

Biosecurity Incident Public Information Manual



Part 1: Public Information Policy

Version 2.0 – May 2018

**Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network**

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Authority

This manual has been prepared by the National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN). The NBCEN comprises agricultural health organisations and communication managers from Commonwealth, state and territory agencies responsible for biosecurity.

Note: Name change from National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network to National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network in November 2017.

Version control

Version	Date of issue	Author	Comments
V1.0	April 2014	Biosecurity Incident National Communication Network (NCN)	Endorsed by the National Biosecurity Committee in February 2014
V2.0	May 2018	National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network	Endorsed at face-to-face NBCEN meeting November 2017

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1 Introduction

The *Biosecurity Incident Public Information Manual* (BIPIM) enables Australian biosecurity/agricultural agencies to apply a nationally consistent communication and engagement response to biosecurity incidents.

The manual is a guide for undertaking the public information activities (referred to as ‘functions’) that are part of the [Biosecurity Incident Management System](#) (BIMS), and should be read in conjunction with that document.

BIMS is the national biosecurity incident response guide developed by the Biosecurity Emergency Preparedness Working Group and endorsed by the National Biosecurity Committee under the [Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity](#).

BIMS and the manual take an all-hazards approach that can be applied to all biosecurity incidents, including:

- animal health (terrestrial and aquatic)
- plant health
- marine pests
- vertebrate pests
- weeds
- environmental pests and diseases.

This manual guides the activities of public information personnel appointed to local control centres and state/territory and national coordination centres during a biosecurity incident. All incidents require a level of communication support, therefore BIPIM is scalable and can be used across all incidents, regardless of their level.

BIPIM has four parts:

- Part 1—contains high level policy information
- Part 2—identifies the public information functions required during a biosecurity incident and how they should be implemented
- Part 3—contains job cards specific to the public information functions and describes responsibilities, tasks, skills and knowledge required
- Part 4—contains forms and templates.

Why public information is important in a biosecurity incident

Public information is time-critical information that audiences need so they can respond appropriately during and after a biosecurity incident. Information is disseminated to, and received from, the public/communities, affected industries, the media, stakeholders and within an agency/organisation.

Timely, accurate and consistent information helps the community and affected stakeholders prevent the spread of pests, diseases and invasive species and aid containment, control and eradication efforts.

Public information also plays an important role in informing media and the public about invoked laws, such as movement restrictions and controlled quarantine areas.

Effective communication and engagement is vital in responding to an incident. In addition to assisting with the response, keeping the public informed improves the perceived effectiveness of a response and can assist with recovery. As [Bruce Esplin](#), former Emergency Services Commissioner for Victoria, said after the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009:

Communication is the critical thing and if you do not do it right you will be judged to have failed, regardless of what else you do with your fire trucks and your response.

Impacts of biosecurity incidents

Plant and animal pest and disease incursions and other biosecurity incidents can be financially and emotionally devastating to affected farmers and producers. Incidents cause crop losses, the destruction of animals, lost income and access to markets.

Some incidents can have more far reaching effects that impact on the wider community, associated industries and supply chains, and can cause damage to the environment. This was seen during the outbreak of Equine Influenza in 2007, where many people who were not horse owners or worked in the horse industry, suffered a loss of income. Examples included people employed in restaurants at race courses, and a charity organisation that supported people with a disability by providing a cleaning service for horse saddle blankets and rugs. In addition, some incidents can occur over a significant period of time having a longer lasting economic and social impact.

In the banana freckle eradication response in Darwin, backyard banana plants within certain zones were removed, causing considerable resistance from some residents who could not understand why their healthy plants had to be destroyed. Public information was a vital component of this response.

Australia's favourable export trade status is affected too, as certain diseases, when confirmed, must be reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) or the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). When this notification occurs it can trigger international trading partners to put in place bans or restrictions on affected plants, animals or associated products.

Incidents involving animals

Where animals are destroyed for disease control purposes, people can become upset, hostile and uncooperative.

During the response to the 2001 outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom, suspect animals were destroyed en masse. Extensive media coverage was given to the resulting mental health and economic issues that affected many farmers, their families and surrounding communities.

Research by the Australian Government indicates that if there was an outbreak of avian influenza H5N1, bird owners with a high emotional and financial investment in their birds are likely to hide them or go underground to avoid having their birds destroyed by authorities.

Where a disease is highly contagious and easily spread, government must provide timely, up-to-date, accurate and consistent information about the disease and its impact, the need for biosecurity measures, movement restrictions and reporting obligations. Effective information supports containment, control and eradication efforts.

Animal welfare and livestock export incidents can create community outrage and lead to the involvement of animal welfare activists. These incidents often contribute to a lack of trust in government and industry processes. Providing proactive and effective public information will provide the facts and help balance the argument.

2 Biosecurity response arrangements in Australia

Legislation and Australia's legally binding emergency response agreements (described below) support biosecurity responses in Australia. All impose certain obligations and provide powers to enable certain response actions. The frameworks that apply vary with the nature of the incident (including the type of pest or disease, where it is found, and the parties most affected).

State and territory governments have biosecurity legislation that allows actions to mitigate biosecurity risks. Commonwealth legislation, including powers under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, is available to support the states and territories where appropriate.

National response agreements

Under certain circumstances (the main conditions being that the outbreak or incursion is exotic and eradicable) the response to a biosecurity incident is carried out according to the provisions of national response agreements:

- [Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed \(EPPRD\)](#)
- [Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement \(EADRA\)](#)
- [National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement \(NEBRA\)](#).

(A deed for aquatic animal disease emergencies was being developed at the time of this BIPIM update).

In the case of the EPPRD and EADRA the agreements reflect the joint responsibility for biosecurity in Australia between governments and industries. Plant Health Australia and Animal Health Australia are custodians of the national response agreements, respectively, and will ensure that all parties adhere to their provisions.

If the pest or disease is not eradicable, as in the recent cases of Russian wheat aphid or Panama tropical race 4, the response continues, but not under the provisions of the national agreements.

The technical response to a pest or disease is guided by AUSVETPLAN for animal pests and diseases, AQUAVETPLAN for aquatic animal diseases, PLANTPLAN for plant pests and [EMPPPlan](#) for emergency marine pests. These manuals describe how the response should be undertaken to achieve containment, control and eradication.

How the communication process differs in national responses

During emergency incidents, including Emergency Plant Pest (EPP) incursions and Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) outbreaks, state and territory government agencies are responsible for the on-ground response activities in their jurisdiction. However, when an incident is under the EPPRD or EADRA, decisions about the response activities and the costs incurred, are shared between governments and affected industries.

When a response is nationally cost-shared under the EPPRD or EADRA, a state agency or industry group should not release public information in isolation of other jurisdictions, and having nationally agreed messages in place. Information must always be based on national talking points agreed by all parties participating in the consultative committee which is made up of industry and government

representatives. The NBCEN develops the national talking points and facilitates the consultation process, which is outlined later in this manual.

The committee will be either the:

- Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP)
- Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pest Incursions (CCEPI)
- Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD)
- Aquatic Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (AqCCEAD)
- National Biosecurity Management Consultative Committee (NBMCC).

The consultative committees operate in accordance with the relevant agreement (EPPRD, EADRA or the NEBRA). The parties involved will be the Australian Government, all state and territory governments and usually, one or more industries.

(Note that only those industry bodies that have signed one of these agreements can have a say in the decision making.)

The secretariats for these committees, including the NBCEN, sit within the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Public Information Managers working in a nationally cost shared biosecurity incident need to be aware of the basic provisions of the national agreements, their confidentiality and communication requirements.

Make yourself familiar with the agreements by reading through the Biosecurity OnLine Training ([BOLT](#)) courses developed by PHA and AHA:

- [PHA Foundation](#) – a summary of the plant biosecurity system and the EPPRD.
- [National EPP Response Management](#) – covers the purpose of the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests and the National Management Group, the roles and responsibilities of PHA members, and the decision making process in an incident.
- [EAD Foundation Online Course](#) – the online course provides livestock producers, veterinarians, veterinary students, government personnel and emergency workers with foundation knowledge and the EADRA.

Biosecurity Incident Management System

BIMS is the nationally agreed standard used to guide the management of responses to biosecurity incidents. It is based on established incident management systems used throughout Australia, including the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS). BIMS can be used across all biosecurity sectors.

BIMS was developed to enhance preparedness and consistency of response arrangements across Australian jurisdictions under the [Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity](#), Schedule 7 (Figure 1) (endorsed by [COAG](#) on 12 January 2012). The BIPIM provides detailed information about the public information functions stipulated in BIMS.

Figure 1 Biosecurity Incident Management System functions

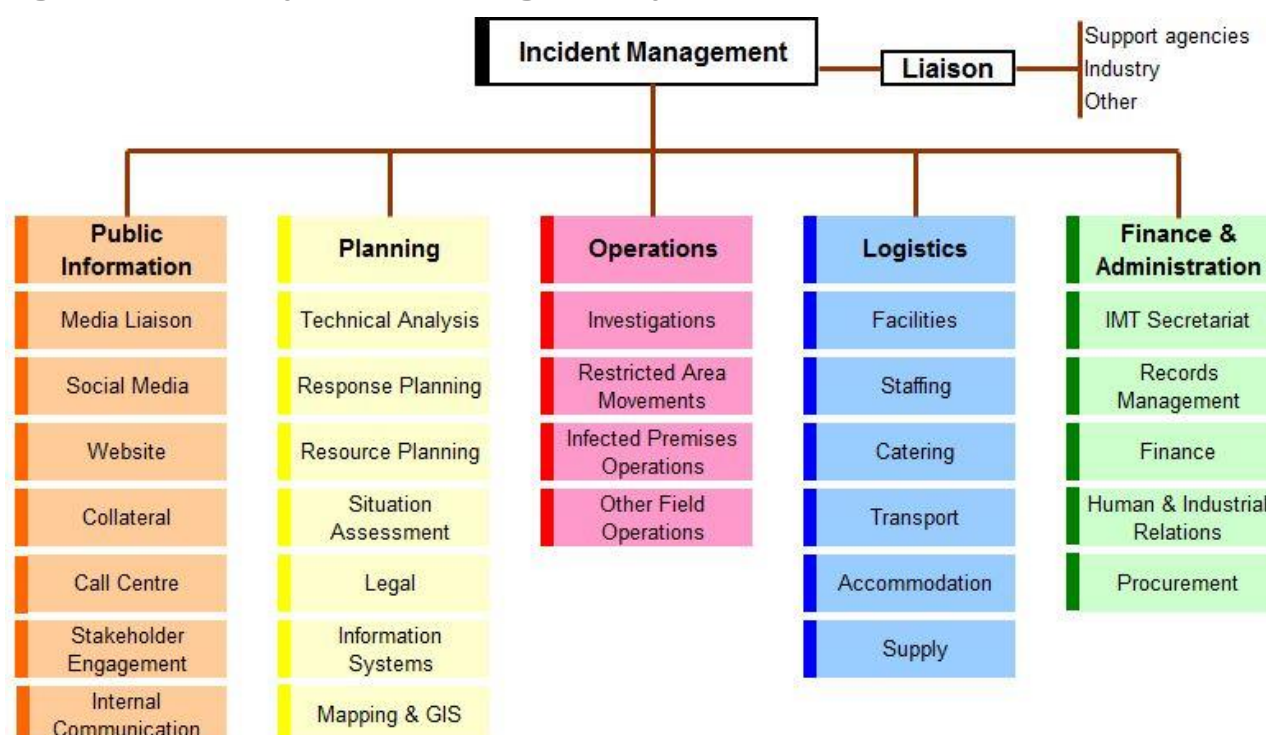


Figure 1: The structure of an Incident Management Team that comes together to respond to an incident is based on BIMS. Set up at Local Control Centre, State Coordination Centre and National Coordination Centre.

Public information, also known as public relations or public communication, is the management of public information and perceptions. Under BIMS, this function is primarily responsible for interacting with the affected people including industry, the general public and media to provide and receive incident-related information.

Classification of biosecurity incidents

Under BIMS, biosecurity incidents are assigned an appropriate level of coordination, resources and support:

- Level 1—local response managed by local resources, with little or no external support
- Level 2—local or regional response, with some support coordinated by a state or territory agency
- Level 3—state/territory-wide response with a fully operational State Coordination Centre and Local Control Centre(s) and possibly assistance from outside the jurisdiction
- Level 4—one or more jurisdictions are involved in managing the response and a National Coordination Centre is established to coordinate nationally available resources
- Level 5—one or more jurisdictions are involved in managing the response and a National Coordination Centre is established to coordinate national and international resources.

See Section 2.6 in [BIMS](#) for more information about incident classification levels.

When a biosecurity incident occurs, an Incident Manager or Controller is appointed who assembles a team of a size capable of managing the incident. Any personnel appointed must already possess the

necessary skills, knowledge and preferably experience to carry out the duties of the role. Roles are described in more detail in Part 3 of the BIPIM.

Irrespective of the level of incident response within a jurisdiction, the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources will deal with national issues such as biosecurity risks at the Australian border (incoming passengers, mail and cargo) and international trade issues.

Phases of biosecurity incidents

The Public Information function will be required through each phase of the response to a biosecurity incident:

- investigation and alert
- operational
- stand-down.

The Public Information function will also apply during the recovery from a biosecurity incident. Recovery can begin at any stage during the response and may continue once response activities have concluded. This is consistent with BIMS.

3 National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network

The National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN) is the national group tasked with producing and disseminating nationally consistent public information in response to animal, plant, and other biosecurity incidents.

Regardless of incident level, the NBCEN can be used to coordinate the public information response nationally. The NBCEN will circulate media releases, talking points and other public information material across jurisdictions to ensure consistent messaging.

During a biosecurity incident the NBCEN:

- reports to and provides strategic communication advice to the relevant technical consultative committee or National Management Group
- develops (where required) a national communication and engagement strategy for agreement by the relevant technical consultative committee or National Management Group and oversees its implementation
- ensures that national media and communication procedures for biosecurity incidents are activated and implemented accordingly
- explains policies, plans and practices to all stakeholders clearly, consistently, openly and quickly
- facilitates the flow of information between jurisdictions (related to public information activities)
- provides experienced public information officers to other jurisdictions (where available and/or necessary)
- ensures the key principles of crisis communication are upheld throughout a response to a biosecurity incident.

Figure 2 NBCEN's relationship with industry and consultative committees

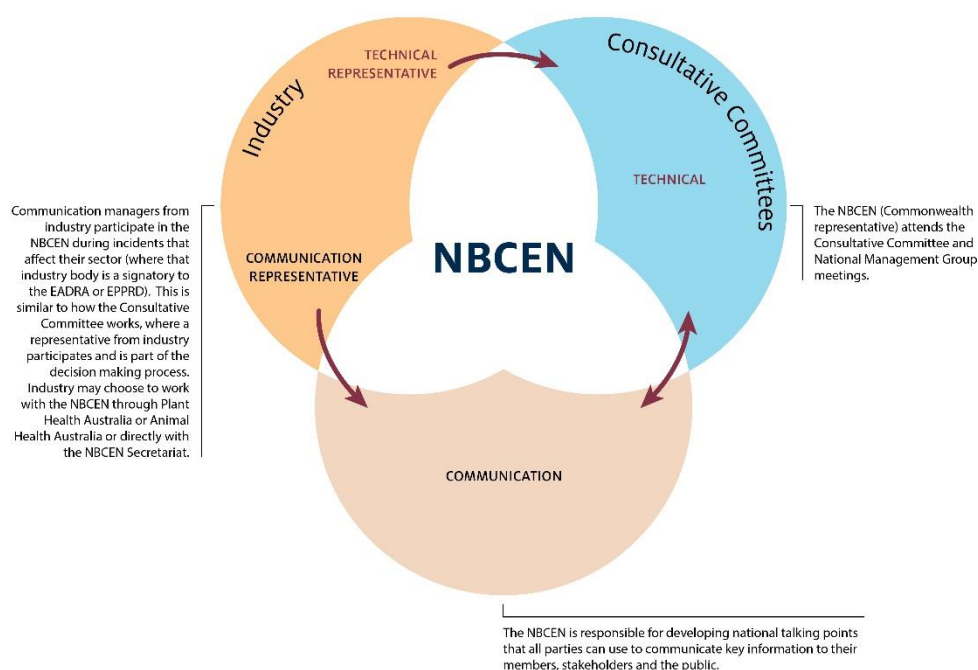


Figure 2: Diagram showing relationship of the NBCEN with the consultative committee and industry representatives.

NBCEN membership

The NBCEN is chaired by the Senior Executive Service officer responsible for Communication in the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. The NBCEN's core membership comprises relevant communication managers from:

- Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- state and territory agriculture departments or biosecurity agencies
- Animal Health Australia
- Plant Health Australia
- CSIRO (Australian Animal Health Laboratory)
- the Australian Government Department of Health
- the Australian Local Government Association.

Wildlife Health Australia and the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions are NBCEN observers.

Note that plant and livestock industry representatives as well as National Farmer Federation's state representatives will be invited to attend face-to-face meetings in their region to present and engage with NBCEN members.

The NBCEN chair may also invite communication managers or liaison officers from affected industries and/or organisations to participate in NBCEN meetings held in response to a biosecurity incident, including:

- industries affected by the incident
- other relevant Australian, state or territory government agencies
- national/state farming organisations
- non-government environmental organisations
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand
- the Australian Food and Grocery Council
- the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority.

Where an organisation does not have a communication manager, the president, CEO or relevant executive of that organisation should participate in the NBCEN during the response to the incident.

How the NBCEN works with the Public Information function

The NBCEN interacts with the Public Information function in each of the state/territory national coordination centres and the national coordination centre.

Investigation and alert phase

The NBCEN representative in the affected jurisdiction contacts the NBCEN chair to discuss whether it is necessary to notify other jurisdictions or to call a meeting of the NBCEN.

Operational phase

When an incident affects only one state or territory, the combat jurisdiction's Public Information function develops draft talking points and a communication and engagement strategy for the incident response. The NBCEN representative in the State Coordination Centre will share this material with the NBCEN.

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (as the National Coordination Centre) performs a national coordination role during incidents that affect more than one jurisdiction. The Public Information function in the National Coordination Centre is responsible for developing and coordinating national communication materials and activities. The NBCEN chair (in the NCC) will activate and coordinate the activities of the NBCEN.

The NBCEN chair (or their representative) attends the technical consultative committee and National Management Group meetings. Following these meetings, the national talking points (and where necessary a national communication and engagement strategy) are developed (or updated) by the NBCEN. A communication or liaison representative from affected industry groups are invited to participate in the NBCEN for incidents that affect their industry. (As per the consultative committee, the industry group must be signatory to EPPRD or EADRA). In large, widespread incidents, the NBCEN should meet after each consultative committee meeting so they can be updated on the direction of the response and action any specific requests.

Note: an agreed and documented process is in place for developing national talking points. Any enquiries received in relation to international trade and market access considerations, as well as international border operations, should be directed to the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Stand-down phase

If during the investigation and alert phase the pest or disease is proven not present, the NBCEN stands down.

If an incident moves from the operational phase into the stand-down phase, the NBCEN finalises involvement with a debrief to record what worked well and what lessons will help the next response.

If containment, control or eradication of the pest or disease is not possible, the consultative committee and the National Management Group may decide to transition to a management program. The NBCEN may be asked to develop a communication strategy that explains to stakeholders the reason for the decision and maintains consistent messaging between the jurisdictions.

Recovery phase

The NBCEN must continue to meet, as appropriate, to review communication strategies and messaging for the recovery phase. This ensures that messaging remains consistent in each jurisdiction and is useful to the people requiring assistance.

4 The Public Information function

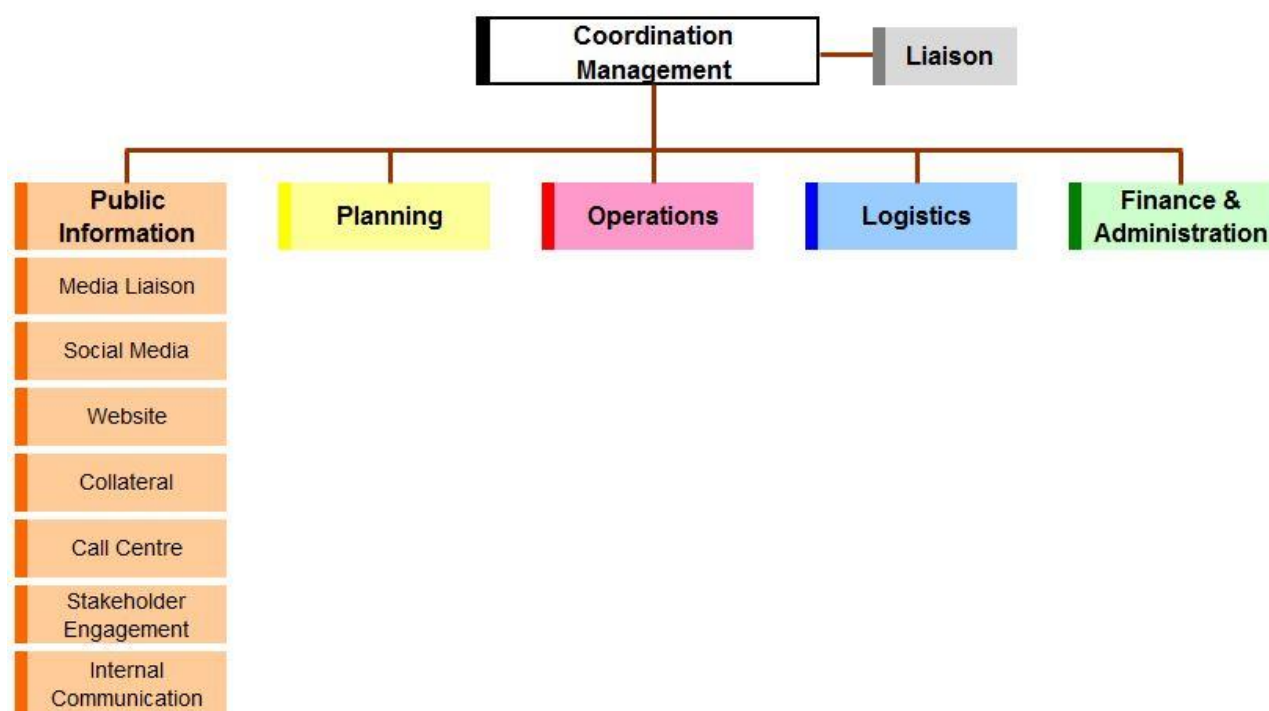
In the event of a biosecurity incident, the Public Information function is responsible for the management of public information generated and received by the incident's control or coordination centre. This includes information from and for those affected by the incident, businesses, the general public and media.

The public information function may be established in a Local Control Centre (LCC), State Coordination Centre (SCC) and National Coordination Centre (NCC), depending on the size and complexity of the incident. Local or regional incidents may not require the entire public information suite and staff can take on multiple roles. However, all eight functions will need to be well resourced for larger incidents.

- Public Information Management
- Media Liaison
- Social Media
- Website
- Collateral
- Call Centre
- Stakeholder engagement
- Internal Communication

Depending on the scale of the incident, each jurisdiction or organisation may choose to add public information functions as required. Other functions might include content matter expert, reporting officers and someone dedicated to liaising with the Minister's office or attending to ministerial or departmental correspondence related to the incident (e.g. emails from the public).

Figure 3 Biosecurity Incident Management System Public Information function



Public information objectives

The following are general objectives for the public information function in a disease or pest outbreak. These can be adapted to be incident-specific to:

- raise awareness about a pest or disease outbreak within affected industries and communities. This aims to garner support for eradication activities and minimise social and economic impacts so the community can move into the recovery phase as soon as possible.
- provide detailed and relevant information that enables affected industries to identify the disease; encourages surveillance and reporting.
- provide affected industry stakeholders with communication tools and detailed information about necessary on-farm biosecurity practices, to help contain the pest/disease and avoid spreading it further.
- provide specific, targeted information to organisations that are in contact with affected stakeholders along the supply chain; this could include information such as financial assistance, interstate movement restrictions and so on.
- provide information to the community, with a focus on those who come into contact with affected stakeholders.
- ensure industry and stakeholders are informed about biosecurity response processes, such as tracing, testing and surveillance, and are up-to-date and reassured in relation to the overall progress of the response.
- maintain community support for the affected industries to minimise economic impacts.
- coordinate information from other government agencies to address wider community issues resulting from the impacts of the pest/disease.
- coordinate information across jurisdictions, including through the Australian Government, particularly where an incident spans more than one jurisdiction.

Responsibilities

In general, the public information function is responsible for managing the following key activities within or across the functional areas listed above:

- External communication collateral such as advertising, media, websites, all printed materials and social media.
- Stakeholder engagement including liaison and coordination with peak bodies, and other key stakeholders such as importer and exporters, on public information matters including working closely with industry liaison officers.
- Community engagement including mobile community information offices, call centres, community forums, information booths
- Internal communication which involves informing staff in the broader department or organisation. This would include those staff who are not involved in the response..
- Communication policy and processes such as design and style guides, approval processes, and publishing templates.
- Inter-government liaison and coordination on communication activities, particularly in the case of a multi-jurisdictional response. This will generally be coordinated through NBCEN.
- Reporting and issues management including providing reports and intelligence gathered through public information activities to inform operations and planning functions. Also coordinating processes to ensure emerging issues in the public information arena are swiftly addressed.

Please refer to the *BIPIM Part 2: Public Information Operations* for more information related to each function.

5 Evaluation and review

Incident response evaluation

It is a standard practice that incident responses are evaluated. All relevant BIMS functions, including Public Information, will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness and identify where improvements can be made. Lessons identified from the response should be shared through the NBCEN to help bolster the experience and knowledge base of all jurisdictions facing biosecurity incidents.

Review and update of the manual

BIPIM should be updated by the NBCEN after an incident where improvements are identified and agreed upon.

Alternatively, the BIPIM will be reviewed by the NBCEN every two years.