

Alleged agricultural bias in biosecurity law

Lobby group the [Invasive Species Council](#) claims that biosecurity and quarantine laws are currently dominated by agricultural interests. Council CEO Mr John DeJose says that unless current law reforms give the environment equal protection, our ecosystems will remain at the mercy of newly invading pests and diseases.



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New federal biosecurity laws are being drafted after the independent [Quarantine and Biosecurity Review](#) found that the system needed an overhaul.

The Council is calling on the Federal Government to ensure the protection of the country's environmental health gets equal billing with agricultural protection under the new laws.

According to the Council, since the Quarantine Act of 1908 Australia's defences against newly invading pests and diseases have been weighted in favour of protecting primary industry profitability. This has given Australia some of the toughest quarantine laws in the world but, according to the council it has still left our natural environment exposed to dangerous invasive species.

'Invasive species have caused the extinction of 40 Australian mammals, birds and frogs, and are second only to habitat loss in the numbers of native species and ecosystems they threaten,' says Mr DeJose.

The Council points to a number of invasive species brought into Australia for agricultural purposes, including exotic grasses such as gamba, mission, para and hymenachne species, imported for grazing in Australia's rangelands. The Council points to the role that these grasses play in helping fuel frequent, intense, large-scale fires, which they argue are contributing to mammal extinctions across northern Australia.

The Council wants the new laws to:

1. Ensure transparent decision-making guided by independent science.
2. Ensure that systems specifically aimed at stopping environmental invasives reach the same level of priority as those enjoyed by industry.
3. Harness the intellectual firepower of the community environment sector in shaping invasive species policy and responses.
4. Adopt the 'polluter pays' principle to fund environmental restoration.

Source: Invasive Species Council

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