

Media release

Rapid response needed to rein in biosecurity outbreaks



Scientists are investigating how Australians can respond more quickly and strategically to biosecurity outbreaks.

Presenting at the upcoming *2010 Global Biosecurity Conference*, Dr James Bennett from the University of Western Australia said in the past, surveillance programs for pests and diseases of crops had been developed in an ad-hoc manner, on a case-by-case basis.

He said a rapid response was crucial to minimising the costs and impacts of outbreaks.

“The key element for rapid response is an effective surveillance strategy.”

“When a new harmful plant pest or disease is discovered, a rapid and accurate response is needed because as the organism spreads, the cost of management escalates and the likelihood of eradication quickly declines,” Dr Bennett said.

“Once an outbreak has been detected an assessment of the organism’s potential to spread in the environment where it has been found needs to be carried out immediately.”

Dr Bennett said historically Australia had been reactive rather than proactive in developing response programmes.

“When an incursion occurs, there is often little information about how far the invading organism will spread in the new landscape.”

“In some cases it may be possible to use historical data from a different site with similar climatic and environmental conditions to parameterise a simulation model; however, this is rarely the case.”

“Where there is little available data about the potential size of an incursion, expert knowledge is invaluable.”

The project being carried out by Dr Bennett and his colleagues will result in a list of questions to ask experts about an invading species, which will enable all available spread-related information to be quickly gathered.

“The gathered information will then be used to accurately forecast the spread and to make better decisions about how to best respond to the incursion.”

Understanding the risks of potential biosecurity issues will form the basis of the Threats and Impacts stream of the *2010 Global Biosecurity Conference* to be held in Brisbane from February 28 – March 3 2010.

The conference is a partnership event between the CRC for National Plant Biosecurity, Australian Biosecurity CRC for Emerging Infectious Disease and the Invasive Animals CRC.

The *2010 Global Biosecurity Conference* is sponsored by: the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC); the Australian Centre of Excellence for Risk Analysis (ACERA); and the Australian Government’s Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS).

Registrations for the conference are now open. Visit www.globalbiosecurity2010.com

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