecurity and Food Safety branch also has a monthly report on resource expenses that includes emergency and on-emergency circumstances. A separate centralised reporting structure within Biosecurity and Food Safety captures incidence data, including the biosecurity matter/carrier, number of staff involved and staff days in response etc. As reported at the recent hearing, DPI is moving to integrate a system, currently used by other jurisdictions that will lead to a steady increase in performance reporting that will assist with budget forecasting to support emergency response and compliance activities. This will be fully implemented by July 2021.

Recommendation 3

The Audit recommended that the Department apply Cost Benefit Analyses (CBA) and after-action reviews to its biosecurity emergency responses.

| 3. | 3. The Department advised that it developed an emergency response, a CBA Framework and an Emergency Management (EM) Lessons Management Framework.

a) Does the Department complete CBAs for every biosecurity emergency response? If no, why not?

b) Please explain how the EM Lessons Management Framework improves the Department's engagement with State agency partners, particularly in regard to after action reviews. | The Department has implemented new standard processes to support Hazard Owners determining the appropriateness of a response following a suspect or confirmed detection and diagnosis. Issues taken into account in making this decision are: legal requirements, state obligations (i.e., if a National or State Committee has assessed the threat as having an impact), technical feasibility (i.e., to prevent, eliminate, minimise or manage), cost benefit analysis i.e., has a National or State CBA been undertaken, has the threat been categorised as an exotic pest or disease under an existing agreement) , and risk analysis. These critical decision-making steps are captured to identify the most cost-effective option and outcome.

As indicated above where the pest or disease concerned has been categorised within an existing national deed or agreement or is covered by an existing NSW policy or procedure that recommends a response should be undertaken, a further cost benefit analysis is generally not required to be undertaken if one has been undertaken to support the national agreement.. However, this does not preclude NSW from conducting a cost benefit analysis to inform national discussions or its own actions to determine feasibility and cost effectiveness of a particular response.

A CBA is generally undertaken where the above situations do not exist. NSW has been working on the development of a rapid cost benefit analysis framework, and the development of a supporting tool kit to improve decision making to determine the most cost-effective option and outcome. This latest body of work is expected to be completed by end June 2021 and will be instrumental in assisting the Department demonstrating costs to the economy, community and environment that would have occurred if an emergency response, where appropriate, had not been triggered.

The Department's Lessons Management Framework applies to agricultural and animal sector function area emergencies. The framework comprises 5 stages: collection of information/ observations, analysis of data, identification of actions and outcomes I.e., training, engagement, policy etc; with a review and monitoring regime. A Lessons Management Committee with representatives from NSW DPI and a key state agency, Local Land Services (LLS), have recently conducted analysis of over 300 recommendations from after-action reviews and will continue to build on observations provided by response staff and stakeholders. Learnings may be applied to |

		wider biosecurity emergencies, with other state-based agencies, upon maturity of the system.
Recommendation 5 The Audit recommended that the Department publish annual data on performance targets and outcomes for its biosecurity compliance and emergency response activities.		
4.	The Department reported that it has finalised performance targets and plans to conduct a review of its structure and functions which will improve its reporting activities. The review, however, has been delayed due to the bushfires, and subsequently the Department has yet to implement the reporting framework and publish annual performance data. a) Has the pandemic had an impact on the Department's ability to address the Audit's recommendations? b) How will the review lead to additional improvements in the Department's biosecurity compliance reporting and emergency response activities? c) Has the Department published its 2018-19 performance data as set out in the report recommendations (due by December 2019)?	a) Like other agencies across the State, the pandemic has had an impact on DPI's ability to implement the recommendations with available resources being redirected to other priority projects over the course of 2020. b) Please refer to answers to questions 1 and 2 above. c) In the Department's response to the Performance Audit on 14 June 2019, it indicated that a more realistic target for this recommendation was June 2020. In subsequent reports, the Department indicated that that it is aiming to publish a high-level snapshot by December 2020. A report on 2019/20 data is currently being prepared.
Recommendation 6 The Audit recommended that the Department revise its compliance and emergency response procedures and practice to address environmental and community risks in consultation with partner agencies.		

| 5. | 5. The Department reported its completion of the recommendation in relation to compliance procedures on weeds and pest animals and management of weeds.

a) Has the Department implemented compliance policies specifically in relation to emerging environmental risks, community activities and emerging risks from industries such as tourism and infrastructure?

b) Can you advise the Committee how the Department implemented advice from its partner agencies in the development and implementation of its compliance guidelines and emergency response practices for emerging environmental and community risks? | DPI continues to lead the biosecurity response to environmental invasive species for NSW. The priority pest and weed lists are composed of species that are predominantly environmental threats. Weeds that are of primary importance to agriculture, particularly in cropping and livestock grazing systems, are mainly dealt with through improved farming practices, with much of the foundational research to develop these practices undertaken by DPI Agriculture. The Biosecurity and Food Safety Branch has a strong focus on tackling species at the start of the invasion curve where our interventions are dictated by feasibility of control and risk. DPI uses Risk Assessment Systems that do not discriminate between environment and agricultural risks. Response activities over the last 12 months, apart from parthenium weed, have been largely focussed environmental threats. These eradication programs include yellow crazy ant at Lismore, rubber vine in Western NSW, frog bit (various locations in NSW) and red eared slider turtles in Sydney basin. In addition, over the same period, DPI has had a strong focus on over 40 other environmental pest and diseases species that have originated from illegal introductions at the national border.

a) DPI continues its work on additional actions to address risks to the environment under the Department's Environmental Biosecurity Action Plan. Further details on the achievements against specific goals can be provided upon request. Regarding strengthening partnerships, NSW DPI is developing a revised Biosecurity Strategy in consultation with over 40 stakeholders. It is expected that a subordinate Invasive Species Plan will be developed to outline roles and responsibilities for various agencies and partners in managing environmental issues. It is expected that similar subordinate plans will articulate roles and responsibilities for other areas such as plant and animal disease. Of further note, plant and animal biosecurity deed arrangements are equally applicable for environmental issues as they are for horticulture, aquaculture or agriculture.

b) Please see response at 5a. |

DECEMBER 2020