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Wheatbelt NRM

Structure and Governance of
Recognised Biosecurity Groups

Draft Final Report

August 2012

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Executive Summary

The *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007* (the Act) brings a new approach to the funding and control of declared pests in Western Australia based on greater industry involvement in funding and decision making. Two key initiatives in the Act are the establishment of the Declared Pest Account and a provision that enables the Minister for Agriculture to recognise any group whose purpose includes the control of declared pests in a particular area, as a Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG).

The establishment of RBGs will encourage a more collaborative approach to declared pest control by enabling Government to better support landholders in performing their statutory duty to control declared pests on their property. Government plays a key role by providing:

- ▶ Guidance in terms of who is able to participate, roles and responsibilities, geographical boundaries, expected outcomes, funding arrangements and operational relationships
- ▶ Appropriate levels of technical and funding support.

Through RBGs landholders can exercise control over both the services being delivered and the means by which they are being delivered.

Funding for RBGs will come from rates imposed on land in prescribed areas and matched dollar for dollar with funds from Government. The rates collected and matching funds are paid into the Declared Pest Account to be used for declared pest control on prescribed land for which the rates were collected.

By sharing the funding the Government is demonstrating its desire to share the responsibility for declared pest control between the State and industry.

The Act does not prescribe a process for the Minister to follow in recognising groups other than to say it will occur via an instrument signed by the Minister. The structure and governance of RBGs is still being developed. Possibilities range from groups already in existence (e.g. zone control authorities, local government authorities, NRM groups) through to groups newly established for the purpose of declared pest control.

Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management Incorporated (Wheatbelt NRM) appointed GHD Pty Ltd (GHD) to examine the potential for establishing RBGs in the Avon River Basin. A key element of the consultancy was community consultation at several locations in the region in order to provide growers and others with the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of recommendations to Government on the establishment and operation of RBGs.

GHD conducted four community consultation workshops Wyalkatchem, Moorine Rock, Corrigin and Northam during the first week of August 2012. A key message from the workshops was that while there was in-principle support for community involvement in dealing with local biosecurity matters, most landholders were concerned about the requirement for 'another group' and the pressure this would place on local people to find time to contribute to the group's function.

The key findings from the community consultation workshops are listed in the following table.

Key findings from the workshops

No.	Key finding
1	There was general but cautious support for RBGs (the workshop at Corrigin indicated they did not see the need for an RBG at present). Most growers were concerned about the requirement for 'another group' and the pressure this would place on local people to find time to contribute to the group's function.
2	While no one structure and governance model for RBGs was preferred, there was general support for the hosting model. Potential hosts identified included local government authorities, ROCs, Wheatbelt NRM and farm improvement groups. Participants generally favoured a 'mix and match' approach over a 'one size fits all' approach It was acknowledged that the 'devil will be in the detail' and so it was recommended that up to three pilot RBGs be established to evaluate alternative structures and governance arrangements
3	There was no consensus as to whether RBGs should be established at a regional or local level. Again, it was suggested that the 'mix and match' approach should be applied to suit the circumstances
4	It was generally agreed that local government has a role to play in the establishment and operation of RBGs because of its rating capacity and capacity to provide administrative and resourcing support
5	The 'communities of mutual interest' principle was seen as an important determinant of the geographical size of RBGs
6	It was agreed that RBGs must be adequately funded and resourced to be successful
7	While it was generally acknowledged that the proposed funding arrangements for RBGs would be better than the current funding for declared pest control, there was a degree of mistrust of the proposed rating scheme
8	It is important that funds raised through rating (plus the government's share) 'hit the ground' and are not consumed in excessive 'red tape', administration and other overhead costs
9	It is also important that conditions placed on the matching government funds are not too onerous
10	In the spirit of a partnership, RBGs should enter into a MoU with DAFWA, which sets out respective commitments and obligations
11	The successful establishment of a RBG will require a local 'champion' who is prepared to 'drive' its establishment
12	There was concern that 'volunteer burnout' will impact on the willingness of landholders to become involved in the establishment

No.	Key finding
	and operation of RBGs
13	Control of declared pests on public lands and peri-urban properties is a major issue for landholders
14	Recruiting and retaining qualified staff will be a challenge for RBGs
15	It is important that the experienced gained and lessons learned from the Landcare Program be drawn on in establishing RBGs

The following are recommendations from the study.

Recommendation 1: Two to three pilot RBGs be established and operated on a trial basis based on the hosting model, but with different hosts. These pilot RBGs would be monitored for their progress by way of mid-term and final term reviews

Recommendation 2: The pilot RBGs are underpinned by a MOU with DAFWA.

Recommendation 3: DAFWA develop standardised monitoring and evaluation reporting systems for use by all RBGs.

Recommendation 4: DAFWA investigate the feasibility of developing an investment decision framework along the lines of the Salinity Investment Framework (SIF) for use by RBGs.

Recommendation 5: DAFWA prepare a factsheet on RBGs for distribution to interested stakeholders/organisations.

Recommendation 6: RBGs appoint declared pest control officer(s) (DPCO) to manage and undertake the day-to-day activities of the RBG.

Recommendation 7: A RBG Association is established to provide a vehicle for RBGs to exchange ideas and experience in establishing and managing RBGs.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) are an integral part of a new, more participatory approach to the control of declared pests in Western Australia provided for by the new *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007* (the BAM Act).

Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management Incorporated (Wheatbelt NRM) was initially appointed GHD Pty Ltd (GHD) to prepare a report on potential structures and governance of RBGs in the Avon River Basin, including community consultation on alternative arrangements. As well as guiding the establishment of RBGs in the Avon region, the report was to inform policy advice to Government on their sustainability in the region and elsewhere.

In the meantime, the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) commissioned Natural Resource Nexus (NRN) to examine structure and governance arrangements for RBGs.¹ Therefore, rather than repeating the NRN study, GHD was asked to focus on the community consultation component of the original consultancy.

In preparing this report, GHD held a series of community consultation workshops across the Avon region to provide growers and others with the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of recommendations to Government on the establishment and operation of RBGs. These workshops were held at Wyalkatchem, Moorine Rock, Corrigin and Northam during the first week of August 2012.

1.2 Purpose and structure of the report

This report details the findings of community workshops and makes recommendations as to a way forward for establishing RBGs in the agricultural areas of Western Australia.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the legislative background, role and funding of RBGs and sets out some over-riding criteria and principles for their establishment. Section 3 reports on the outcomes from the community workshops. Discussion and recommendations are presented in Section 4.

1.3 What is meant by biosecurity?

The term 'biosecurity' is increasingly being used to describe the control of pests, diseases and weeds. Currently, the nationally accepted definition of biosecurity is *'the protection of the economy, the environment and human health from the negative impacts associated with pests, diseases and weeds'*.²

¹ Natural Resource Nexus (2011). *A Conceptual Delivery Framework for Biosecurity and Recognised Biosecurity Groups in Agricultural Areas of Western Australia*, Report prepared for the Department of Agriculture and Food WA Invasive Species Program, September.

² Parliament of Western Australia, Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Legislation (2007). Report No. 7, *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Bill 2006, Biosecurity and Agriculture Management*

The following, more formal definition is provided in the BAM Act:

'biosecurity means protection from the adverse effect an organism has or may have on:

- (a) another organism; or*
- (b) a human being; or*
- (c) the environment, or part of the environment; or*
- (d) agricultural activities, fishing or pearling activities, or related commercial activities carried on, or intended to be carried on, in the State or part of the State'.³*

1.4 Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007

Biosecurity in Western Australia is governed by the BAM Act, the State's primary biosecurity legislation, which aims at both preventing pests and diseases from entering the State and controlling those that are found here. The BAM Act brings a new approach to the funding and control of declared pests in Western Australia based on greater industry/community involvement in funding and decision making.

The Western Australian government spends around \$37 million each year on biosecurity.⁴ This expenditure is increasingly targeting pre-border and border operations where preventing entry and eradication of certain pests is still possible and provides the best return on publicly funded pest control. Landholders are expected to play a much greater role in the control of established and more widespread pests.

The BAM Act has a number of provisions aimed at facilitating greater landholder and community participation in declared pest control. First, it empowers the Minister to determine a rate chargeable on land in a prescribed area for a financial year for the purpose of declared pest control in that area.⁵ Rates collected under this provision are matched by funds paid by the State government from the Consolidated Account.

Second, it provides for the establishment of the Declared Pest Account, into which are paid the rates collected and matching funds from the State government.⁶ This arrangement extends the funding arrangements for declared pest control in the pastoral areas under the former Zone Control Authorities (ZCAs) (now RBGs) to the agricultural areas.

Third, it enables the Minister for Agriculture to recognise any group whose purpose includes the control of declared pests in a prescribed area, as a RBG.⁷ Ministerial recognition of a group as a RBG enables it to draw funds from the Declared Pest

(Repeal and Consequential Provisions) Bill 2006 and Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Rates and Charges Bill 2006, April, p. 24.

³ Part 1(6) of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

⁴ Ruprecht, J. (2010). Biosecurity in Western Australia, Presentation to the Biosecurity Investment Forum, Technology Park Western Australia, 13 September.

⁵ Sections 130 -136 of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

⁶ Section 137 of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

⁷ Section 169 of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

Account to carry out declared pest control in a prescribed area that has been rated under Section 130 of the BAM Act.

The establishment of RBGs is aimed at encouraging a more collaborative approach to declared pest control by enabling government to better support landholders in performing their statutory duty to control declared pests on their property.⁸ Government is expected to play a key role by providing:

- ▶ Guidance in terms of who is able to participate, roles and responsibilities, geographical boundaries, expected outcomes, funding arrangements and operational relationships
- ▶ Appropriate levels of technical and funding support.

This industry-based approach to declared pest control is entirely consistent with current government service delivery more generally, whereby government partners with industry and the community in delivering services. In this way industry can exercise control over both the services being delivered and the means by which they are being delivered.

In summary, the establishment of RBGs is expected to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of declared pest control by:

- ▶ Providing industry a greater say in setting priorities for declared pest control
- ▶ Ensuring that control programs are better tailored to local and regional problems
- ▶ Generating greater industry 'ownership' of the declared pest problem.

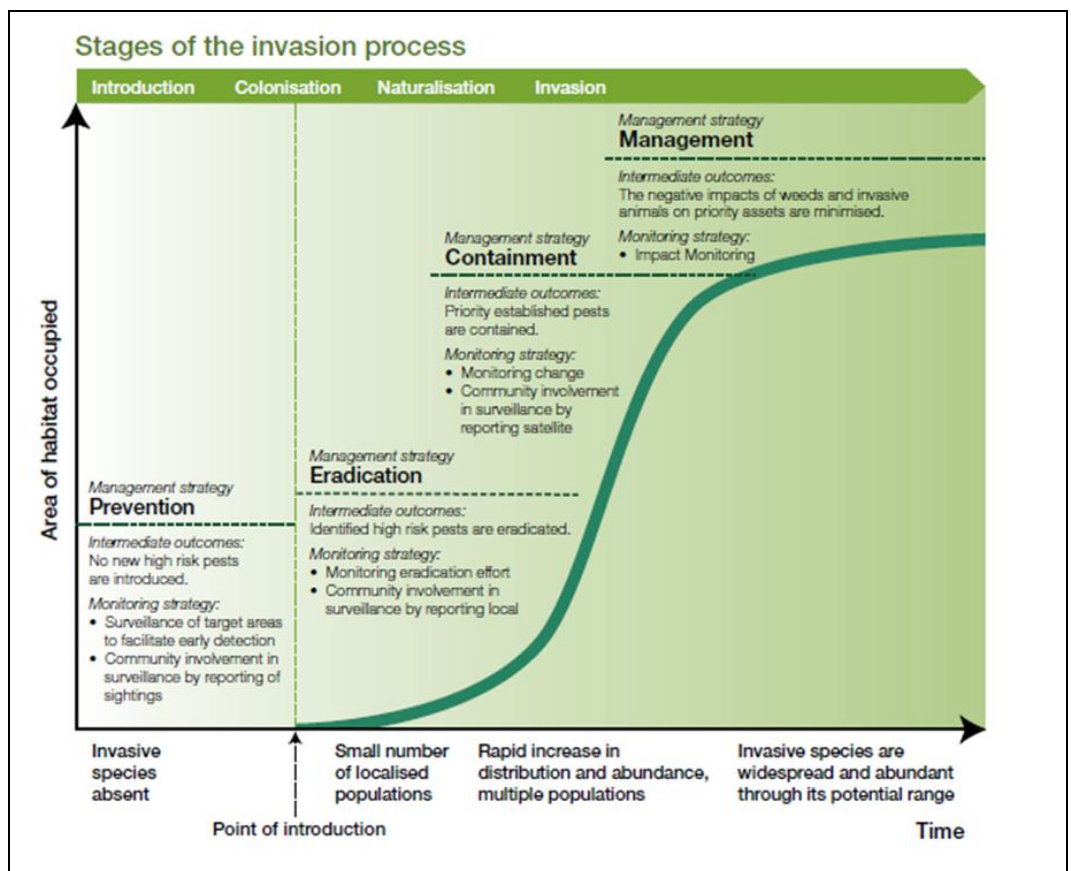
⁸ Section 30 of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

2. Recognised Biosecurity Groups

2.1 The role of RBGs

The BAM Act is not specific about the role of RBGs other than to prescribe that ‘the body is established for a purpose which includes controlling declared pests in a specified area’.⁹ Their role should be seen in the context of the State government’s overall approach to managing existing and potential declared pests in Western Australia. This approach, which is based on a principle of shared responsibility between all levels of government and the community, requires the government to invest in declared species control where it yields the greatest public benefit.

Under the invasive species management model¹⁰ (shown in Figure 1) government can achieve the greatest public benefit (return on its investment) from declared pest control by targeting populations that are at low levels or non-existent. Under this model, the management of widespread and abundant declared pests at the upper end of the invasive species management model curve is the responsibility of individual landholders who can attain considerable private benefit from control.



⁹ Section 169(2) of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

¹⁰ Victorian Department of Primary Industries (2011). *Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework*, Melbourne.

Figure 1 Invasive species management model

Under the shared responsibility approach, RBGs provide support and assistance to landholders in controlling widespread and abundant declared pests. This support could range from on-farm technical support to the control of declared pests on public lands in a prescribed area. The level and type of support is likely to vary between RBGs.

2.2 Funding of RBGs

As discussed earlier, funding for RBGs will come from rates imposed on land in a prescribed area. These funds are paid into the Declared Pest Account along with matching funds from the State government.

An RBG may be provided funds from the Declared Pest Account by the Director General of DAFWA (with the Minister's authorisation) to carry out declared pest control in areas from which rates were collected. The expenditure of these funds can be constrained by the directions given by the Director General in the notice accompanying the funds (e.g. the purpose for which the funds are to be used, directions on how the money should be used, the time period in which the work must be completed and the reporting requirements). Reports to the Director General from RBGs must be published on DAFWA's website.¹¹

By matching rates income dollar for dollar the State government is demonstrating its desire to share the responsibility for declared pest control between the State, industry and the community. This cost sharing arrangement also reflects the collective good characteristics of an RBG's activities in that benefits arising from the work of an RBG may accrue to a wider community than the one represented by the RBG (and paying the rate). For example, the benefits of an RBG controlling declared pests in road and rail reserves will benefit the community at large as well as landholders on adjoining properties.

This joint funding approach is in accordance with the beneficiary pays principle which states that the beneficiary of a good or service should bear some or all of the cost of its provision. In this case, government represents the wider community. It also acknowledges the collective good nature of the RBG's activities in that landholders and others outside the RBG can enjoy the benefits of the RBG's work without contributing towards the cost as there is no way of excluding them (the 'free rider problem').

2.3 Structure and governance of RBGs

While the BAM Act enables the Minister to recognise groups formed for, among other things, declared pest control, as RBGs, it does not prescribe a process for the Minister to follow in doing this other than to say it will occur via an instrument signed by the Minister.¹² Factors likely to be taken into account by the Minister in making his decision include:

¹¹ Sections 137 – 139 and 170 – 171 of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

¹² Section 169(1) of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

- ▶ Ability of the prospective RBG to undertake activities consistent with the BAM Act
- ▶ The capacity of the RBG to manage any public funds it receives
- ▶ The legitimacy of the RBG within its community to decide how to allocate the funds it receives.

The BAM Act is also flexible in terms of the structure and governance of RBGs. Possibilities range from groups already in existence (e.g. local government authorities (LGAs), Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs), natural resource management (NRM) groups, farm improvement groups) to groups specifically established for the purpose of declared pest control.

The NRN report prepared for DAFWA¹³ identified a number of generic categories of structure and governance arrangements for RBGs in the agricultural areas of Western Australia. These are:

- ▶ Use of an existing organisation that is either a statutory body or body corporate (e.g. an incorporated group) and includes in its purpose the control of declared pests in a specified area

A variation of this arrangement is where a RBG is recognised at a large (e.g. regional) scale with local sub-groups (either incorporated or unincorporated) nested beneath it
- ▶ A hosting model in which an existing organisation at a State or regional scale hosts a number of sub-regional incorporated RBGs. The hosting arrangement would include the provision of a range of services to the RBGs under a fee for service arrangement
- ▶ A specially created incorporated RBG (incorporated under Western Australia's *Association Incorporation Act 1987*), which would provide for its own governance, administration, planning, operations, monitoring and reporting

Such a RBG could be created at a local, sub-regional or regional scale.

In reality, it may not be possible to implement any one of these options across the whole of the agricultural area in a 'one size fits all' approach. Rather, the option that best fits the situation should be chosen, creating the possibility of a 'mix and match' approach to establishing RBGs across the agricultural areas of Western Australia.

2.4 Establishing RBGs

2.4.1 Assessment criteria

The NRN report proposed the following broad assessment criteria for evaluating alternative structure and governance arrangements:

- ▶ How well does the proposed arrangement deal with the issue of 'communities of mutual interest'?

¹³ See Footnote 1.

- ▶ What is the potential for keeping overhead (administrative) costs to a minimum (i.e. administrative efficiency)?
- ▶ What is the proposed arrangement's potential to be applied in different parts of the agricultural area?
- ▶ What are the set up costs of the proposed arrangement?

2.4.2 Governance principles

Experience in natural resource management (NRM) in Australia over the past 20 years (e.g. through major national programs under the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality, Natural Heritage Trust and Caring for our Country) shows good governance of NRM bodies to be a critical success factor. To this end, a set of governance principles have been developed, which NRM groups should satisfy to ensure proper and sound governance.¹⁴

These principles, described in Table 1, are legitimacy, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and fairness while exhibiting functional and structural integration, capability and adaptability. They determine:

- ▶ How power and responsibilities are exercised
- ▶ How decisions are taken
- ▶ How the community or stakeholders have their say.

These governance principles should be taken into account when establishing RBGs.

Table 1 Governance principles

Principle	Description
Legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Validity of organisation's authority to carry out its role ▶ Power has been devolved to the lowest level at which it can effectively be organised ▶ Integrity with which authority is exercised
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Visibility of decision making processes ▶ Clarity with which the reasoning behind decisions is communicated ▶ Availability of information about governance and performance
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Allocation and acceptance of

¹⁴ Lockwood, M, Davidson, J, Curtis, A, Stratford, E and R Griffith (2010). Governance principles for natural resource management, *Society and Natural Resources*, 23: 986-1001.

Principle	Description
	<p>responsibility for decisions and actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Demonstration of whether and how these responsibilities have been met <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - essential for authority and credibility
Inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Opportunities available for stakeholders to participate in and influence decision making processes and actions ▶ People making decisions should seek input from multiple sources, have an awareness of and value diversity and have policies and structures to foster stakeholder contributions and engagement
Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Respect and attention given to stakeholder's views ▶ Consistency and absence of personal bias in decision making ▶ Consideration given to the distribution of costs and benefits of decisions ▶ People making decisions are fair and equitable in the exercise of authority
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The connection between and coordination across different governance levels ▶ The connection between and coordination across organisations at the same level of governance ▶ The alignment of priorities, plans and activities across governance organisations
Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Systems, plans, resources, skills, leadership, knowledge and experiences that enable organisations and individuals who direct, manage and work for them to effectively deliver on their

Principle	Description
	<p>responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Executive skills and leadership, skills and competence of staff (technical, financial and management), availability of training, management systems, knowledge, funding availability and continuity ▶ Sufficient financial autonomy and flexibility ▶ Involvement of government where public good outcomes are involved
Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Incorporation of new knowledge and learning into decision making and implementation ▶ Anticipation and management of threats, opportunities and associated risks ▶ Systematic reflection on individual, organisational and system performance ▶ Organisation is able to rearrange its internal processes and procedures in response to changing internal or external conditions

3. Community perspective on RBGs

3.1 The community's role in RBGs

As discussed Chapter 2, the establishment of RBGs is aimed at facilitating greater landholder and community participation in declared pest control, especially in the control of established and more widespread pests. This approach, which is based on a principle of shared responsibility between all levels of government and the community, is broadly consistent with the regional delivery model that has underpinned the funding of NRM in Australia since 2000.¹⁵

3.2 Community consultation workshops

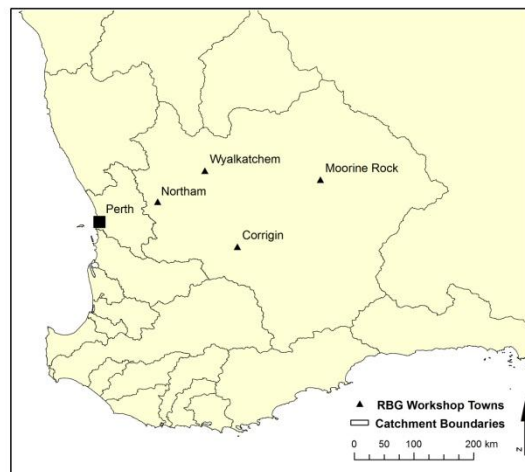
3.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the community consultation workshops was to provide landholders and people either representing an organisation (e.g. World Wildlife Fund (WWF)) or currently employed in a community support position (i.e. Natural Resource Management Officers (NRMOs)) an opportunity to contribute to the formulation of recommendations to Wheatbelt NRM and the State government on the establishment, structure and governance of RBGs in the Avon River Basin and the agricultural areas more generally.

¹⁵ See Marshall, GR (2009). Polycentricity, Reciprocity, and Farmer Adoption of Conservation Practices under Community-Based Governance, *Ecological Economics*, 68, pp. 1507-1520.

3.2.2 Location of workshops

The workshops were held in Wyalkatchem, Moorine Rock, Corrigin and Northam. These locations are broadly reflective of the sub-regions of Wheatbelt NRM's overall region. These locations are shown on the following map.



3.2.3 Workshop numbers

Table 2 presents the number of attendees at each workshop. Attendees included landholders, local government personnel, NRMOs, DAFWA representatives, WWF representatives and a local Member of Parliament.

Table 2 Workshop numbers

Workshop location	No. of attendees
Wyalkatchem	11
Moorine Rock	7
Corrigin	6
Northam	14

3.2.4 Workshop format

The workshops were facilitated by GHD and conducted as a semi-structured discussion. While the questions asked at the workshop generally followed the direction of the discussion, the following questions guided the workshop:

- ▶ What are the main biosecurity concerns in your area?
- ▶ Does the RBG concept have a place in your area?
- ▶ How would you prefer to establish an RBG in your area (e.g. entirely from scratch or with an established group)?
- ▶ What are your thoughts on the idea of a rating scheme to fund biosecurity?
- ▶ How do you see partnership arrangements between community and government best working in an RBG (e.g. membership, voting, roles and responsibilities)?
- ▶ If an RBG were to be established what support would be required to enable effective reporting and meeting administration?

The issues raised by participants during the workshops are listed in the next section of the report.

3.2.5 Workshop outcomes

Discussion points from each workshop are shown in Tables 3 to 6 below.

Table 3 Wyalkatchem workshop outcomes

No.	Issue
1	Participants recognised declared pests (especially wild dogs, foxes, rabbits and cats) are a problem and that RBGs would provide a broad scale regional approach in contrast to a localised on-farm approach to declared pest control
2	There was a general view that a regional approach to RBGs would be preferred over a local approach
3	Having a repository of records of declared pest control programs is important in order to track the progress and impact a program is having and to identify where the investments have been made
4	Participants recognised an important role for local government in RBGs, especially their rating capability and administrative capacity
5	Participants recognised the importance of the concept of 'communities of mutual interest'. Defining communities of mutual interest is likely to be more difficult in the western part of Wheatbelt NRM's region where communities are more diverse (e.g. farmers, hobby farmers, rural lifestyle landholders, absentee owners etc.)
6	There is a potential role for Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) as these represent communities of mutual interest – transport, health, education etc., and have existing resources. It was recognised that not all ROCs are well set up and so may not represent a universal model for RBGs
7	There was a clear message that there are lessons from the Landcare

No.	Issue
	experience, particularly the importance of administrative support to the group and the impact a community group has in terms of the time and effort that is required on behalf of the members
8	NRM groups are important – they have strong links to the community and represent and support the community. They have a sound understanding of the issues and reflect the regional/coordinated approach that an RBG will bring
9	RBGs need not be perpetual. They can have an end point at which time their purpose and achievements are reviewed. Projects can be defined with key milestones, funding requirements and completion dates, especially where rating is involved
10	There is concern about funding risk – that once the RBG is established the matching government funds could dry up as a result of changing government priorities
11	There is concern about potentially high turnover of established/experience staff
12	Acknowledged the potential for free riding as pests do not stop at local government boundaries
13	There is likely to be mistrust of rating. Therefore, introducing the rating scheme needs to be explained carefully to landholders by local people rather than bureaucrats, emphasising local participation, defined projects and clearly defined completion dates
14	It is important that money ‘hits the ground’ with the avoidance of excessive red tape in governance and administration
15	RBGs are a partnership arrangement where the community brings local knowledge and experience, commitment and in-kind support and funds (through the rating scheme). DAFWA would be expected to bring technical knowledge and research capability
16	There is a need for an MOU with DAFWA to provide certainty as to the on-going government commitment to the RBG

Table 4 Moorine Rock workshop outcomes

No.	Issue
1	Key declared pests include wild dogs, foxes, rabbits and cats. Camel sightings were mentioned. Locusts are also a problem but are being managed by DAFWA
2	There is concern that current funding for declared pest control must come from competitive grants. Some success with grants for fox baiting has been achieved, but grants are generally hard to get. There is a perception that the lack of State government funding for declared pest control means that the pests are not important (i.e. the ‘horse has bolted’)

No.	Issue
3	There is concern that funding will not 'hit the ground'
4	RBGs will need to be properly funded and adequately resourced to be successful
5	Successful establishment of a RBG will require a 'champion' or advocate who is prepared to drive its establishment
6	There is concern that landholders in the region are experiencing 'volunteer burnout' due to the demands placed on their time, especially with dwindling numbers of people available to participate in various initiatives. ¹⁶ Rationalisation of broadacre farming is contributing to this trend. Also the problem of young people leaving the region is reducing the number of land holders capable of being involved in a RBG
7	Suggested that the issue of problems with local resourcing may mean that regional scale RBGs may work better than local RBGs
8	There is concern that the control of declared pests on the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) estate, mining tenements, Crown Land etc. is inadequate and this will undermine control efforts by a RBG
9	Absentee owners are seen as a problem for declared pest control on some properties
10	Much of the declared pest control in the region is only done after considerable pushing. Many landholders wait until pests reach plague proportions before taking action
11	If rating is to be applied then accountability to ensure there is value for money in control programs is imperative
12	Suggested that existing groups such as the Bodallin Catchment Group could be recognised as a RBG. Declared pest control could form part of its portfolio of activities. The Yilgarn Local Action Group on Skeleton Weed could also play a role
13	Participants acknowledged that a ROC could be a RBG. However, it was felt that the Yilgarn Shire was large enough to be a RBG and that the ROC did not satisfy the communities of mutual interest criteria
14	Participants did not see DAFWA as a member of the RBG. Agreed there was a need for independence and ownership to be successful. DAFWA could attend RBG meetings in an 'ex officio' capacity
15	Question – would the regulation of 1080 use remain with DAFWA?
16	It was recommended that a RBG be established as a pilot study. Need to establish the business case for establishing the RBG. The business case would need to take into account the size of the problem (e.g. skeleton weed)
17	It is important that any conditions on the matching funding are not too

¹⁶ See Byron, I and A Curtis (2002). Maintaining Volunteer Commitment to Local Watershed Initiatives, *Environmental Management*, 30, pp. 59-67, for a discussion of this issue.

No.	Issue
	onerous otherwise landholders will not participate. There is concern about the level of direction a RBG will receive from government
18	There is a need for community ownership in establishing RBGs
19	Participants supported the need for an MOU with DAFWA to ensure commitment

Table 5 Corrigin workshop outcomes

No.	Issue
1	Need to explore the potential for the use of existing organisations as RBGs as it would be a more efficient use of resources (e.g. ROC or the Corrigin Farm Improvement Group)
2	Resourcing of an RBG may be an issue as there are less people 'on the ground'. It is a struggle to get people to Landcare meetings
3	Try an emulate the Red Card model
4	The regulation of 1080 use is seen as an issue
5	Some participants felt that a farmer-based RBG may not be the answer. It was agreed that it will need the involvement of local government
6	Biosecurity is a big issue and needs to be managed (e.g. skeleton weed)
7	Establishment of RBGs will require farmer interest and should align with catchment areas
8	Need common issues (e.g. roly polly weed)
9	Suggested that the RBG could be under Wheatbelt NRM – as the representative group
10	Question: why not give the matching funds directly to DAFWA?
11	There was concern that committees can become single issue groups. There is a need for more of a regional approach
12	RBGs represent a partnership with DAFWA – people interested in biosecurity
13	RBGs could have responsibility for the control of declared pests in road reserves
14	ZCAs are a model for RBGs – but with their own budget
15	The establishment of RBGs viewed by some as a cynical cost shifting exercise by government
16	Economic imperative (e.g. wild dogs) will determine a farmer's attitude to declared pest control

No.	Issue
17	There is concern about the impact of declared pests (e.g. foxes and cats) on biodiversity. Competitive Federal funding grants used to fund control programs
18	There is concern that a diversity of interests will make RBGs difficult to work
19	Question: will an RBG be able to determine its own priorities and programs?
20	Question: what incentives can be provided to encourage local governments to control pests in road reserves?
21	Participants acknowledged of the principle of 'communities of mutual interest'. Require farmer driven establishment of RBGs
22	The NRMO model is working in the Corrigin region. Enjoying success in winning competitive grants to undertake control programs (including baiting programs). Currently seeking funding for control of weeds in road reserves
23	There is a view that if an RBG was to target roadside work then this should not be funded from rate revenue
24	Question: can an RBG be advisory only?
25	Participants felt that the Corrigin region does not require an RBG at present. Suggested that the situation be reviewed in 2 years

Table 6 Northam workshop outcomes

No.	Issue
1	Funding of RBGs – the acceptability of rating questioned. Another rate may be too much to accept
2	View expressed that it may be difficult to get volunteers to become involved in the management of RBGs. It is already difficult to get people to meetings. People are stretched but will react in a crisis. The dynamics of volunteerism have changed
3	Suggested that an RBG should sit under Wheatbelt NRM. Each district has its own problems – therefore need to set guidelines (e.g. Dowerin – birds and weeds are problems)
4	NRMOs are not always a community resource unless employed by local government and subsidised by Wheatbelt NRM
5	In local government NRMOs have priorities set by Council (e.g. Dowerin – recycling)
6	There is a problem of volunteers preparing funding applications for

No.	Issue
	declared pest control
7	Concern was expressed about declared pest control in peri-urban areas – especially absentee owners
8	Big groups work well if there is sufficient grower involvement and common interests
9	Landholders are generally prepared to work hard on issues that affect them
10	There is a preference for ‘fit for purpose’ or ‘mix and match’ RBGs rather than a ‘one size fits all’
11	Need people on the ground to ‘champion’ an RBG. Question: how long will an RBG take to evolve?
12	Suggested that biosecurity be tagged with health – healthy living, healthy landscapes and healthy environment
13	In a RBG decisions need to be made close to the ground
14	Overhead costs could be an issue. Existing peak bodies are struggling with overheads
15	Declared pest control in reserves is an important issue. Need a coordinated approach in a nil tenure setting
16	RBGs will support landholders in meeting their obligations under the BAM Act
17	Question: will local governments pay the levy?
18	The industry funding schemes deal with pests that affect an industry with little impact on public benefit
19	Noted that many growers are controlling declared pests in rail reserves out of their own pocket
20	What can we learn from the conversion of ZCAs in pastoral areas to RBGs?
21	It is important to build an understanding of the role the government will play in building capacity in the governance and operation of RBGs. DAFWA’s role seen as a developmental role
22	The hosting model of RBGs is preferred as it avoids duplication of services. The RBG can utilise many of the hosts services
23	Hosts may include local governments and NRM groups
24	‘Mix and match’ model is preferred
25	Managing the loss of staff from an RBG could be an issue
26	Question: who collects the rates – the Office of State Revenue (OSR) or local government on behalf of OSR?

No.	Issue
27	It is recommended that DAFWA commence a communication program on the BAM Act and RBGs

3.2.6 Key findings from the workshops

The key findings from the workshops are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7 Key findings from the workshops

No.	Key finding
1	There was general but cautious support for RBGs (the workshop at Corrigin indicated they did not see the need for an RBG at present). Most growers were concerned about the requirement for 'another group' and the pressure this would place on local people to find time to contribute to the group's function.
2	While no one structure and governance model for RBGs was preferred, there was general support for the hosting model. Potential hosts identified included local government authorities, ROCs, Wheatbelt NRM and farm improvement groups. Participants generally favoured a 'mix and match' approach over a 'one size fits all' approach. It was acknowledged that the 'devil will be in the detail' and so it was recommended that up to three pilot RBGs be established to evaluate alternative structures and governance arrangements
3	There was no consensus as to whether RBGs should be established at a regional or local level. Again, it was suggested that the 'mix and match' approach should be applied to suit the circumstances
4	It was generally agreed that local government has a role to play in the establishment and operation of RBGs because of its rating capacity and capacity to provide administrative and resourcing support
5	The 'communities of mutual interest' principle was seen as an important determinant of the geographical size of RBGs
6	It was agreed that RBGs must be adequately funded and resourced to be successful
7	While it was generally recognised that the proposed funding arrangements for RBGs would be better than the current funding for declared pest control, there was a degree of mistrust of the proposed rating scheme
8	It is important that funds raised through rating (plus the government's share) 'hit the ground' and are not consumed in excessive 'red tape', administration and other overhead costs
9	It is also important that conditions placed on the matching government funds are not too onerous

No.	Key finding
10	In the spirit of a partnership, RBGs should enter into a MoU with DAFWA, which sets out respective commitments and obligations
11	The successful establishment of a RBG will require a local 'champion' who is prepared to 'drive' its establishment
12	There was concern that 'volunteer burnout' will impact on the willingness of landholders to become involved in the establishment and operation of RBGs
13	Control of declared pests on public lands and peri-urban properties is a major issue for landholders
14	Recruiting and retaining qualified staff will be a challenge for RBGs
15	It is important that the experience gained and lessons learned from the Landcare Program be drawn on in establishing RBGs

4. Discussion and recommendations

4.1 Structure and governance arrangements

The NRN report identified the following broad structure and governance arrangements for RBGs, which were discussed earlier in the report:

- ▶ Existing organisations that are either a statutory body or body corporate and include in their purpose the control of declared pests in a specified area
- ▶ Hosting organisations, with one or more RBGs nested within the overall structure
- ▶ Specially created incorporated RBGs

Although there was cautious support for the establishment of RBGs in the workshops, the workshop participants did not identify a single preferred arrangement. While there was a general preference for the hosting model, there was considerable discussion about the preferred host. Options ranged from regionally focused organisations such as the ROCs and Wheatbelt NRM to more locally based organisations such as local governments and farm improvement groups.

The capacity to rate was considered an important attribute favouring local government authorities.

There was broad agreement that the structure and governance arrangement chosen should reflect the circumstances and requirements of the region or local area in question – the ‘mix and match’ approach as opposed to a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

Given that the ‘devil will be in the detail’ in establishing and operating an RBG it was recommended that two to three pilot RBGs be established and operated for a period of time to assist in determining the best way forward.

The idea of a pilot RBG is discussed further in the next section.

4.2 Pilot RBGs

It is recommended that two to three pilot RBGs be established in Wheatbelt NRM’s region. These should be based on the hosting model, but using different hosts. Potential hosts could include:

- ▶ NewROC
- ▶ Yilgarn Shire
- ▶ Wheatbelt NRM

The choice of pilot RBGs should be based on a sound business case, which sets out:

- ▶ The priorities for declared pest management and the objectives of the proposed RBG, including a statement of needs and justification
- ▶ A discussion on how the community will be involved in the establishment and operation of the proposed RBG

- ▶ A description of the proposed structure and governance arrangements, including identification of potential board members and chair
- ▶ A description of the declared pest control programs to be undertaken by the proposed RBG
- ▶ Details of resourcing and staffing requirements, including a discussion of the potential to share resources with a host organisation
- ▶ A high level benefit cost analysis of each control program
- ▶ A risk assessment identifying the risks associated with each control program and recommendations for mitigating the risks
- ▶ An analysis of funding requirements, including an analysis of the costs (capital and recurrent) of establishing and operating the proposed RBG and the costs (capital and recurrent) of each control program.
- ▶ An analysis of the rating requirement (in dollar terms per property), including consideration of the process of rates collection
- ▶ An outline of the proposed implementation plan, including timelines, key milestones and reporting requirements and key performance indicators. This section should include consideration of review requirements and dates.

It is recommended that the Government provide start-up funding for the preparation of the business cases to ensure funding is not a barrier to implementation of the pilot RBGs. These business cases could also provide a template for future submissions to the Minister by groups seeking recognition as a RBG.

4.3 Role of DAFWA

As discussed earlier, the establishment of RBGs will allow the State government (through DAFWA) to better support landholders in performing their statutory duty to control declared pests on their property. This partnership arrangement between the RBGs and DAFWA, which is akin to the agency-community partnerships that evolved under the National Landcare Program,¹⁷ is a critical component of the RBG model.

With respect to RBGs, DAFWA's role will include:

- ▶ Providing funding to RBGs from the Declared Pest Account
- ▶ Providing appropriate institutional support to RBGs to ensure investment decisions for declared pest control are optimal. This was identified as a weakness of Catchment Management Organisations under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.¹⁸ To ensure consistency in approach to investment decision making across RBGs it is recommended that the development of an investment

¹⁷ Curtis, A (1998). Agency-Community Partnership in Landcare: Lessons for State-Sponsored Citizen Resource Management, *Environmental Management*, 22, pp. 563-574.

¹⁸ Pannell, D and A Roberts (2010). Australia's National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality: a Retrospective Assessment, *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 54, pp. 437-456.

decision framework along the lines of the Salinity Investment Framework (SIF) be investigated for use by RBGs.¹⁹

- ▶ Providing technical knowledge and assistance in declared pest control to RBGs
- ▶ Undertaking research on matters of importance to declared pest control
- ▶ Facilitating capacity building in RBGs by:
 - Providing education and training in declared pest control
 - Providing advice and training to RBG personnel on leadership²⁰ and working in partnerships
- ▶ Undertaking independent evaluations of RBG's declared pest control programs to identify the impact their investments are having on declared pest control outcomes
- ▶ Attending to biosecurity matters as described in the invasive species management model.

One concern expressed at each of the workshops was that the State government's funding contribution and support could diminish over time as priorities changed, forcing RBGs to curtail activities, increase the rate levied on landholders or seek other sources of funding (e.g. competitive grants under Caring for our Country). To mitigate this financial risk and in recognition that the RBG model is based on the principle of shared responsibility between the government and the community it is recommended that MOUs between individual RBGs and DAFWA be negotiated. The MOU would serve to clearly define the responsibilities and obligations of the parties (DAFWA and the RBG). This will help overcome concerns raised in the workshops about security of funding and government support.

A clear message that came from the workshops was the need for monies to 'hit the ground' and not be used up in excessive red tape and administration. The need for accountability was also acknowledged to ensure there was 'value for money' in control programs.

To this end it is recommended that DAFWA develop generic standardised monitoring and evaluation reporting systems that could be rolled out across all RBGs to ensure accountability and transparency in their operation and readily facilitate reporting to the Minister.

Finally, there was a belief amongst some workshop participants (especially in the Corrigin workshop) that the establishment of RBGs and rating were compulsory. This confusion appears to have arisen from presentations on earlier incarnations of the RBG model by DAFWA officers prior to the enactment of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

¹⁹ Roberts, AM and DJ Pannell (2009). Piloting a Systematic Framework for Public Investment in Regional Natural Resource Management: Dryland Salinity in Australia, *Land Use Policy*, 26, pp. 1001-1010.

²⁰ Research into Landcare has shown that limited leadership training was a shortcoming of the program (see, for example, Byron, I and A Curtis (2002). Maintaining Volunteer Commitment to Local Watershed Initiatives, *Environmental Management*, 30, pp. 59-67).

In order to correct landholder misconceptions about RBGs it is recommended that DAFWA prepare a factsheet on RBGs for distribution to interested stakeholders and organisations.

4.4 Declared pest control officers

It is recommended that RBGs appoint a declared pest control officer(s) (DPCO) to manage and undertake the day-to-day activities of the RBG. The role of the DPCO would be similar to NRMOs, who have proved to be successful, especially when well supported and funded.

Full-time DPCOs will also help to overcome the 'volunteer burnout' problem by dealing with the day-to-day tasks in the RBG.

Broadly, DPCOs would provide a link between the community (as represented by the RBG), the government (DAFWA) and the declared pest control issue. This three-way relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.

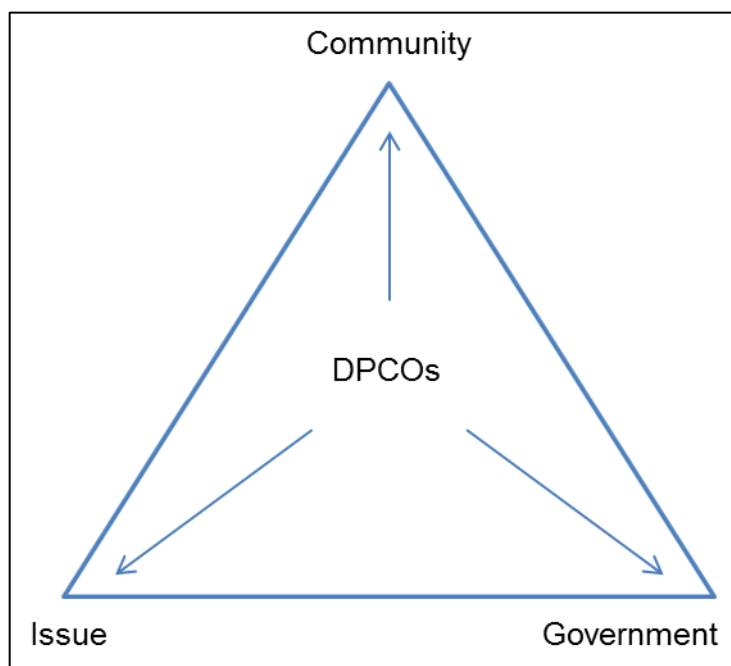


Figure 2 DPCO linkages

The job description for a DPCO could include:

- ▶ Provide technical and administrative support to the RBG Board and act as Executive Officer to the Board
- ▶ Prepare declared pest control programs to be undertaken by the RBG

- ▶ Liaise with DAFWA in the preparation of management plans for the control of declared pests in the RBGs area²¹
- ▶ Liaise with DAFWA Biosecurity Officers on declared pest control matters in the RBG area
- ▶ Provide advice to landholders on control of declared pests
- ▶ Undertake administrative, financial management and reporting functions for the RBG
- ▶ Monitor performance of declared pest control programs
- ▶ Maintain records of declared pest control activities
- ▶ Liaise with key personnel in the host organisation (if applicable).

4.5 RBG Association

A number of workshop participants observed that RBGs resemble Landcare groups established under the National Landcare Program. The views about the success of Landcare groups were mixed. However, it was agreed that in establishing RBGs lessons learned from the Landcare experience should be carefully considered.²²

Further, as RBGs are established and commence operations, other RBGs may benefit from the lessons learned. It is therefore recommended that a RBG Association be established as a network of RBGs to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experience and provide an effective means of communication between RBGs. This could be done through a newsletter, annual conferences and specialised workshops.

The RBG Association could also be an effective organisation to engage with DAFWA and other government agencies and authorities on matters of common interest to RBGs (e.g. declared pest control on public lands) and to influence broader policy directions on declared pest control.

The timing of the establishment of the RBG Association is not critical and can wait until the pilot RBG program has been undertaken.

4.6 Summary of recommendations

The key recommendations from this report are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Two to three pilot RBGs be established and operated on a trial basis based on the hosting model, but with different hosts. These pilot RBGs would be monitored for their progress by way of mid-term and final term reviews

Recommendation 2: The pilot RBGs are underpinned by a MOU with DAFWA.

Recommendation 3: DAFWA develop standardised monitoring and evaluation reporting systems for use by all RBGs.

²¹ See Section 45 of the *Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007*.

²² See, for example, Curtis, A, Lucas, D, Nurse, M and M Skeen (2008). *Achieving NRM Outcomes through Voluntary Action: Lessons from Landcare*, Discussion Paper, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne.

Recommendation 4: DAFWA investigate the feasibility of developing an investment decision framework along the lines of the Salinity Investment Framework (SIF) for use by RBGs.

Recommendation 5: DAFWA prepare a factsheet on RBGs for distribution to interested stakeholders/organisations.

Recommendation 6: RBGs appoint declared pest control officer(s) (DPCO) to manage and undertake the day-to-day activities of the RBG.

Recommendation 7: A RBG Association is established to provide a vehicle for RBGs to exchange ideas and experience in establishing and managing RBGs.

GHD

1st Floor, 10 Victoria Street

Bunbury WA 6230

T: (08) 9721 0700 F: (08) 9721 0777 E: bunmail@ghd.com

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		Name	Signature	Name	Signature	Date
1	John Roberts	Fionnuala Hannon		John Roberts		