

**Subject:** Notification 2023/028 - Risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade - Australia response [SEC=OFFICIAL]  
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**From:** Ollerenshaw, Rhedyn  
**To:** UNOG-UNEP-CITES Info, Thea Henriette Carroll  
**CC:** Wildlife Communications  
**Attachments:** Notification 2023-028 - mesures to address zoonotic disease risk and wildlife trade - Australia response.pdf

Dear Secretariat, Dear Thea

I'm pleased to submit Australia's response to Notification to the Parties 2023/028 - Risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade (attached). We hope this will be helpful in the implementation of Decision 19.15.

Kind regards

Rhedyn

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Dr Rhedyn Ollerenshaw  
Assistant Director | Policy and International Engagement  
Wildlife Trade Office  
CITES Management Authority of Australia  
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water | [dcceew.gov.au](http://dcceew.gov.au)  
Ph: 02 5156 3738  
Mob: 0481 141 487  
E: [Rhedyn.ollerenshaw@dcceew.gov.au](mailto:Rhedyn.ollerenshaw@dcceew.gov.au)

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## **Australia's response to CITES Notification to the Parties 2023/028 - Risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade**

Australia supports a global approach to addressing the high-risk interactions between humans and wildlife that give rise to zoonotic pandemics and addressing their environmental drivers such as urban encroachment and wildlife habitat loss. Protecting native wildlife and ecosystems is also critical to pandemic prevention, with increasing potential for disease emergence as climate change and land use changes put pressure on our environment. Taking a One Health approach to preventing future pandemics of zoonotic origin is essential.

Australia has well-regulated [biosecurity](#) and [wildlife trade](#) systems in place under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, *Export Control Act 1982*, *Imported Food Control Act 1992* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. These work together to protect Australia's animal, plant, environment and human health status. Investing in research and new ways of understanding and detecting risks, sharing international resources and intelligence, and continually reviewing risk settings helps prevent the introduction, establishment and spread of pests, weeds and diseases in Australia. The use of surveillance and monitoring of the highest risk areas is critical along with border control activities, which focus on managing potential biosecurity threats at airports, seaports and mail centres.

This response is a policy level overview and not detailed technical response. As is likely the case across many countries, the below information is not exclusively related to the implementation of CITES but is certainly of relevance.

2. *Measures to be reported on could include inter alia:*

a) *definitions adopted relating to zoonoses;*

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), and Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC) have drafted the following definition for the purposes of the national priority zoonotic disease list:

*“A zoonosis is any disease or infection that is naturally transmissible between animals and humans. Animals thus play an essential role in maintaining zoonotic infections in nature. Zoonoses may be bacterial, viral, fungal, parasitic or prion, and may be transmitted directly between animals and humans or via food. Vector-borne infections are considered zoonotic in Australia if there is an animal host present outside of controlled settings such as laboratories or zoos”.*

c) *synergies with appropriate national and international animal and public health authorities that have been developed and strengthened; and*

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has increased investment in the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) to support the implementation of a global work program aimed at addressing the risks of future zoonotic disease spillover events occurring from trade in wildlife, including the development of guidelines to mitigate the risk of spillover events occurring throughout the wildlife value chain.

DAFF and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the agency in which the CITES Management, Scientific and Enforcement Authorities sit) have also strengthened liaison, communication and collaboration on issues associated with the drivers of emerging diseases and disease risks associated with the wildlife trade.

- d) *strategies developed to identify and reduce the risk of transmission and spillover of zoonotic diseases and pathogen emergence from traded wildlife, including inter alia:*
- i) *assessment of risks associated with sources of traded wildlife specimens and associated wildlife support chains especially from areas or involving species known or suspected to be exposed to or linked to potentially harmful pathogens;*
  - ii) *testing wildlife specimen in trade, including in markets, and associated wildlife supply chains for pathogens, taking into account known or suspected pathogen infection risks;*

The Australian government is committed to coordinated global action and support for countries to mitigate the pandemic risks posed by practises within wildlife wet markets and along the wildlife supply chain, including a phasing out or cessation of practises where risks of spillover events emerging cannot be sufficiently mitigated.

Australia has implemented a One Health Surveillance initiative, led by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) in collaboration with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEW), Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC) and Wildlife Health Australia (WHA). The 'One Health surveillance initiative' was designed to *"Enhance Australia's wildlife health surveillance and intelligence program to better protect wildlife and support global and national One Health outcomes, including zoonotic pandemic prevention"*. The initiative will do this by:

- a. improving the capability of the wildlife surveillance and intelligence system to identify potential zoonotic or other disease risks emerging from wildlife
- b. improving capacity to investigate significant wildlife disease (or health) events aimed at identification of the underlying causes, including to determine their relevance to human, livestock/domestic animal and environmental health
- c. establishing a 'One Health Investigation Fund' to which provides support to a national criteria-based process for timely and thorough field, laboratory and epidemiological investigation into selected wildlife disease events via relevant multisectoral collaboration
- d. establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with feral animal disease experts
- e. expanding mutually beneficial wildlife health related partnerships to other key stakeholders, including, but not limited to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- f. improving the consideration of wildlife health in the development of human health, conservation and livestock and agricultural policies (including disease prevention and response arrangements) and promoting a better understanding of wildlife health as a basis for healthy populations of human, domestic animal and livestock populations and resilient ecosystems
- g. providing an evidence base upon which to support decision-making on immediate or longer-term actions necessary to maintain animal, human and environmental health.

The Australian Government has also established an Australian Human Animal Spillover and Emerging Diseases Scanning (HASEDS) Group; an endorsed initiative of the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer within DAFF; the Australian Chief Medical Officer within DHAC; and the Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer within DAFF (collectively known as the Chiefs).

- The key purpose of the group is to deliver a multi-sectoral, genuine 'One Health' national approach to the scanning and assessment of new, emerging and re-emerging disease risks, with potential for human-animal interspecies transfer that could create significant threats to

public and animal health in Australia, and/or significant damage to community wellbeing, livestock economies, wildlife or the environment.

- The group will provide information to the Chiefs on these risks, based on technical risk assessments that will inform Australia’s prevention, preparedness and risk mitigation activities.

Given that support for zoonotic prevention starts with the health free-ranging populations (prevention at source), a key element of Australia’s approach preventing zoonotic disease emergence includes is the national wildlife health surveillance system which includes testing for diseases in wildlife populations in Australia. In relation to this surveillance "wildlife", is inclusive of managed and unmanaged populations of native and feral free-ranging animals as well as captive wild animals. Further text about the national wildlife health surveillance system is provided below.

- iii) containing or mitigating pathogen spillover from specimen known or suspected to be infected, including in markets, or associated wildlife support chains;*
- iv) organization, monitoring, administration of the abovementioned matters; and*
- v) building institutional capacity, including capacity for inter-agency collaboration (for example between agencies tasked with wildlife management, veterinary and public health, trade regulation, and CITES Authorities), as required to implement the abovementioned matters.*

#### *Australian Government agencies*

The Australian Chief Veterinary Officer, Chief Environment Biosecurity Officer, Chief Plant Protection Officer, Threatened Species Commissioner work together and regular communicate across matters (e.g. [Three Chiefs newsletter](#)). The Australian WOAHP Focal Point for Wildlife, Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and Australian CITES Management Authority work together and regularly communicate on matters of wildlife trade and health.

#### *Veterinary authorities and law enforcement (including wildlife trade law enforcement)*

Wildlife trade law enforcement collaborate and work in partnership with the veterinary authorities in relation to the following activities:

- clearances at the border (import and exports)
- applying quarantine (imports)
- ensuring compliance of permits (imports and exports)
- border and post border seizures
- euthanasia, appropriated disposal, testing for diseases, quarantine, re-housing illegal seizures (coming into the Country, specifically species that are endangered / higher conservation value, ongoing compliance)

Veterinary authorities and law enforcement in Australia also undertake joint simulation exercises, joint trainings and workshops and Joint investigations (poaching, poisoning, mass mortality events). Veterinary authority and law enforcement draw on the capacity, expertise and regulatory/enforcement authority of the other as required.

#### *Committees*

The [Animal Health Committee \(AHC\)](#) delivers strategic policy, technical and regulatory advice, and national leadership on animal health and biosecurity matters. Committee members include the chief veterinary officers (CVOs) of the Commonwealth, states and territories, along with representatives from the CSIRO Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (formerly Australian Animal Health Laboratory), the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Observers include representatives from Animal Health Australia, Wildlife Health Australia, and the New Zealand

Ministry for Primary Industries. Observers are invited by the AHC Chair to participate at committee meetings in an advisory or consultative capacity, and do not have voting rights.

The [Environment and Invasives Committee \(EIC\)](#) is responsible for providing national policy leadership on the identification, prevention and management of invasive plant, vertebrate and invertebrate species that adversely impact the environment, economy and community. Membership is comprised of representatives from the Australian state and territory primary industry and environment departments. Representatives from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Plant Health Australia, Animal Health Australia, Wildlife Health Australia, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, and the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions are observers on the committee.

### *Wildlife Health Australia*

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) is the national coordinating body for wildlife health in Australia. It is a not-for-profit association initiated by the Australian Government and is funded through a cost-share model with the Australian Government and all state and territory governments, with significant in-kind support from other stakeholders. WHA focuses on the health of free-ranging populations of wild animals and the possible impacts on Australia's animal and human health, natural environment, biodiversity, and economy.

WHA has more than 650 members, including wildlife health professionals, wildlife carers, private practitioners, institutional representatives from national, state and territory departments of agriculture, human health and environment, universities, zoos, hunting groups, conservation groups and other industries and diagnostic pathology service providers. Australia's WOAHA Focal Point for Wildlife is within WHA and provides support to Australia's WOAHA Delegate.

WHA's activities include:

- coordinating national wildlife disease surveillance programs and focus groups
- managing Australia's national database of wildlife health information
- organising and providing national communication about wildlife disease and emerging incidents
- participating in the development of regional and national strategies for wildlife health emergency preparedness and response
- facilitating, monitoring and supporting field investigations of disease incidents
- advancing education and training in wildlife health
- publishing fact sheets about diseases of national importance in wildlife
- providing information about wildlife health to the community.

WHA administers Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system in partnership with government and non-government agencies, which monitors the health of wildlife (inclusive of native, feral and captive wild animals) to detect the emergence of new or exotic diseases which may have the potential to impact on human health, biodiversity, domestic animals, trade and tourism.

- Key elements of the [national wildlife disease surveillance system](#) include a network of coordinators reporting into a [web-enabled national database \(eWHIS\)](#) that captures wildlife health information. This network includes WHA coordinators (agriculture) and environmental government representatives in each jurisdiction, coordinators at zoo wildlife hospitals, sentinel veterinary clinics, universities, the Australian Registry of Wildlife Health,

the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy and the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP) as well as representatives from the Australian government.

- This system recognises that wildlife health surveillance and disease incident response is particularly challenging and complex, with activities requiring coordination across jurisdictions, as well as across multiple agencies, departments, organisations and industries.
- A key element of the system includes representatives from the jurisdiction's agriculture (veterinary services/biosecurity) agencies as well as the environment agencies in promotion of collaborative links in the investigation and management of wildlife health.
- General wildlife health surveillance system reporting focuses on the following categories: nationally notifiable animal diseases; diseases listed by WOA; biodiversity diseases; public health and zoonotic diseases; poisoning events; mass or unusual mortality events; and diseases considered unusual, interesting or emerging.
- Surveillance information captured through national wildlife disease surveillance system supports Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, DAFF, DCCEEW, Animal Health Committee (AHC), Animal Health Australia, and Australia's states and territories to better prepare for and protect Australia against the adverse effects of wildlife diseases.

### *Support for Indo-Pacific region*

DAFF has engaged with WHA to establish a WOA-recognised Collaborating Centre for Wildlife Health risk management for the Indo-Pacific region with a focus on drivers of disease emergence. The proposal will support the region to achieve improved outcomes for wildlife health, which has significant flow on effects to positive health and food security outcomes and the wellbeing of human and animal populations. In these increasingly interconnected and complex systems, the accessibility and availability of wildlife health data is more important than ever to provide decision-makers with greater clarity and ability to navigate collaborative solutions that contribute to the health of their populations. This collaborating centre will support WOA and its member countries by:

- enhancing and promoting the rapid sharing of wildlife health and biosecurity intelligence by building trusted networks,
- supporting veterinary, wildlife and public health authorities and related organisations to better protect and manage wildlife health,
- strengthening multisectoral and interdisciplinary coordination and collaboration in capacity building to improve wildlife health outcomes.

### **Additional resources that may be useful**

1. [National Wildlife Biosecurity Guidelines](#). These guidelines provide the best practice biosecurity measures for those working with Australian wildlife. The guidelines are intended for all people who work (or interact) with wildlife including wildlife managers, researchers, veterinarians, carers and others. All organisations which work with wildlife are encouraged to use the information in these guidelines to assess their own biosecurity risks and to develop and maintain an optimum level of biosecurity for their operations.
2. [National Zoo Biosecurity Manual - ZAA website](#). Developed by veterinary leaders and advisors within the Australian zoo industry to document best practice biosecurity measures currently being adopted by the zoo industry.
3. [National Guidelines for Management of Disease in Free-ranging Australian Wildlife](#). Provides a practical document outlining the science of wildlife disease management and describes what options might be available to manage wildlife diseases in an Australian context. The focus of the Guidelines is on management options for disease in native wildlife at a population level and are intended for use by anyone involved in management of a disease in Australian wildlife. The

Guidelines emphasise that wildlife disease management should be undertaken as a multidisciplinary, collaborative effort, with input from a wide range of experts and stakeholders including Indigenous people.

4. [Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan \(AUSVETPLAN\)](#). Contains the nationally-agreed approach for the response to emergency animal disease incidents in Australia, and include considerations in relation to wildlife and public health. The following are of relevance:
  - a. Enterprise Manual Zoos
  - b. Guidance document Risk-based assessment of disease control options for rare and valuable animals
  - c. Wild Animal Response Strategy
5. [Emergency Wildlife Disease Response Guidelines](#). The guidelines draw from the AUSVETPLAN framework and provide a high-level document for guiding the management of an emergency wildlife disease response in Australian native animals.
6. [Communicable Diseases Network Australia \(CDNA\) Series of National Guidelines \(SoNGs\)](#). Provide nationally consistent advice and guidance to Public Health Units to help them respond to notifiable diseases using best practice and include reference to wildlife as appropriate.
7. [Approved arrangement guidelines - Wild game meat](#).
8. Final report: Importation of captive non-human primates - review of import conditions. <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/policy/risk-analysis/animal/captive-non-human-primates>
9. Animal import risk analyses. <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/policy/risk-analysis/animal>
10. [Sustainable harvest of marine turtles and dugongs in Australia - A national partnership approach](#).
11. [Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production of Wild Game Meat for Human Consumption](#).
12. Game Meat Processing standards and guidelines. <https://www.primesafe.vic.gov.au/licensing/meat/game-meat-processing/standards-and-guidelines/>
13. Wild Game Meat Harvesting Guideline. <https://www.primesafe.vic.gov.au/uploads/Publications/Game%20Harvester%20Guideline%20January%202021.pdf>