

LORD HOWE ISLAND BOARD

Business Paper

OPEN SESSION

ITEM

Update on Biosecurity Operations Plan Resourcing for Lord Howe Island

RECOMMENDATION

1. That this report be received and noted.
2. That a more detailed report be prepared for presentation at the Boards November 2019 meeting.

BACKGROUND

In 2016 the Board adopted the LHI Biosecurity Strategy 2016, which identifies the movement of freight via the Island Trader and aircraft as potential high to very high risk pathways for biosecurity matter entering LHI.

High to very high risk material includes mammals (including rodents), reptiles, amphibians, tramp ants, invertebrates, plants and plant pathogens. The LHI Biosecurity Strategy 2016 identifies increased inspections of freight at Port Macquarie and training of stevedores and providers as mitigating measures to address the risk pathways. It identifies that prevention and preparedness remain the most cost-effective approaches when managing biosecurity threats and incursions. In order to reduce the risk of incursions to Lord Howe Island, there is a need to improve the LHIB's biosecurity measures pre-border and to increase inspection regime for all pathways and risks.

Section 9 of the LHI Biosecurity Strategy 2016 identifies the following legal obligations applicable to the Board in undertaking its biosecurity duty:

- World Heritage Convention - Australia has obligations under Article 5, including: to protect, conserve and present the World Heritage values of the property
- EPBC Act, the Commonwealth can among other things: List key threatening processes and recovery plans (i.e. LHI Biodiversity Management Plan 2007 which has numerous actions related to biosecurity).
- LHI Act makes provision for the care, control and management of LHI. In relation to Biosecurity it defines the LHIB charter, functions and regulations including:
 - to manage, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the Island's environment;
 - take all practicable measures to protect and conserve the fisheries, fauna and flora of the Island

- prohibiting the introduction of any species of fauna or flora to the Island or prescribing conditions in relation to the introduction of any species of fauna or flora
 - the destruction of plants declared by the regulations to be noxious
 - regulation, control or prohibition of exotic plants on the land
- NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 – outlines the general biosecurity duty for people to be aware of their surroundings and take action to prevent the introduction and spread of pests, diseases, weeds and contaminants. For the LHIB, this translates to “if we are aware of risks we need to take reasonable steps to protect”

As part of the Rodent Eradication Program (REP), biosecurity detection dogs were purchased and trained, and dog handlers recruited, to enable improved biosecurity measures, specifically to detect remaining individual rodents post-REP baiting, as well as for ongoing island-wide rodent/pest surveillance and any subsequent incursion response. The Biosecurity detection dogs have been trained to detect rodents (rat/mouse), reptiles (snake/lizard) and amphibians (frog/cane toad).

CURRENT POSITION

The LHI Biosecurity Strategy 2016 outlines the Board’s legal obligations relating to biosecurity, identifies the risks to be managed and mitigated, and provides recommendations to increase biosecurity and manage risks. These have been trialled and are now being adjusted to ensure an appropriate level of protection and management is provided to protect investments made in various eradication and threatened species recovery programs being implemented on World Heritage listed Lord Howe Island.

In June 2019 the Board engaged an expert independent biosecurity auditor to review the Board’s existing biosecurity measures on Island and review inspection operations pre- and post-border. This included an assessment of the implementation of current biosecurity strategies and protocols in place for the storage, transport and delivery of goods and bulk cargo to Lord Howe Island and the efficacy of inspection procedures/regimes. This audit identified opportunities for improving biosecurity practices and facilities at departure and arrival points.

It recommended increased resourcing for biosecurity staffing to ensure:

- all voyages of the Island Trader are satisfactory inspected pre-border at Port Macquarie and post-border at LHI, which requires a minimum of two staff to be present at the LHI jetty for each day of unloading;
- all freight flights are inspected and over 90% of passenger flights are inspected;
- inspection of incoming private vessels;
- that there are adequate staff provisions to have a handler and dog working daily to hunt rodents on LHI during the REP;
- ongoing monitoring of surveillance and incursion response tools and devices;
- increased biosecurity leadership, education and engagement.

In June 2019 the Board received funds from the North Coast Local Land Services for improvements to Biosecurity measures for WH listed Island, which includes vermin proofing the Birdon Shed at Port Macquarie, rapid response kits and pallet inspection stands. Further funding opportunities for improving biosecurity measures for Lord Howe Island are being explored.

Current biosecurity activities include:

- Use of two person crew to inspect the island trader on island each visit. Two person crew required to allow for meal breaks, to inspect all priority freight and respond to incidents without gaps in detection.
- Biosecurity detection dogs inspecting 90% of freight flights and 50% passenger flights.
- Approvals and monitoring of imports for biosecurity risk.
- Pre-border (Port Macquarie) inspections with LHIB Biosecurity Officer and detection dog of Island Trader prior to and during loading. Also includes inspections of Eastern Air hangers and Birdon facilities, maintenance of baiting and monitoring devices, and education and awareness for stevedores, carriers and suppliers. This requires 4 days at Port Macquarie. Currently this includes:
 - o LHIB Biosecurity Officer and dog to fly return to Port,
 - o Accommodation for four nights
 - o Vehicle Hire
 - o Meal allowance.

On 20 June 2019 approval was granted at a Special Board Meeting to set the establishment for the Board and to further approve changes specific to the 2019/20 Salaries & Wages Budget:

The following was approved.

- Recognition of Dog Handlers on a full-time basis (7 days per week) now expensed against the Board's recurrent Budget at 1.05 FTE in 2019/20 (previously under REP), and recognised as 1.40 FTE in future years.

From 21 August 2019, the contract for engaging the Biosecurity Dog Handler roles through the REP ended. A 'Request to Fill' was submitted seeking an additional 0.4 FTE to meet increased biosecurity inspection and monitoring requirements. This was approved till November 2019 subject to preparation of a paper for consideration at the November Board meeting providing further detail on biosecurity requirements and resource implications.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That this report be received and noted.
2. That a more detailed report be prepared for presentation at the Boards November 2019 meeting.

Prepared: Hank Bower Manager Environment & World Heritage

Endorsed: Peter Adams Chief Executive Officer, Lord Howe island Board