



National Council of Women of New Zealand

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Submission to the Biosecurity Council on the Draft Biosecurity Strategy New Zealand: Guarding Pacific's Triple Star

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 42 nationally organised societies. It has 34 branches spread throughout the country to which women from some 150 societies are affiliated. Its purpose is to work for the well being of women, families and society through research, discussion and action.

This submission was written from comments given by members of the Environment Standing Committee and one Branch. It has been made more difficult to write because only a limited number of members have been able to respond. This is due to the cost of purchasing the document and the lack of Internet access. These problems act against citizen's participation in the democratic process.

Executive Summary

NCWNZ supports the control of all biosecurity issues being managed by one government department, and suggests that this be a separate stand-alone department. Public awareness should be encouraged by ongoing education, including both the risks themselves and the impacts of those species. Biosecurity provides an important way of protecting taonga under the Treaty of Waitangi. The decision criteria are supported, especially the recognition of environmental values and the importance of the indirect costs of intervention and non-intervention. NCWNZ supports any increase in funding for research to inform biosecurity policy and decisions. NCWNZ endorses the proposed activity areas and supports them as funding priorities.

Specific Comment on Recommendations

a. Leadership and participation.

As stated on p.31, biosecurity is a core responsibility of central government and so it follows that there must be a lead from central government by way of good strategy backed by legislation that will ensure the strategy is implemented at a national level. The present system where making separate departments responsible for sections of work and devolving some responsibilities to regional and territorial authorities does not work well in practise, with inconsistent application of regulations. NCWNZ supports fully the narrowing of the present spread of responsibility and the allocation of biosecurity matters to one department of government. NCWNZ would recommend a separate department that is well funded and has the legislative muscle to override other departments in situations where urgent action is required on biosecurity matters. Some incursions need a rapid and immediate response without taking time for debate. An example of this is the painted apple moth in Auckland. If the area where it was first found, plus an adequate margin, had been treated straight away, it would not have spread to the wide area that is now subject to a massive and controversial spray programme. The temporary inconvenience and discomfort of some citizens is a small price in comparison with the potentially devastating effects on natural biodiversity and the economy of letting the pests continue to spread. Those whose health is likely to be affected should be helped, such as by temporary relocation, but it is vital that small invasions are hit early and hard, to prevent a pest getting out of hand.



It is not clear from the recommendations as to the role of the Ministry for the Environment and/or the Department of Conservation in managing biosecurity risks to overall biodiversity. Not only is biosecurity of prime importance in guarding New Zealand's primary industries but it is also vital in the protection of indigenous species. Already there have been too many unwitting and deliberate imports that have had devastating effects on the unique flora and fauna of this country and the links between biodiversity and biosecurity need to be strengthened through consultation and policy making. Therefore NCWNZ regards recommendation 16, with its provision for a joint approach between MAF and DOC, as being of critical importance.

Recommendation 9 regarding public awareness is crucial to advancing biosecurity, and NCWNZ supports strongly the actions needed to make this happen. There needs to be continuing public education to change the "why bother" attitude and prevent individuals bringing in banned items. The programme 'Border Patrol' shown on television in 2002 took a huge step in public awareness and this should be repeated. As a follow-up, NCWNZ suggests a further series of programmes outlining the consequences of biosecurity incursions. To return to the painted apple moth, there has been little public education as to the impacts of these pests if they become fully established. The television and newspaper images of the recent foot and mouth disease outbreak in Britain were instrumental in raising awareness of the devastation such an outbreak could cause in New Zealand and made travellers much more alert to the consequences of their actions. With foot and mouth disease endemic in South East Asia and the number of travellers coming to New Zealand from that part of the world, this is a high biosecurity risk and needs constant public education. At present, information in the public domain appears spasmodically, but an ongoing education programme will generate understanding and support within the community. The enthusiasm of community groups and individuals could be channelled into local action. It was an observant individual who first noticed the painted apple moth (Forest and Bird, February 2003, p.35).

b. Tiakina Aotearoa.

NCWNZ supports recommendation 10 and its recognition of responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi. One part of the Treaty concerns protection of Taonga, including plants and animals, and pests already impact severely on them. Biosecurity operations contribute to the preservation of taonga; similarly the Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) provides a mechanism for the protection of other countries' taonga and should be supported fully.

c. Decision-making and priorities.

NCWNZ supports recommendations 11 to 20 and believes that overall these will be encompassed within the role of a sole department. In particular, recommendation 14 setting out criteria for decision making provides the basis for biosecurity operations and day to day management. Environmental concerns are recognised in section 14a and should be given equal or greater value than economic criteria given the long-term importance of ecosystem integrity. As the predicted effects of climate change become more obvious the balance between the criteria may well alter depending on the risk under consideration. Criteria (c) and (d) (direct and indirect costs of intervention or non-intervention) require careful thought and discussion based on inputs from several different scenarios. While direct costs of intervention and non-intervention are relatively straight forward, indirect costs are less easy to establish but can be very influential on final outcomes. NCWNZ is pleased that these considerations, which are often neglected because they are difficult, have been recognised.



Recommendation 20 regarding the development of biosecurity research is endorsed by NCWNZ, and the research will be necessary for the decision-making processes (recommendation 19) and advisory panel's work (recommendation 18). The information provided by rigorous research will be vital in progressing biosecurity issues to conclusions that are of maximum benefit to New Zealand. Such research is likely to require government funding and NCWNZ would support any increase in available research money.

d. Capability and funding.

NCWNZ regards recommendations 21, 22, and 23 as being fundamental to the implementation of any biosecurity strategy. The review of capability (recommendation 21) is needed urgently and should be ongoing in the sense that any organisation should be examining whether or not its operation is carrying out its objectives. The initial review will give areas for improvement, as well as those done well, and reveal funding needs as in recommendation 22. Recommendation 23 outlines the essential activity areas and NCWNZ supports those listed. Passenger clearances are the public face of biosecurity and are critical to both managing the risk and raising awareness. To this end spraying of aircraft cabins on landing heightened travellers' understanding of the importance of biosecurity, whatever merit they had as a control measure. It is of concern that currently such a small proportion of containers is inspected and a higher level of funding would enable more of this work to be carried out. Of equal importance to cargo is the ballast water and hull bioloading, both of which can introduce foreign unwanted organisms to New Zealand. Ballast water is known to carry microscopic algae, some of which produce toxic blooms that are of concern to the marine aquaculture industry. The organisms carried on the hulls of vessels entering New Zealand waters can put natural marine ecosystems at risk and endanger marine reserves. With such a long coastline and many possible points of access, there are huge problems with managing all the vessels arriving here but it is important that these problems are addressed in operational procedures.

e. Other comment.

An aspect of biosecurity that is not considered in this strategy is the deliberate introduction of species that would have devastating health or economic effects, the so-called bioterrorism. While it could be seen that these are not specifically addressed or the need to do so is not present, NCWNZ recommends that the proposed science advisory panel and Advisory Board give recognisance to this possibility and make specific plans to deal with any incursion of this nature.

Conclusion

Overall NCWNZ is supportive of the strategy and its direction for the future. It is encouraging that serious consideration is at last being given to the immense importance to this country of effective biosecurity systems and crucial that funding resources be provided for the work. Public education is an important tool in raising awareness of impacts and enables informed decision-making by travellers. Continued consultation with stakeholders will assist in ensuring that everyone contributes to managing risk.

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