

# **Submission to Review of Australia's international development policy**

by

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## **1. My background**

I am a former Australian Inspector-General of Biosecurity (2016-2019), Executive Director with NSW Agriculture (1997-2006), and NSW Chief Veterinary Officer (1989-1996), and have served on the boards of Animal Health Australia and of the Cooperative Research Centres for Invasive Animals, Weeds, Beef, Sheep, Cotton and Rice.

I also led a number of veterinary capacity-building projects in Indonesia focused particularly on development of sustained capacity to improve control of serious zoonotic diseases, such as rabies, anthrax and brucellosis, and to prepare for transboundary disease incursions.

I am also the NSW coordinator for the Crawford Fund, which promotes the benefits to Australia and developing countries of agricultural research and development, and strengthens food and nutrition security by supporting Australians training developing country scientists and farmers, and young Australians developing their careers and volunteering abroad.

Due to my background and experience, I will focus in this submission mainly on the need for Australia to share and further develop its expertise in biosecurity with developing countries, particularly our near neighbours, for mutual benefit, using past examples. This is only a subset of the many compelling reasons for maintaining or expanding a strong and positive development assistance program.

## **2. Biosecurity for food security, economic growth and poverty reduction**

Helping developing countries protect their human populations, agricultural production and environments from the ravages of diseases and pests is a critical underpinning for increasing social stability and economic prosperity, which in turn can increase global security overall.

The current coronavirus epidemic shows the importance of countries having good medical systems, from trained doctors and nurses to diagnostic and research capacity, reporting systems and emergency response capability. It also profoundly illustrates the massive economic impacts on travel and trade that an outbreak can have, and the need for early detection and response to minimize these impacts where possible. Australian contributions to multilateral agencies like the World Health Organisation are essential for global health programs and initiatives that can facilitate this. Bilateral programs with developing countries can also be immensely helpful, especially when maintained long-term to develop capacity progressively, as the global health security system is only as good as its weakest link. Coronavirus also shows the importance of a One Health approach, looking at transmission of diseases from wild or domestic animals to people.

Serious animal and plant diseases and pests can be a huge constraint to food production, causing poverty and misery especially to smallholder farmers who produce half the world's food. This can impact particularly on women, and in turn on children through stunting and lack of education, which then creates a long burden of poverty into the future. Failure to control these diseases and pests also creates risks of their entry to Australia via travellers or trade.

Australia has kept out, eradicated or effectively managed some of the world's worst animal and plant diseases and pests, and its enviable biosecurity status and trading reputation would be damaged by their entry. An incursion of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) could cost Australia \$50 billion over a decade. As with human health, developing offshore human capacity, infrastructure and systems to prevent, detect, eradicate or effectively manage these diseases and pests is critical, and by working with developing countries to do this, Australia strengthens its own defences. It also allows Australians to gain experience in confronting exotic diseases and pests, improving awareness and preparedness for possible incursions.

Australian contributions to the CGIAR Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centres foster global improvements in agricultural research, many of which have major benefits to Australia. For example, in relation to biosecurity, Australia benefits from access to new disease-resistant crop germplasm that allows us to prepare for incursions of cereal rusts that could devastate our grains industry. Wider benefits from access to more productive varieties are enormous.

### **3. Impacts of some past Australian aid programs**

#### **FMD eradication support**

Australia assisted Indonesia and later The Philippines to eradicate FMD, thus providing major economic benefits to both countries and reducing risks to Australia by pushing the disease further offshore. Australia has continued to work with larger multilateral partners to assist in bilateral and multilateral projects to control FMD in south-east Asia.

- Indonesia implemented an FMD eradication program in 1974, supported by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) providing \$8 million for FMD vaccine, vehicles and vaccinating equipment as well as the services of consultants and advisers for field control of the disease. Indonesia achieved FMD freedom without vaccination in 1986, the first country in the world to eradicate FMD by vaccination rather than 'stamping out', which would have been devastating for smallholders.
- The Philippines began a national plan to eradicate FMD in 1996, island by island, supported by Australia and facilitated by FAO, in response to a major epidemic spreading through pigs. The country was finally declared free from FMD without vaccination in 2011.

#### **Indonesian veterinary capacity development**

A series of Australian-funded projects from the late 1970's to the present progressively supported the development of laboratory and field veterinary capacity throughout Indonesia, especially the eastern islands, underpinning domestic and larger-scale livestock production expansion. A network of field animal health posts was developed,

allowing provision of vaccination and other veterinary services to smallholders, and animal disease surveillance through a stronger veterinary laboratory service.

Junior government and university staff undertook postgraduate studies in Australia and subsequently progressed, becoming key senior leaders with major technical, policy or implementation roles over the years. Indonesia was able to improve its management of key diseases such as anthrax and rabies, and its exotic disease preparedness, while Australia gained access to reliable offshore disease monitoring data through the North Australian Quarantine Strategy for early warning of disease risks. This approach also fostered enduring friendships and understanding between the two countries.

### **Governance and institution strengthening**

Although the countries are very different, Australia's assistance to Indonesia in setting up a transparent voting system has arguably contributed to its rapid progression to a vibrant democracy with remarkably trouble-free elections with quick and verifiable results.

## **4. Current activities**

For a tiny budget, the Crawford Fund supports a wide range of small but targeted training activities mainly in the Asia-Pacific region.

For example, in the field of plant health and crop production, senior eminent scientists are supported to mentor junior staff in the Lao PDR, to develop their ability to conduct field and basic laboratory investigations and link them with international scientists for broader and deeper understanding of the pathogens, pests and systems that are constraints to food production, and to trial low-cost management strategies. The semi-retired scientists who are freely providing their time also mentor young Australian volunteers who gain tremendous experience by working in developing countries. Australian researchers gain access to new pathogens and pests which enables better diagnostic tests to be developed here. This in turn supports food production both here and overseas.

Broader Crawford Fund-sponsored training programs on topics such as soils management have wider applicability, such as leading to projects sharing Australia's experience of salinity management with Vietnamese workers in the Mekong delta, where salinity is an increasing problem. Crawford Masterclasses on topics such as Research Management and Communications are also run, for mid-career research managers from the Asia-Pacific.

ACIAR's recent launch of the Meryl Williams Fellowship to foster female leadership in agriculture in the Indo-Pacific region shows the value of inclusive, well-targeted programs that will have long-lasting benefits – a tiny vignette of the wonderful work that ACIAR supports, which should be expanded not cut.

## **5. Future implications**

The progressive decline in the quantum and proportion of GNP for Australia's international development budget is not in the national interest, due to the many problems besetting our neighbouring countries that may spill over to this country. Increasing global population pressures causing climate, food and water security issues,

as well as placing greater trade and travel burdens, are key drivers of these risks, and assisting our neighbours with strategic short-, middle- and long-term management of them is prudent, though not cost-free.

The examples given above illustrate the value of long-term targeted investments in key countries and areas of mutual concern, reducing risks, building capacity and increasing goodwill – ‘doing well by doing good’. Development assistance is an insurance policy as well as a good deed.