

# Hon Colin Holt MLC

Member for South West Region

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Via email: [env@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:env@parliament.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Swinbourn

## **Petition No. 160 – Biosecurity levy imposed on residents of Boyup Brook**

Thank you for the invitation to provide a written submission regarding the bio-security levy issue raised in Petition 160 and tabled on 18 August 2020.

The community is extremely disappointed with the lack of consultation prior to the levy being imposed, do not support the levy, and are angry about the heavy handed demand for payment issued by the Office of State Revenue.

The *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act*, which this Rate Assessment Notice comes under, was introduced into Parliament in 2007. There has not been a review of the effectiveness of the levy to date, with QON 6076 – March 2020 confirming a review is not due until 2023. I do note however the Minister has indicated a review of the Biosecurity legislation will be undertaken next year.

While the Recognised Biosecurity Group process works well for much of the State, especially the pastoral areas where it was modelled on the old 'zone control authorities', there is still uncertainty on its effectiveness in the Agricultural and South West regions. Those biosecurity groups who have well developed processes for engaging with their stakeholders, and have been effective in this engagement, seem to be going from strength to strength.

The principle of government matching funds with industry/community on a dollar for dollar basis is sound, provided all stakeholders are supportive of the investment and action plans.

Three main issues have emerged in the process of securing a biosecurity levy for the Blackwood Biosecurity Group.

1. **Consultation** – the level of consultation with those required to pay the levy has been less than satisfactory. Despite notices in the local paper and invitations to forums, the level of interest was low and it was not until ratepayers received a rate notice were they even aware of the levy. According to the DPIRD Declared Pest Rates 2019-20 Consultation outcomes, those who did respond to the survey were overwhelmingly against the levy process. In the Blackwood region only 5.5% of respondents were supportive, with 82% not supportive and 12.5% neutral.



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The Minister signed off on the levy, despite a very low level of effective consultation with those affected, and an extremely low acceptance rate. It appears there is no threshold of consultation required, only that the Minister must be satisfied that some occurred.

2. Memorial on land title – a notice threatening legal action or the lodgement of a memorial against the land title of anyone who refused to pay the levy was issued by the Office of State Revenue. Whilst this appears to be standard practice for the non-payment of rates, it would appear to be a significant over-reaction for this levy, especially for a pensioner living on a small town block.
3. Significant impact of pests on Crown land - The Blackwood region has significant areas of State Forest, many of which border farming properties. Landowners in the region actively manage feral animals and weeds on their properties, and invest heavily in addressing issues. The Boyup Brook Shire conducts one of the State's most successful and coordinated fox shoots, and farmers regularly deal with feral pigs and weeds. There is the strong view that many pests multiply in State owned forests with little being done to control their spread.

There seems little doubt the objectives and motives of the Blackwood Biosecurity Group are sound and have resulted in good work done by many volunteers in the region. This petition is in no way undermining their commitment to the region or devaluing the work they do, but does highlight the attitude of the community towards being forced to pay a levy.

Many in the broad-acre agricultural sector in particular are aggrieved they are already spending significant resources on their own properties to deal with pests and weeds, and feel there is little 'value-add' from funding another group. This is the same sentiment expressed by landowners in the Boyup Brook area.

The original plan for the Blackwood Biosecurity Group was to have four Shires involved – West Arthur, Boyup Brook, Bridgetown and Nannup. Of these Shires, Nannup argued the case to not be in the RBG, and was apparently exempted. Boyup Brook Shire argued very strongly to not be in the RBG but to no avail. This inconsistency in the application of the rate aggrieved many in the Boyup Brook Shire, including the Shire itself, who have been very active in their opposition to the rating.

If consultation is to be authentic, the results need to be taken into consideration when making a decision. The very low rate of support for the levy should have been sufficient to either abandon the process or trigger further consultation and awareness raising. There should be some threshold of community acceptance before the Minister is able to implement a compulsory levy on all properties, including small town based residences.

There is no denying the serious and negative impacts on rural properties caused by declared pests. Any partnership agreement between landowners and the State Government should be properly negotiated with all parties satisfied the arrangement is fair and equitable. This current levy does not fall into this category so should be withdrawn without penalty for those who have refused to pay.

Further consultation, investigation and planning is needed for all parties to determine the most effective and strategic methods of working collaboratively towards the eradication of declared pests.

Yours sincerely,



Hon. Colin Holt MLC  
Member for the South West