Australian Government
Department of Agriculture

Plant health surveillance

The plant biosecurity surveillance system: how responsibility is shared and coordinated

June 2019

Work to protect Australia from new plant pests and diseases, while still allowing trade to flow, begins at the negotiating table of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) in Rome, where international standards for surveillance are set.

Measures to protect Australia's plant health then extend across the oceans to activities in our geographical region and at our borders, with strict conditions on imports and checking of passengers, cargo and mail.

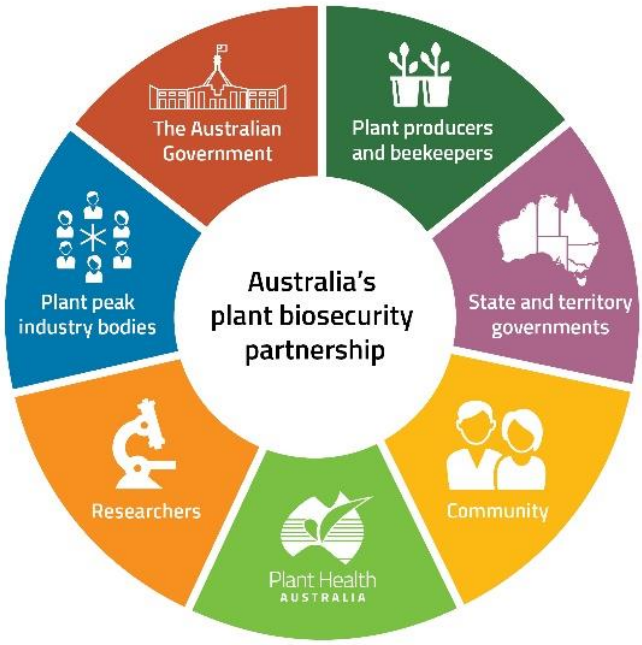
Within Australia, surveillance is conducted and data gathered in our states and territories, farms and forests, cities and towns, in the bush and by the sea.

Due to the complexity and scale of plant biosecurity surveillance in Australia the system can only work effectively with cooperation between all of the stakeholders involved — government, industry groups, growers, researchers, environmental groups, and the community.

The Australian Government has responsibilities under international agreements and the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, and state and territory governments each have their own management duties set out in legislation and in jurisdictional biosecurity plans.

Growers have a responsibility to be aware of potential exotic pests and to check their crops, and all of us in the community need to be on the lookout and report anything unusual.

Surveillance activities are increasingly being carried out in partnership to strengthen protection against plant pests, and to collect and analyse the data needed to support market access. Only by working together can we protect Australia, including our economy, our natural environment, our rural communities and our Australian way of life.



Industry-government partnerships underpin Australia's plant biosecurity surveillance system
Image courtesy of PHA

The role of governments in plant pest surveillance and how activities are coordinated

The Australian Government's role in plant biosecurity surveillance

Through the Department of Agriculture, the Australian (Federal) Government leads and coordinates surveillance activities across the biosecurity continuum—offshore or pre-border (international), at the border, and post-border or onshore (within Australia).

These activities aim to maintain and grow Australia's role in international trade, and protect the nation's industries, environment and community from the harmful effects of plant pests and diseases.

International standards underpin Australia's plant biosecurity surveillance system

The Department of Agriculture represents Australia in activities to develop and implement international agreements (phytosanitary agreements) that aim to prevent the global spread of plant pests while still allowing countries to trade. These international agreements underpin actions taken under Australia's plant biosecurity surveillance system, and set requirements that must be met by Australian producers looking to trade overseas.

Key among them is the global World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement). As an international treaty the SPS Agreement sets out the legal obligations of World Trade Organization member states such as Australia with respect to sanitary and phytosanitary measures for the protection of human, animal and plant life from pests and diseases.

Actions taken to honour these obligations are led by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)—a statutory body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, based in Rome. Recognised by the SPS Agreement as the only international standard-setting body for plant health, the majority of the IPPC's work program consists of agreeing and implementing international plant health standards (International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures—ISPMs).

As an IPPC member Australia works to build and coordinate protective measures that countries all around the world take to prevent and control the spread of plant pests and diseases.

Action is also taken on a regional basis through Australia's involvement in the Asia and Pacific Plant Protection Commission, and the Pacific Plant Protection Commission.

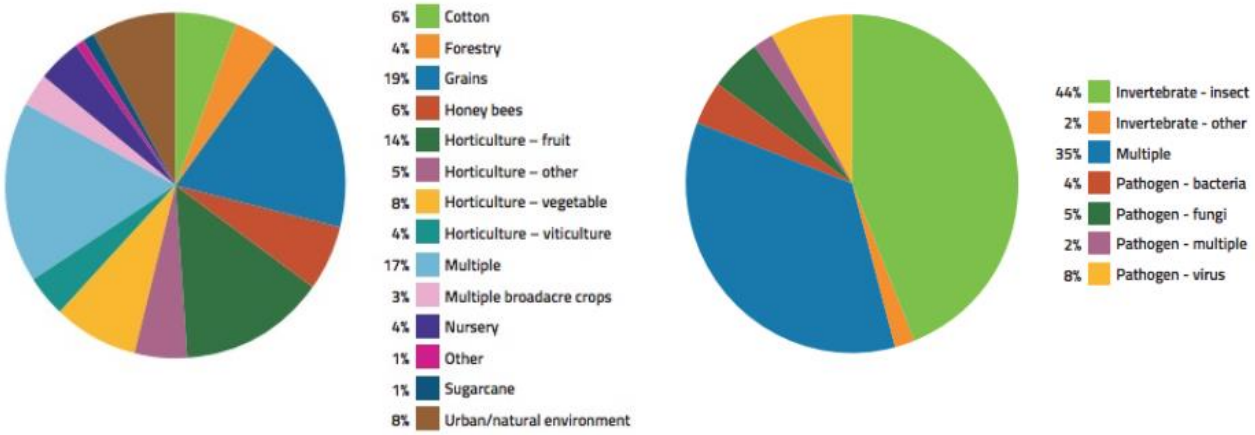
Under these international arrangements the Department of Agriculture is designated as the National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO) for Australia. In the event of an outbreak of a pest or disease that could have a potential impact on other trading nations, the department is required to report this information to NPPOs of other countries.

The department also has a responsibility to collect pest information through surveillance activities and to verify this information to support any pest status or area freedom claims, vital for market access for Australian producers.

The role of state and territory governments in surveillance

State and territory governments play a major role in Australia's plant health surveillance system by carrying out checks for plant pests within their borders.

In 2017 there were 155 surveillance programs that targeted particular pests or looked for pests in particular crops all over Australia (see graphs below). It is data from these activities that the Department of Agriculture uses to provide pest freedom information to Australia's international trading partners.



Across Australia, over 150 surveillance programs that target particular crops or particular pests are in operation. Image courtesy of Plant Health Australia

States and territories also provide essential surveillance checks when a plant pest is found and efforts are launched to eradicate it. Delimitation surveillance checks around the area to find out how far a pest has spread. If the pest can't be eradicated then ongoing surveillance is necessary to be sure that the pest doesn't spread to other areas.

Many of these eradication responses are managed and funded by government and industry partnerships under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, the legally binding agreement of which Plant Health Australia is custodian.

State and territory governments also answer calls to the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881**, the number that all Australians can use to raise the alarm if they find something unusual. Every report is taken seriously, checked out and treated confidentially.

National committees coordinate plant health surveillance activities across governments

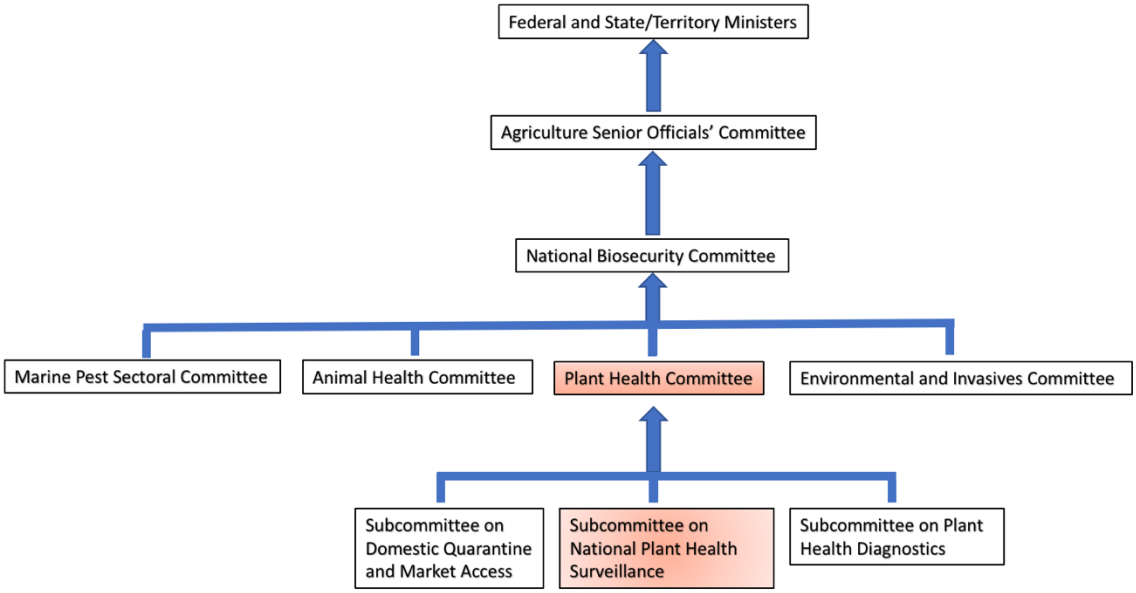
At the highest level, the coordination of biosecurity between state and territory governments and the Australian Government is guided by the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB). Since 2012, a number of significant achievements have been made against the priority areas identified in the IGAB schedules. The agreement was last reviewed in 2017, with the report *Priorities for Australia's biosecurity system* pointing the way forward.

The diagram over the page shows the national committee structure that coordinates and integrates biosecurity, including plant health surveillance activities, within Australia.

Plant Health Committee (PHC) is the peak government body responsible for maintaining or improving plant health in Australia to support the economy, environment and community. PHC is made up of Chief Plant Health Managers (or equivalent) in each state and territory and the Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer (from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture).

PHC plays a critical role in deciding which plant pests and diseases should be targeted by Australia's plant biosecurity surveillance system, with industry groups, governments and Plant Health Australia working together to combat the threat of pests, including the 'Top 40 exotic and unwanted' National Priority Plant Pests.

PHC reports its decisions to the **National Biosecurity Committee (NBC),** made up of senior Australian Government officials responsible for biosecurity, and state and territory departments. This body then reports to the Agricultural Senior Officials Committee and the various Australian agriculture ministers.



National committees oversee coordination of biosecurity activities across governments, including plant health surveillance

The Subcommittee on National Plant Health Surveillance (SNPHS) provides expert policy and technical advice on national plant health surveillance issues and ensures the continued effective operation of the national plant biosecurity surveillance system. It includes representatives from all jurisdictions, Plant Health Australia, and CSIRO, who together are responsible for steering the implementation of the National Plant Biosecurity Surveillance Strategy. SNPHS provides a mechanism for cooperation and coordination between all stakeholders involved in surveillance activities in Australia.

Since finding and identifying pests go hand-in-hand, SNPHS works closely with the **Subcommittee on Plant Health Diagnostics (SPHD),** responsible for overseeing Australia's ability to identify or diagnose particular plant pests.

The role of Plant Health Australia

In addition to the national committee structure, Plant Health Australia (PHA) plays a key coordination role in plant biosecurity in Australia, including in plant health surveillance. A not for profit company with government and industry members, PHA brings together the main stakeholders in the plant biosecurity system to agree and implement actions to protect the nation's environment and economy.

This includes developing and implementing industry specific and national strategies and programs for surveillance and diagnostics, as well as supporting national networks for surveillance and diagnostics specialists.

PHA has a key role in coordinating partnerships between government and industry such as the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program, which protects Australia's honey bees and the crops they pollinate from exotic pests. Find out more about PHA's role in surveillance at www.planthealthaustralia.com.au

National strategies and frameworks set the direction for plant health surveillance

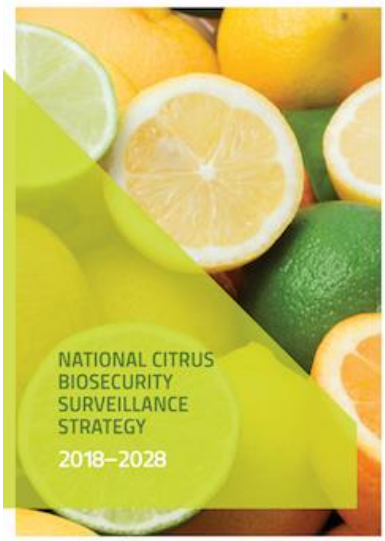
National Plant Biosecurity Surveillance Strategy to 2030

The *National Plant Biosecurity Surveillance Strategy 2013–2020* set out a vision which underpinned the reform of Australia's national plant health surveillance system in recent years. It was developed by PHA in consultation with peak industry bodies, the Australian and state and territory governments, researchers, and community and environmental stakeholders.

An updated *National Plant Biosecurity Surveillance Strategy 2020–2030* is currently under development, to guide activities for the next decade, as well a *National Plant Biosecurity Diagnostic Strategy 2020–2030*. To reflect a stronger focus on prevention a new strategy, the *National Plant Biosecurity Preparedness Strategy 2020–2030,* is also being developed.

Plant Health Australia is also working with industry and governments to steer the implementation of the national citrus and forest biosecurity surveillance strategies, launched in 2018. Further industry specific surveillance strategies are currently under development (for grains, potatoes, temperate and tropical fruit), and these will also form part of the new strategic framework for Australia's plant biosecurity.

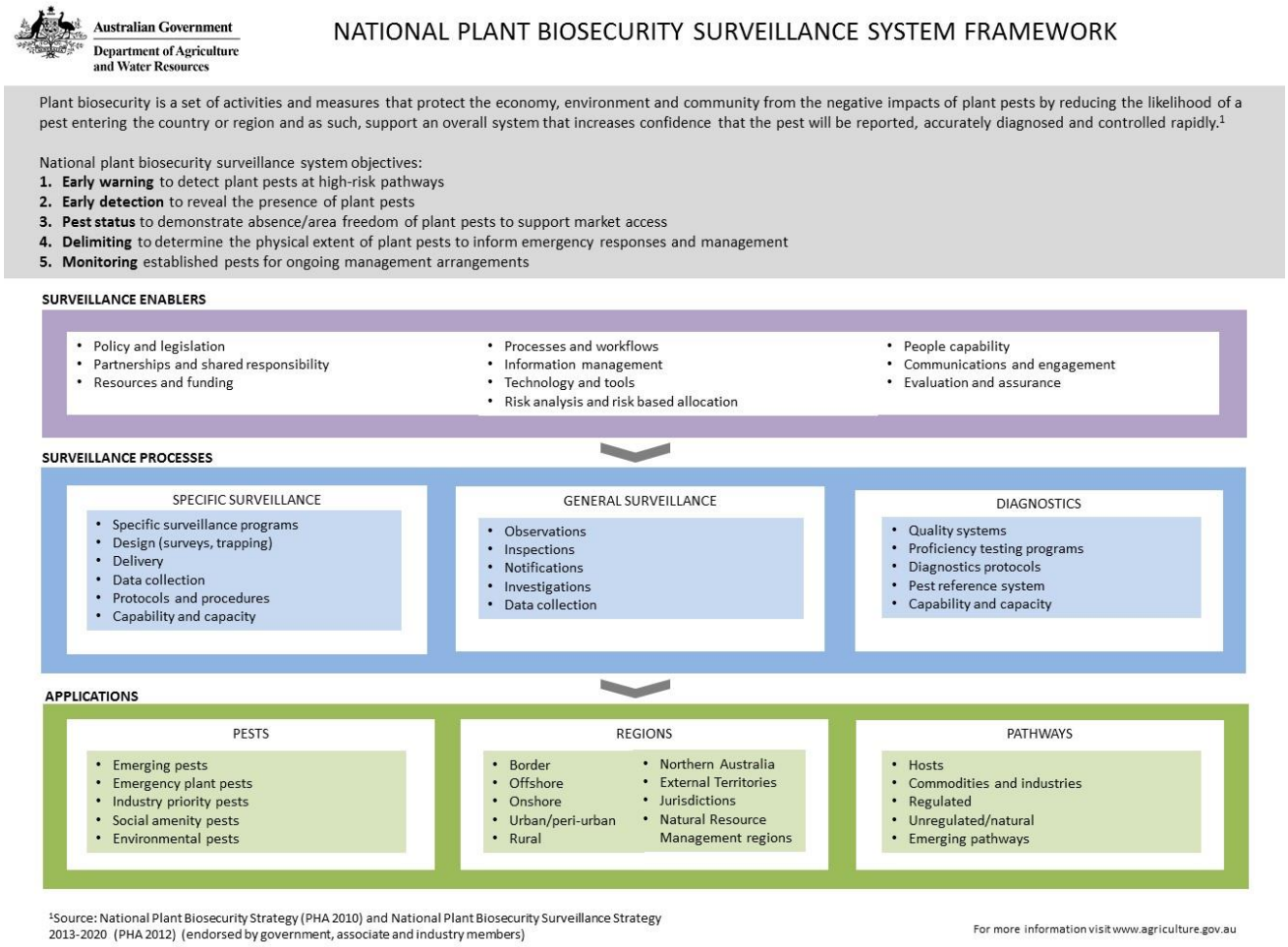
Through these strategies ,Australian governments and growers are able to work together to protect these industries from the worst threats and meet the nation's obligations under the international plant health agreements which govern global trade.



All strategies are available on the Plant Health Australia website at www.phau.com.au.

National Plant Biosecurity Surveillance System Framework

Launched in 2017, Australia's new plant biosecurity surveillance system framework was developed by the Australian Government in consultation with industry groups, researchers, environmental groups, PHA, and state and territory governments. It marks the start of a new era in Australian biosecurity.



The Framework identifies three components of the system that together protect Australia and its role in international trade:

Surveillance enablers

These underpin effective functioning of plant health surveillance. They include the IT systems, supporting policies and legislation, reporting mechanisms, sufficient trained personnel, resources and funding.

Surveillance processes

These are the surveillance activities themselves, along with necessary supporting systems to allow data gathering and pest identification. Diagnostics, the ability to quickly and accurately identify a plant pest, is a critical part of the system.

Applications

These are where the checks are made. Surveillance sites include urban as well as rural Australia, northern Australia and overseas. Surveys target types of pests, such as Emergency Plant Pests and environmental pests; and they target critical pathways where pests could arrive or spread.

Industry, growers and the community have important roles in surveillance

While governments have particular responsibilities in the biosecurity system industry members and the entire Australian community has an important role to play in finding and reporting plant pests.

Growers need to be aware of potential pest threats, and conduct crop monitoring on their farms. Records of these checks are increasingly important as general surveillance data, contributing to Australia's evidence base for continued access to overseas export markets.

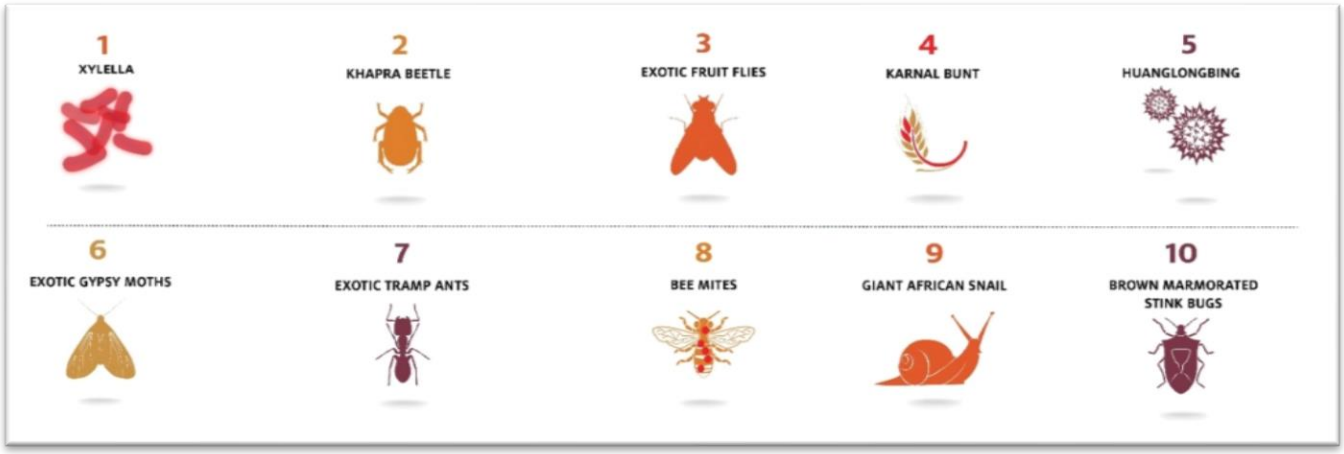
All Australians are also encouraged to keep watch for anything unusual, and to understand their legal responsibilities when travelling and moving goods into or around Australia,

Suspicions of plant pests or diseases in the backyard or on the farm can be reported confidentially to the **Emergency Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881**.

If something suspicious is found in goods, containers or parcels arriving from overseas call the **See. Secure. Report. Hotline** on **1800 798 636** to speak to specially trained officers who investigate all reports related to imported items, or you can complete the online reporting form at http://www.agriculture.gov.au/pests-diseases-weeds/report.

Many significant detections in Australia have come from someone noticing something unusual and reporting it to local authorities.

Surveys have shown that, overwhelmingly, Australians want to help. They want to know how they can protect their nation's agricultural industries and unique environment from the threat of unwanted plant pests and diseases. Governments, industry groups and Plant Health Australia work to raise awareness of plant pests in the community and among commercial growers. Campaigns have included the 'Top 40 exotic and unwanted' and 'Biosecurity Matters', information on industry websites, plus free resources and information on the Farm Biosecurity website.



All Australians are encouraged to keep watch for the nation's most unwanted exotic plant pests and diseases and report anything unusual to the Emergency Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881

Together we can keep Australia free from damaging plant pests and diseases

Where to find out more

Find out how and why Biosecurity Matters in everyday activities like shopping online and gardening at http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/biosecurity-matters

Be inspired by the winners of the Australian Biosecurity Awards
http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/australia/public-awareness/aba

Download the free Farm Biosecurity Planner from farmbiosecurity.com.au/planner or get the smartphone app from farmbiosecurity.com.au/farmbiosecurity-app.

For travelling or moving goods within Australia you can find out more about your biosecurity obligations on the Australian Interstate Quarantine website at https://www.interstatequarantine.org.au/

Plant biosecurity, the system that protects us and key pest threats: Plant Health Australia's National Plant Biosecurity Status Report is a useful resource which you can find at planthealthaustralia.com.au/npbsr

Take action against Australia's Top 40 Exotic and Unwanted Plant Pests: information and videos available on the Department of Agriculture website

Citrus growers can download their industry's national surveillance strategy from
planthealthaustralia.com.au/strategies/national-citrus-biosecurity-surveillance-strategy

Foresters can download their industry's national surveillance strategy from
planthealthaustralia.com.au/strategies/national-forest-biosecurity-surveillance-strategy.