

The Auditor-General provides assurance to Parliament on the accountability and performance of the Victorian Public Sector. The Auditor-General conducts financial audits and performance audits, and reports on the results of these audits to Parliament.

On 19 August 2015, the Auditor-General tabled his performance audit report, *Biosecurity: Livestock*.

19 August 2015 | Biosecurity: Livestock

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Overview

An effective livestock biosecurity system is crucial.

The audit found:

- diminished capacity to detect, prepare for and respond to livestock disease threats
- increased risk of delays in detecting outbreaks.

Urgent attention is needed to address lost capacity.

A photograph showing two individuals in a farm setting. One person, wearing a white lab coat and a face mask, is holding a small pig. The other person, wearing a full-body white protective suit and a hood, is also wearing a face mask and appears to be examining the pig. The background shows a wooden structure and some hay.

An effective livestock biosecurity system is crucial to international trade, public health and animal welfare.

Overall this audit found that there is:

- diminished capacity to detect, prepare for and respond to livestock disease threats, and
- an increased risk of a major disease outbreak going undetected until it has become established.

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Background

- Victoria's advantageous biosecurity status provides significant benefits.
- Exotic and other emergency animal diseases are a major threat to Victoria's livestock industries.
- Measures to prevent or detect diseases at an early stage provide the greatest return on investment.
- Livestock biosecurity is jointly managed by:
 - Commonwealth Government
 - state and territory governments
 - livestock industries
 - private veterinary practitioners.



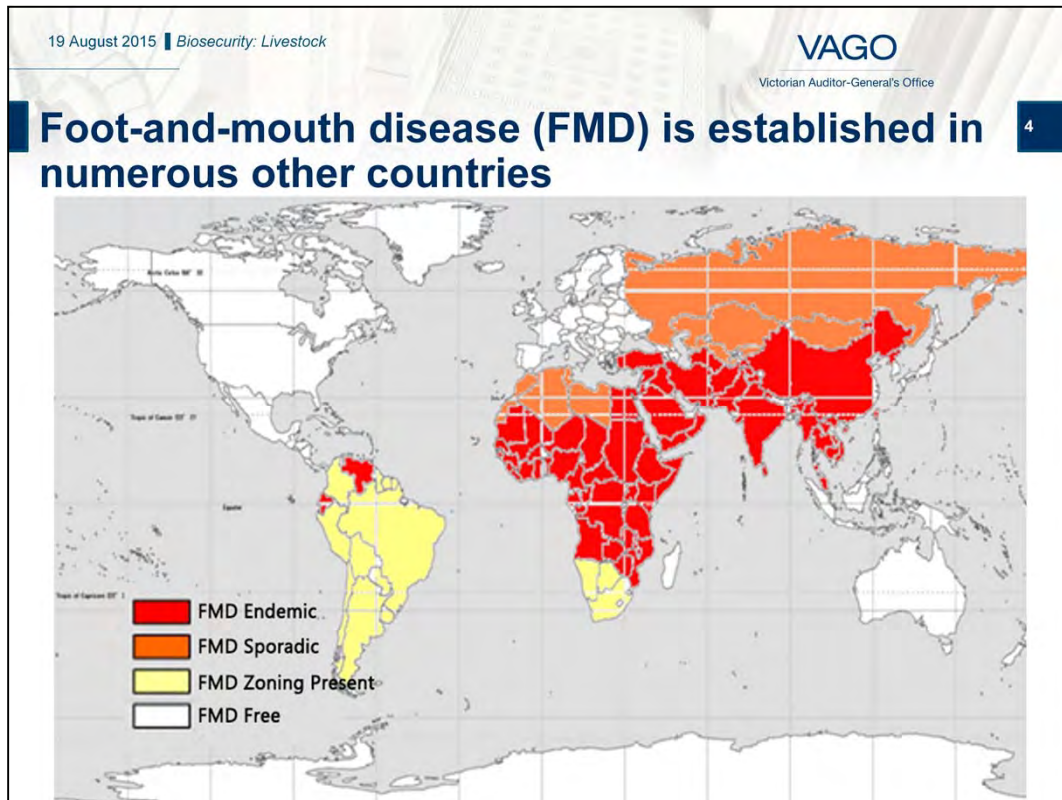
Victoria remains free of many pests and diseases. This has provided its agricultural industries with a significant competitive advantage and helped maintain access to premium export markets.

Biosecurity measures also provide significant public health benefits. This is because a number of animal diseases can be transmitted to humans. These are known as zoonotic diseases.

Despite Victoria's advantageous, animal biosecurity status, exotic and other emergency animal diseases remain an ever-present threat to Victoria's livestock industries.

The most cost-effective livestock biosecurity measures focus on preventing or detecting diseases at an early stage, rather than containing established diseases.

Livestock biosecurity is jointly managed by the Commonwealth government, state and territory governments, livestock industries and private veterinary practitioners.



The map on this slide shows that while Australia is free of foot and mouth disease, FMD is established in numerous other countries. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences estimates that the impact of a large scale, multi-state outbreak of FMD on Australia's economy would be \$52 billion over a 10-year period.

The risks posed by FMD highlight the importance of an effective biosecurity system to prevent and prepare for this highly infectious disease, as well other emergency livestock diseases.

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Focus of this audit

Key areas examined

- Activities to prevent the establishment of livestock diseases, including those that are zoonotic.
- Arrangements for responding to a serious livestock disease outbreak.

Audit scope

- Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport & Resources (DEDJTR)
- Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Focus on exotic and other emergency livestock diseases

The audit assessed the effectiveness of Victorian biosecurity practices that relate to livestock disease management, including:

- activities to prevent the establishment of livestock diseases, including those that are zoonotic
- arrangements for responding to a serious livestock disease outbreak.

The audit focused on the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) as the nominated control agency for animal disease threats in Victoria. It also included the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which is responsible for managing zoonotic livestock diseases from a human health perspective.

The audit focused on exotic livestock diseases such as FMD, avian influenza and equine influenza, as well as other emergency diseases, such as anthrax.

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Outbreaks well managed but small in scale

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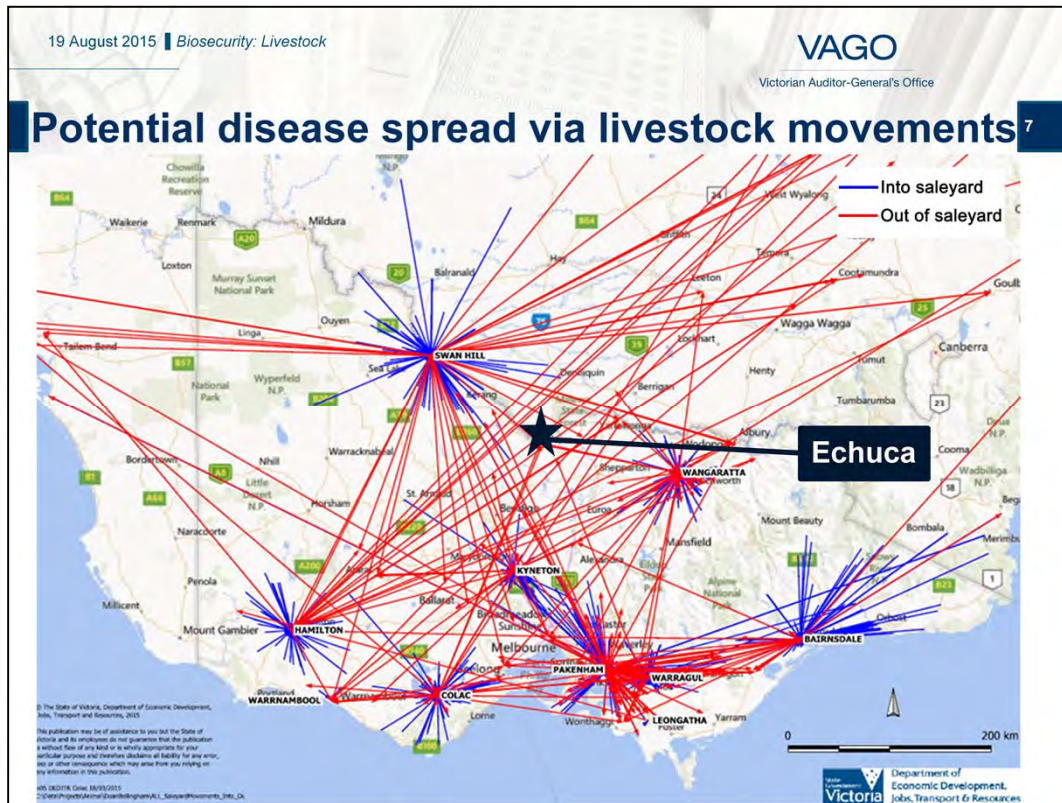
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- Recent livestock disease events were effectively managed:
 - Suspected case of FMD (2015)
 - Sporadic case of anthrax (2015)
 - Low pathogenic avian influenza outbreak (2012)
- However, these events were small in scale.

Recent livestock disease events have not fully tested the capability and capacity of Victoria's biosecurity system.

DEDJTR's responses to recent livestock disease events have been successful. These events included a suspected case of FMD in 2015, a sporadic case of anthrax in 2015, and an outbreak of low pathogenic avian influenza in 2012.

DEDJTR's responses were swift, comprehensive and effective in mitigating risks to primary production, human health and animal welfare. However, these recent events have been small in scale and have not fully tested the capability and capacity of Victoria's livestock biosecurity system.



This image shows the movements of cattle and sheep into and out of saleyards on 29 January 2015, the day after the suspected FMD case was reported in Echuca. Echuca's central location among these movements highlights the potential for a confirmed case of this highly infectious disease to spread rapidly within and outside of Victoria.

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Weakened livestock biosecurity capacity

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Resourcing cuts have:

- reduced surveillance coverage
- increased risk of delays in detecting outbreaks
- increased reliance on reactive funding allocations.

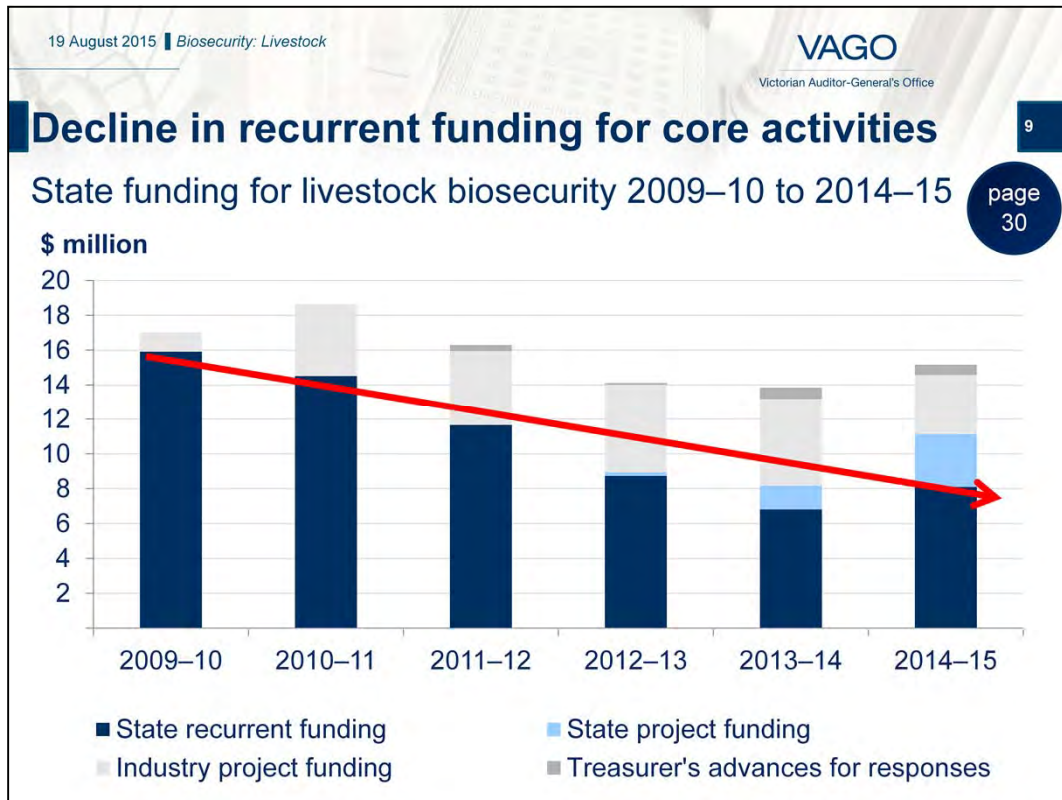
Lost capacity to detect, prepare for and respond to livestock disease threats increases risks to livestock industries and public health.

DEDJTR's capacity to effectively detect, prepare for and respond to an emergency livestock disease outbreak has been weakened by a decline in financial and staff resourcing for core biosecurity functions.

This decline has resulted in a significant drop in surveillance coverage and therefore increases the likelihood of a major disease outbreak going undetected until it has become established.

It also increases Victoria's reliance on reactive funding allocations to protect its livestock industries from emergency animal diseases.

Ultimately Victoria's lost biosecurity capacity increases risks to its livestock industries and public health.



This figure shows state funding for livestock biosecurity between 2009–10 and 2014–15 and the increased reliance on short term or reactive funding allocations over this period.

In particular, the navy blue bar shows that state recurrent funding for core livestock biosecurity activities reduced by 49 per cent over this period. This funding stream covers a range of critical functions that include veterinary services, surveillance and tracing livestock movements.

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Impacts of resourcing constraints

- ↓ 42% reduction DEDJTR veterinary and animal health officers since 2010.
- ↓ 39% reduction in departmental surveillance between 2011–12 and 2014–15.
- ↓ 7% reduction in private veterinary surveillance between 2011–12 and 2014–15.
- ➡ Insufficient staff resources to cope with growing demand for animal welfare investigations.



The weakened livestock biosecurity capacity in Victoria is evidenced by:

- a 42 per cent reduction in departmental veterinary and animal health officers since 2010
- a 39 per cent reduction in departmental surveillance investigations between 2011-12 and 2014-15
- a 7 per cent reduction in private veterinary surveillance over the same period
- and a lack of staff resources to cope with the growing demand for animal welfare investigations.

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Plans to improve will not restore capacity

- DEDJTR has developed plans to enhance preparedness:
 - Foot-and-mouth disease preparedness planning
 - Improved disease-level risk management
 - Electronic tracing of sheep and goat movements
 - Focus on illegal swill feeding of pigs
- But these are incapable of restoring lost capacity.




Success of future responses will depend more on external input and reactive funding allocations.

To DEDJTR's credit, it has developed plans and commenced a range of work within its own resourcing levels to enhance its livestock disease preparedness. However, this work is incapable of restoring the diminished capacity of Victoria's livestock biosecurity system.

Ultimately, the success of any future response to outbreaks will depend heavily on input from other agencies, jurisdictions, organisations, private veterinary practitioners and Victoria's livestock industries, as well as reactive funding allocations from government.

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Recommendations

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		Accept
That DEDJTR:		
1	improves disease surveillance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> focusing its targeted surveillance based on a systematic assessment of disease risks increasing statewide participation in surveillance programs by private veterinary practitioners so that surveillance records more accurately reflect the geographic distribution of livestock species and numbers, as well as disease threats establishing arrangements to gain assurance that the industry-led disease surveillance of poultry is effective enhancing systems and processes to minimise errors in disease surveillance records and improve their timely completion 	✓
3	finalises plans to implement a new electronic traceability system for sheep and goats	✓

We made five recommendations. The two shown on this slide reinforce the need for improved disease surveillance and enhanced traceability of sheep and goats throughout the livestock chain.

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Recommendations – <i>continued</i>		13	
		Accept	
That DEDJTR:			
4	adopts a systematic approach to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviewing and updating its documented livestock biosecurity procedures selecting disease simulation exercises based on disease risks and the coverage, content and delivery of past exercises evaluating the outcomes of simulated and actual disease responses as part of a continuous improvement program assessing the coverage and content of its livestock biosecurity training programs for staff and private veterinary practitioners. 	✓	
5	develops an overarching strategic approach to engaging non-government stakeholders	✓	
That DEDJTR and DHHS:			
2	work together to determine and apply the most effective method for preventing the illegal swill feeding of pigs.	✓	

The recommendations also reinforce the need for more strategic and systematic approaches to a number of livestock biosecurity functions. DEDJTR and DHHS have accepted these recommendations, and the Auditor-General will monitor progress on their implementation.

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Key messages

- Recent livestock disease events have not fully tested the capability and capacity of Victoria's biosecurity system.**
- Lost capacity to detect, prepare for and respond to livestock disease threats increases risks to livestock industries and public health.**
- Success of future responses will depend more on external input and reactive funding allocations.**

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This slide summarises the key messages from the audit.



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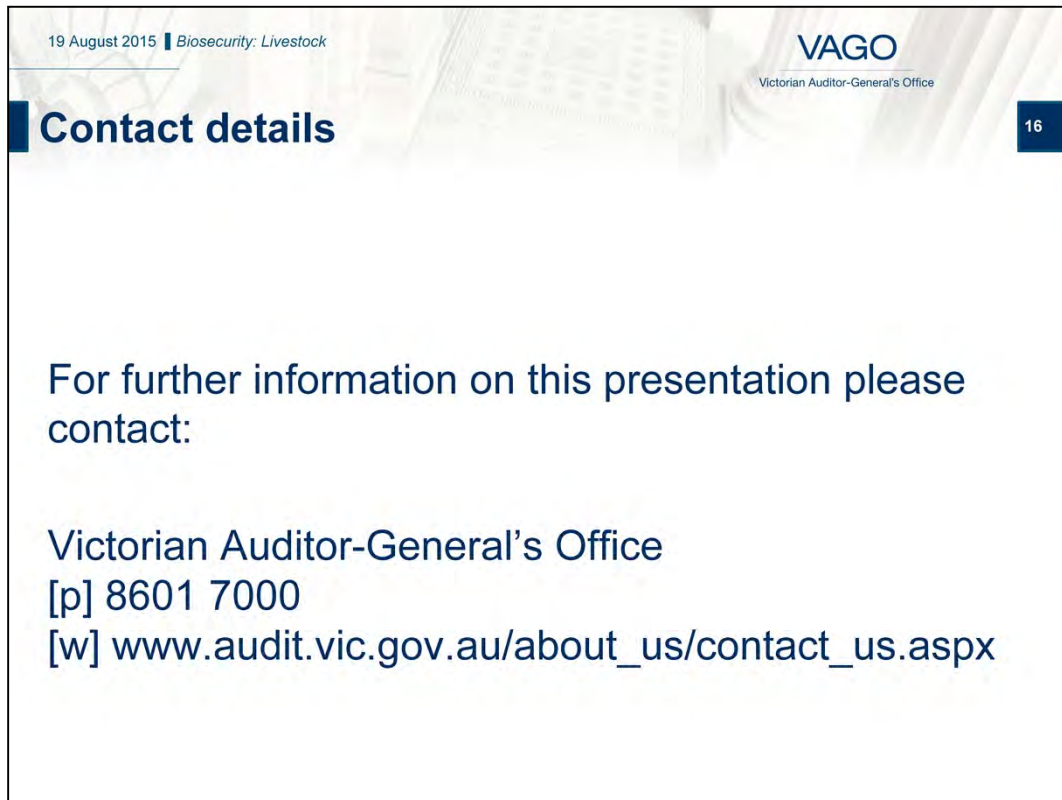
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Overall message

Urgent attention needed to address lost livestock biosecurity capacity and sufficiently protect livestock industries and public health.

Overall, urgent attention is needed to address the lost livestock biosecurity capacity and sufficiently protect Victoria's livestock industries and public health.



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Contact details

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For further information on this presentation please contact:

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