

**Fourth Meeting  
Geneva, 10-14 December 2007**

**Meeting of Experts  
Geneva, 20-24 August 2007**

Item 5 of the agenda

**Consideration of ways and means to enhance  
national implementation, including enforcement  
of national legislation, strengthening of  
national institutions and coordination among  
national law enforcement institutions**

**BIOSECURITY–PROTECTION FROM THE RISKS POSED BY  
ORGANISMS TO THE ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND  
PEOPLE’S HEALTH THROUGH EXCLUSION,  
ERADICATION AND CONTROL**

Submitted by New Zealand

1. New Zealand presents its perspectives on the risks posed by a major disease outbreak which could put at risk the well-being of its agricultural system, its people, the environment, the economy of the country and the quality of life of all who live inside its borders<sup>1</sup>. New Zealand is of the view that an effective biosecurity regime is an essential component in efforts to combat bioterrorism.
2. Biosecurity has been a critical aspect of the New Zealand government administration for well over 100 years. Previously referred to as agricultural security, it was intended to safeguard the national agricultural system from mainly microbial diseases prevalent in the northern hemisphere but also found in the flora and fauna of all continents.
3. It is now seen in the widest possible sense, as an all embracing whole of New Zealand attempt to protect the land, its people, animals, agriculture, and the economic, social and environmental well-being of all entities. Diseases common in most countries are not found in

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<sup>1</sup> The agricultural sector provided around 66% of New Zealand’s exports in 2005 (horticulture, forestry, viticulture, and normal farming including dairying, beef and lamb). This sector – minus forestry – produces around 5% of New Zealand’s GDP.

New Zealand. The dominant theme of the governmental organisation Biosecurity New Zealand<sup>2</sup> is to maintain the integrity of the country by strict border controls on the importation of materials which might contain micro-organisms in any viable form, and could compromise the integrity of the country and to manage these risks if there is a breach.

4. A comprehensive national biosecurity strategy was developed in 2000. The components it incorporated include:

- (i) Government and public commitment to biosecurity;
- (ii) Capacity and capability to identify, prevent and manage biosecurity risks and threats;
- (iii) A co-operative and consultative approach to identifying biosecurity risks;
- (iv) Government and stakeholder partnerships to ensure adequate funding for biosecurity activities (these include central, regional and local government, importers/exporters, industry, community groups [farmers, horticulturists, service industries], tertiary and science institutions, pest management companies);
- (v) Clear accountabilities for biosecurity;
- (vi) A legislative framework that meets New Zealand's biosecurity needs;
- (vii) Ensuring that exotic biosecurity risks are managed off-shore where practicable;
- (viii) Consistent assessment of biosecurity risks across and within organisations with responsibilities for biosecurity;
- (ix) Consistent application of cost-effective risk-mitigating measures for identified risks;
- (x) Communication programmes that increase the public's awareness, understanding and ownership of biosecurity;
- (xi) Biosecurity research that meets New Zealand's needs; and
- (xii) Ensuring that relevant international biosecurity obligations are met.

5. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is the principal owner of the strategy but works in conjunction with other ministries including Health, Fisheries, Conservation, Environment, Police, Immigration, and those involved in emergency response. Close liaison with the international human and animal health authorities (WHO and OIE) is a critical element of the strategy. Key components are the meeting or surpassing of the agreed international standards for human and animal health and having these recorded. Also, a close liaison is required with counterpart authorities in the main geographically adjacent countries, and with the main partners in agricultural trade.

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<sup>2</sup> The fisheries industry is a separate entity, although for biosecurity purposes is now (2007) being embraced within Biosecurity New Zealand. It is relevant when considering the growing aquaculture sector – salmon, shellfish, crustacean, and other developing farming of pelagic fishes.

6. Agriculture and Health ministries conduct exercises on a regular basis, as an ongoing assessment of their procedures and capabilities. Most recently, the Ministry of Health co-ordinated a four-day exercise in May 2007 which tested New Zealand's ability to manage an influenza epidemic based on an equivalent virus to the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus, H5N1. This was a whole of New Zealand exercise involving the entire country from national emergency responders including border management, to local authorities, industry, schools and airlines.

7. Another system test comprised an effective response to a hoax in 2005, possibly by graduating university students, purporting that foot and mouth disease had broken out on an off-shore island in New Zealand. This incident was dealt with by the agricultural authorities and crisis management procedures as though it was a real outbreak. On reflection, it was a useful real-life scenario, putting to the test all of the emergency procedures. The cost to the country of a real outbreak would, however, be enormous. We note that the outbreak of FMD in 2001 in the United Kingdom led to between 6.5 and 10 million animals being destroyed and cost as much as GB pounds 8.5 billion.

8. Biosecurity New Zealand now integrates biosecurity and the Ministry of Agriculture's quarantine service. It brings together its competency to ensure that policy development, risk assessment, standard setting, and operational functions meet the needs of New Zealand. The strategy is constantly being assessed to ensure that in today's changing world it meets all needs. In this context it would include the ability to respond to terrorist threats or events where biological agents, their toxins or their genetic sequences are used.

9. Surveillance is a key element of the New Zealand biosecurity strategy. A current example is looking for avian influenza (AI) viruses in domestic farmed birds including broiler and layer poultry, and other avian industries. This is part of a general surveillance and monitoring reporting system with a targeted surveillance of commercial birds. In addition, surveillance testing of wild birds for AI viruses has been conducted on a regular basis since 1975 and continues.

10. New Zealand is regarded as a low risk country for AI. New Zealand has no migratory ducks or geese – the main reservoir of AI in the wild. (Our resident population move around the country but are not migratory in the global sense of bird migration.) Testing for a range of exotic diseases including AI (predominantly by cloacal swabs, with occasional blood samples or nasal swabs) is also carried out on those birds that do migrate. These are predominately small waders (godwits, wrybills) which migrate to Alaska and Siberia to breed in the northern hemisphere's summer. Dead birds reported by the public are also regularly tested. Highly pathogenic AI has not been found and neither has the current H5N1 subtype.

## **Conclusions**

11. Biosecurity needs awareness, vigilance, incursion response, and sound and effective management procedures, backed by legislation, transparency and commitment.

12. Bioterrorism can be dealt with under an effective biosecurity umbrella.

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