



6 March 2018

National Biodiversity Strategy Secretariat
Department of the Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

To Whom it May Concern,

WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA (WHA) SUBMISSION: AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGY FOR NATURE (DRAFT) 2018-2030

Please find attached a submission regarding native wildlife, disease and Australia's strategy for nature (the Strategy).

The Strategy is a great initiative. However, **disease as a threat to biodiversity and environment does not appear to be mentioned or identified**. We suggest that this be addressed by **considering its inclusion under Objective 7: Reduce threats to nature and build resilience**. Wildlife Health Australia is well placed to help with delivery of the Strategy in this area, especially under Objectives 10 (Increase knowledge about nature to make better decisions) and 11 (Share and use information effectively).

We are happy to discuss this submission with you face to face should you feel it would assist the writing group. Good luck with this important work and please let us know if we can help in any other way.

Best Wishes,

Rupert Woods AM
CEO, WHA

WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA (WHA) SUBMISSION: AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGY FOR NATURE (DRAFT) 2018-2030

THE IMPORTANCE OF WILDLIFE HEALTH TO AUSTRALIA

Diseases and disease agents of wildlife pose a threat to Australia's environment and biodiversity:

- Wildlife are hosts and/or reservoirs for important diseases and disease agents that can affect the environment and biodiversity. Some of these diseases can lead to extinction (e.g. the introduction of chytridiomycosis in frogs in Australia) or severely impact upon populations (e.g. white-nose syndrome in bats in America which has not yet reached Australia).
- Other wildlife diseases, which have already been introduced into Australia still have unknown impacts e.g. psittacine herpesvirus 1 introduced with legally traded green-winged macaws and pigeon paramyxovirus, which was believed to have been introduced through smuggling.
- Wildlife are also hosts and/or reservoirs for important exotic diseases and disease agents that can affect trade and market access (e.g. another exotic disease, tuberculosis which is present in possums in New Zealand) and detection of disease and disease agents in wildlife, and the lack of evidence of absence to satisfy trading partners, can impact upon trade and market access.
- Furthermore, Australian wildlife are susceptible to many of the important exotic emergency diseases of production animals and, if introduced and established, spillover to humans and food animals can occur (e.g. most other exotic diseases of concern to us including foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever, Nipah virus, Surra etc).
- Wildlife are also the most common source of emerging novel diseases and these diseases can impact upon environment, people and food animals (Jones et al 2008, McFarlane et al 2012).
- While incursions and exotics are recognised as risks (for example chytridiomycosis, which has caused the extinction of six Australian frog species), it is also important to remember that another risk on a national scale...supported by the outbreaks of emergency animal diseases in the last 30 years, is the emergence of diseases from within Australia (for example Tasmanian Devil facial tumour disease, avian influenza, Hendra virus, Australian bat Lyssavirus, Tularaemia, Leishmania etc.). However, the necessary frameworks for management of these two disease pathways **support one another**: a focus on detection and preparedness for incursion by exotics helps our detection and response to outbreaks in endemics and vice-versa.

In assessing and developing strategies to manage incursions of diseases with wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact on Australia's environment, these facts, including hosting of exotic diseases, spillovers and flow-on effects need to be considered.

The risks will become greater with changing land use, climate change, animal movements and as societal attitudes bring wildlife, livestock and people into closer contact.

AUSTRALIA'S STATE OF PREPAREDNESS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INCURSIONS

Australia's current wildlife health system is embedded in our biosecurity/agriculture framework.

The system focuses on surveillance and preparedness for diseases with wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact upon Australia's agricultural trade and market access. Diseases of wildlife that impact upon Australia's biodiversity and environment are a lower priority. Wildlife Health Australia (p6) assists Australian governments in maintaining this system.

Though much good work has been done, there is an immediate need:

- to bring environment into Australia's wildlife health system
- to improve education and knowledge of diseases with wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact upon Australia's environment and biosecurity and to prepare for and respond to these risks
- to further develop Australia's national wildlife health system to support Australia's animal health specifically in the area of wildlife diseases and biodiversity impacts, and;
- for information gathering and contingency planning for potential high risk diseases with wildlife as a part of their ecology that may impact upon Australia's environmental biosecurity.

It is also vital in future that Australia be able to show that it is free of exotic diseases and disease agents that can affect or be carried by wildlife and feral animals that can jeopardise our trade and market access.

These activities are complementary, however, wildlife biosecurity information and response sources differ from production sources and need separate support. Current frameworks exist that can help, however, **the gap area is in support for surveillance and preparedness for exotic wildlife diseases that could impact upon environment** rather than trade and market access.

THE SOLUTION: SURVEILLANCE, CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND THE INTEGRATION OF WILDLIFE DISEASES THAT MAY IMPACT UPON ENVIRONMENT INTO NATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Having surveillance and contingency plans in place for wildlife disease agents that are outside Australia (e.g. tuberculosis in possums, white-nose syndrome in bats) and the collection of data and risk assessment for agents introduced and within into Australia (e.g. psittacine herpes virus I and pigeon paramyxovirus) is important to better assist in identifying, assessing and mitigate biosecurity risks.

The better our preparedness and knowledge of the risk and distribution of such agents the better Australia can be placed to manage environmental impacts and also the flow-on effects into other areas such as agriculture and human health.

Support for framework building and the inclusion of diseases that may impact upon environment into Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system is required.

PRIORITY ACTIONS: EXPANSION OF AUSTRALIA'S WILDLIFE HEALTH SYSTEM TO INCLUDE WILDLIFE DISEASES THAT MAY IMPACT UPON ENVIRONMENT

Strategies for identification and management of exotic and endemic wildlife diseases that could impact upon Australia's biodiversity and environment must be developed and integrated into Australia's current wildlife health biosecurity framework.

There are opportunities to quickly and easily build upon existing structures. **Expanding the activities of Wildlife Health Australia, whose current focus is trade and agriculture, to include a focus on diseases of wildlife that may impact upon the environment and biodiversity is the obvious solution.**

Utilising existing structures, complementarity rather than redundancy or competition, and the need to engage the states and territories in meaningful ways need to be considered. Failure to do so leaves gap area in the Strategy for Nature and Australia exposed.

SUMMARY

Australia's Strategy for Nature is a great initiative. However, disease as a threat to biodiversity and environment does not appear to be mentioned or identified in the Strategy. We suggest that this be addressed by considering its inclusion under **Objective 7: Reduce threats to nature and build resilience**. Wildlife Health Australia is well placed to help with delivery of the Strategy in this area, especially under **Objective 10: Increase knowledge about nature to make better decisions** and **Objective 11: Share and use information effectively**. Please let us know if and when we can assist.

RELEVANT TECHNICAL INFORMATION SUPPORTING OUR COMMENTS OR PRIORITY ACTIONS

Jones KE, NG Patel, MA Levy, A Storeygard, D Balk, JL Gittleman, P Daszak (2008) Global trends in emerging infectious diseases. *Nature* 451:990-995.

McFarlane R, A Sleight and T McMichael (2012) Synanthropy of wild mammals as a determinant of emerging infectious diseases in the Asian–Australasian region. *EcoHealth* 9(1):24-35.

ABOUT WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) is the peak body for wildlife health in Australia and operates nationally. The head office is located in Sydney, NSW.

WHA activities focus on the increasing risk of emergency and emerging diseases that can spill over from wild animals and impact on Australia's trade, human health, biodiversity and tourism. We provide a framework that allows Australia to better identify, assess, articulate and manage these risks. We provide the framework for Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system.

Our mission is to develop strong partnerships in order to better manage the adverse effects of wildlife diseases on Australia's animal health industries, human health, biodiversity, trade and tourism.

WHA directly supports the Animal Health Committee (AHC), Animal Health Australia (AHA), the Animal Health Policy Branch and the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (OCVO) within the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) and Australian governments in their efforts to better prepare and protect Australia against the adverse effects of wildlife diseases. It provides priorities in wildlife disease work, administers Australia's general wildlife disease surveillance system as well as facilitating and coordinating targeted projects. Wildlife health intelligence collected through the National Wildlife Health Information System (eWHIS: <http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au>) administered by WHA is provided to members of AHC and the Australian Government DAWR, and Departments of Health (DoH) and Environment and Energy (DoEE), on issues of potential national interest, potential emerging issues and significant disease outbreaks in wildlife. The information is provided in line with the agreed policy for data security. WHA supports the National Animal Health Information System (NAHIS) by provision of quarterly reporting and the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer by hosting the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Wildlife Health Focal Point. WHA also provides Australia's representative to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission Wildlife Health Specialist Group (IUCN SSC WHSG).

WHA is administered under good corporate governance principles. An elected management group, chaired by an appointment from DAWR, and including an AHC representative provides strategic direction and advice to a small team, which oversees the running of WHA. It is important to note that WHA involves almost every agency or organisation (both government and NGO) that has a stake or interest in animal and wildlife health issues in Australia. There are over 40 member organisations and more than 700 wildlife health professionals and others from around Australia and the rest of the world who have an interest in diseases with feral animals or wildlife as part of their ecology that may impact on Australia's trade, human health and biodiversity.

More information on WHA is available at: <http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au>.