

2019-20 Declared Pest Rate consultation



In accordance with the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management (Declared Pest Account) Regulations 2014, the Minister for Agriculture and Food carries out consultation on Declared Pest Rates, to be considered prior to the rates being determined and gazetted.

Consultation has closed, and Declared Pest Rates for 2019-20 were published in the [WA Government Gazette](#) on 9 July 2019.

See below for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's response to the submissions received.

The consultation period was open from Monday 20 May until 4pm, Wednesday 19 June. The department used a number of channels to raise awareness of the consultation period:

- Personally addressed letters to over 15,000 landholders
- Public notice in the West Australian, Farm Weekly, the Countryman, and 17 regional newspapers
- Regular and targeted Facebook posts both before and during the consultation period
- Ministerial media statement on 20 May
- Department media statement on 21 May
- Email to key stakeholders

264 submissions were received. Across all 13 RBGs proposing a rate, this represents a response rate of 1.31% from 20,188 landholders. A full statistical summary is available.

Issues raised in the submissions received have been grouped into four main themes – equity and fairness, RBG model, RBG governance, and administration. Responses to each theme are provided below.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) thanks those who took the time to submit comments. Submissions were considered carefully, and provided useful feedback for both DPIRD and Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs).

The annual consultation is a valuable process to enable the Department and groups to gauge landholder perception. This information will be used to make improvements to community engagement, the processes of developing and delivering RBG operational plans, as well as monitoring their performance.

Department response to issues raised

Equity and fairness

The submissions indicated respondents consider the RBG model unfair and inequitable. They objected to being required to pay for work on someone else's land when they manage or control pests and weeds on their own land or don't have declared pests or weeds on their land.

These comments suggest these respondents don't see value in paying a Declared Pest Rate and/or don't fully understand the RBG model.

Response

Success of the RBG model is dependent on landholder participation through engagement processes. Individual pest control efforts can be wasted if not done in a coordinated manner and this is largely the role of RBGs.

The degree of landholder support varies between groups however the common theme is that all groups develop their priorities through engagement with landholders. Groups then develop programs aimed at supporting landholders to manage those priorities, for example wild dogs, foxes, feral rabbits or cotton bush.

The effectiveness of RBGs is substantially dependent upon landholder participation. A well organised group with significant government and other partner organisation support is not assured of achieving targeted control outcomes without effective landholder participation.

The department understands that in some areas of the state, participation is known to be low. The Department will continue to work with the RBGs to help them increase engagement with stakeholders, to communicate operational plans, to seek increased participation, and represent value for money in their efforts to ensure pest and weed management is coordinated across communities and landscapes.

Recognised Biosecurity Group model

There was a landholder perception that the RBG model is a cost shift, that pest and weed management is a government responsibility, that there is a lack of engagement and confidence in RBGs, with a preference for the previous government-led model.

Although, a large number of submissions showed good support for the RBG model with respondents seeing value in a community led, landscape scale approach to pest management and paying a rate to achieve this.

Response

Individual landholders are required under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 (BAM Act) to control declared pests on their land. However, established pests that cross tenure require a coordinated approach for effective management.

A coordinated approach requires participation by all land managers including Local and State Government. RBGs work with government agencies to ensure they are involved in a coordinated response to priority declared pests. RBGs do not replace an individual's responsibility - rather they add value to what individuals are required to do as land managers.

The Department will work with RBGs to reinforce that pest management can be challenging for individual landholders when the species is widespread, and is best addressed when the community, industry and government work together. In line with the principle of shared responsibility, and to support landholders meet their obligations under the BAM Act, the WA Government matches all funds raised via the Declared Pest Rate - doubling the amount available for each RBG for use in their area.

Governance

A number of respondents expressed concern with their RBG's operational plans. They were not confident that priorities in pest and weed management were being addressed and that insufficient funding was being directed to on-ground control activities. Group planning and engagement are relevant to addressing this issue.

Response

Declared Pest Rates and matching WA Government funding are used to implement RBG operational plans for the control of targeted priority declared pests. Because the RBG model is a community based model, deciding on the priority pests that the rates will be spent on is done through the RBG. Groups provide a number of opportunities for landholders to have input. If ratepayers want a greater say they are encouraged to contact their local RBG direct.

Accountability and a transparent process is important to build and develop trust. Therefore, expenditure on delivering operational plans is detailed in RBG annual reports and audited financial statements, which are submitted to DPIRD, placed on the DPIRD website and tabled at the RBG's own Annual General Meetings (open to the public).

Some RBGs might allocate funds to on-ground control when they determine there is a need to support landholders, such as managing large volumes of pests that cross tenures across large areas.

Although RBG activities are always intended to complement landholder efforts – never to replace them. Where landholders don't have the skills or motivation to carry out pest management, RBGs may instead allocate funds to activities other than on-ground control, such as training and education. The circumstances for each RBG vary, and therefore their activities will not be the same.

Administration

The Department received several queries for incorrect property details, issues with multiple Value Entity Numbers (VENs), and incorrect addresses.

Response

Incorrect addresses are being followed up. The Department will adjust records as required to ensure future recipient address issues are minimised.

Summary

The department will provide each RBG with a summary of the main issues for their operational area that were raised in the submissions received, and work with them to address concerns.

The RBG model is based on a community coordinated and led approach, which is nationally recognised, and is successfully used to effectively manage widespread and established pests. This approach provides an opportunity for landholders and groups of landholders to form community groups (that can become RBGs), to identify and manage those pests that most affect enterprises and the environment particular to their region.

The RBG model does not replace a landholder's (including Local, State and Commonwealth Government land managers) obligation to control declared pests under the BAM Act. The success of a RBG is dependent on landholder participation.

To increase landholder involvement, the Department will continue to help RBGs improve their engagement and consultation, and planning and governance processes. The Department will also continue to provide regulatory assistance to RBGs through enforcement actions to support voluntary landholder compliance in accordance with group operational plans.
