

BIOSECURITY INCURSION RISKS AND CHALLENGES IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

When working with northern producers on their biosecurity plans, a common theme we hear is that the risk in the north is lower than the south. Whilst it is easy to feel that many parts of northern Australia are isolated from biosecurity threats, the opposite is actually the case. Northern Australia has its own key biosecurity challenges and risks – you might even be surprised by a few!

- Most of northern Australia is closer to our neighbouring countries than to the southern states of Australia. This **proximity** poses a risk of incursion of pests and diseases into the north by currents and tides, wind dispersion (particularly in the wet season) and international vessels.
- **Bird migration** is a common occurrence for large tracts of northern Australia. Migratory birds can carry exotic pests and diseases from overseas that could potentially establish here in Australia.
- As northern Australia is located mostly in the tropics, there's an increased risk from a **larger array of insect pests** that can act as vectors for transmission of diseases – particularly during wet weather.
- Northern Australia also has a wider range of **feral animals** than in the south. Every disease has a different range of species it can effect. Having a wider range of feral animals makes it more likely that the disease will also impact one or many of the feral animal species in the area.
- Even though the quantity of livestock movements in northern Australia may not compare to the large numbers of movements seen in the southern parts of the country, livestock in this region regularly **travel across much larger distances**. If a disease incursion were to occur in northern Australia, this could cause it to spread across a wider area much more quickly.
- **Extensive grazing** is actually northern Australia's greatest strength, as it lowers contact between livestock, so you might be surprised to see it on this list. However, the challenge that extensive grazing systems also face is the ability to closely monitor stock for signs of unusual disease. This can result in a delay in detection, allowing time for diseases to spread.
- The **distances to vet and laboratory facilities** in northern Australia can delay time to the detection of an incursion. These services can be many hours from properties, making collecting and testing viable laboratory samples more challenging.
- Finally, northern Australia has a number of **international air and sea ports** which are a known pathway for the potential introduction of exotic pests and diseases. The international movement of people and goods is increasing, and so too are the items captured at borders that could be harmful to Australian agriculture.



A lot of work is being done to manage biosecurity risks specific to northern Australia. It is important though that everyone plays their part in biosecurity – these risks cannot be appropriately managed by just one organisation. It is everyone's responsibility.

The Australian Government does a wonderful job at protecting our borders and they also have a team specifically working on the risks unique to northern Australia. But not all risks can be stopped at borders or before entry, so it is important that industry and producers also have strong biosecurity systems in place in the event of something entering the country. This is where producers' biosecurity planning becomes important.

If you would like more information about the biosecurity risks in northern Australia and how you may be able to strengthen biosecurity on your property, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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