

A business case to fund implementation of the Ord Valley Guard Strategic Plan

Introduction

The agriculture sector is a key driver of economic activity in the Wyndham-East Kimberley region, with the potential of the Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA) presenting a unique opportunity to build on the region's strengths and capitalise on new and emerging opportunities to achieve a range of regional development objectives.

The support for the agriculture industry in the ORIA is delivering positive outcomes for the regional economy and continuing to drive industry diversification with the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry accounting for around 10% of total gross value added for the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley in 2022. Similarly, employment in the industry has grown by one-third since 2006, with an increasing share of employees in the industry of Aboriginal heritage (11.8% in 2021 compared to 6.7% in 2006). For the 2022 dry season total irrigated farm activity was 22,960ha producing a total crop value of \$216.8 million.

By adhering to sustainable development principles, the ORIA can support the long-term health and productivity of the land as well as the well-being of all stakeholders involved to produce and transport products in ways that are environmentally sound, economically viable and socially responsible.

Biosecurity as a shared responsibility

The ORIA is renowned for producing high-quality, clean, and safe agricultural products. This reputation is a crucial enabler for maintaining a strong presence in target markets. The region's geographic isolation acts as a natural barrier, limiting the likelihood of biosecurity threats such as pests and diseases. However, despite this advantage the region must remain vigilant to maintain this status.

The consequences of temporary or prolonged impacts from biosecurity risks include environmental damage, economic losses, and social disruption. Achieving an Ord Biosecurity Vision requires coordinated action. Government, industry and the community must work together to transform objectives into tangible outcomes, fostering a thriving and sustainable agricultural sector and contributing to broader social objectives in the Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA) over the next decade.

SWEK Biosecurity Reserve

In 2005 OrdGuard, a regional bio-security plan, set out how ORIA producers, members of the local community and government would cooperate to assess and respond to new pest, disease and weed threats by prevention of entry, early detection, and prompt incident response action to protect the economic health of the region. To that end, the Shire of Wyndham/East Kimberley (SWEK) contributed to assist in implementing and maintaining OrdGuard. Various mechanisms were implemented to ensure the OrdGuard Committee continued to be funded and managed, however in 2010 OrdGuard was closed down.

A SWEK Biosecurity reserve was established to assist in eradication programs for Mediterranean Fruit Fly in the ORIA. The ORIA has area freedom for this fruit fly, and this enables growers to market host fruit into east coast markets without treatment of the fruit. The most recent use of funds from the biosecurity reserve was in 2015, when \$26,000 was used for Mediterranean Fruit fly control.

Any biosecurity outbreaks that are new incursions to Australia are to be managed and funded through federal government and state governments. Any outbreaks that are new to the State will be funded through state funding. More recent examples of such incursions where shire funds were not accessed include Citrus Canker (2018) and Myrtle Rust (2022).

The Biosecurity Reserve currently stands at \$295,000 (June 2024) and is described as a SWEK Activity i.e. Economic services described as to help promote the Shire and its economic wellbeing. The regulation and provision of tourism, area promotion, building control, wellbeing, noxious weeds and vermin control.

The current purpose of the reserve is to hold funds for use in emergency situations that threaten the biosecurity of the East Kimberley.

Biosecurity collaboration

A robust and proactive approach to biosecurity is imperative for the protection of the ORIA's ecosystems and the continuation of its agricultural industries. This responsibility becomes even more pressing in the face of climate change, where changes in temperature and rainfall patterns may alter growing seasons, leading to biosecurity challenges that could affect key sowing and harvesting times. It is also critical given further development in the region will bring additional biosecurity risks that will need to be managed.

To tackle biosecurity threats effectively, collaborative efforts are required. Partnerships between government bodies, industry groups and communities foster a stronger biosecurity framework, underpinned by shared knowledge, resources and action. Everyone, from local landowners to tourists, has a role to play in detecting and responding to biosecurity threats, such as reporting unusual pests or implementing clean-down procedures for equipment and vehicles.

By fostering existing relationships and building upon existing strengths, industry, government, and the community can create a resilient biosecurity system, safeguarding the ORIA's agricultural industry and contributing to the prosperity of WA.

Ord Valley Guard Strategic Plan

In 2022, DPIRD facilitated a series of workshops to re-engage an industry and community focus on the OrdGuard Plan. The outcome from this was a commitment by the SWEK Council (28th November 2023) to allocate \$15,000 towards updating the Ord Biosecurity Plan and requested that the role of the Shire is clearly defined within the plan.

An independent consultancy Agknowledge was engaged to work with DPIRD and the OrdGuard Committee to review and renovate the OrdGuard Plan to reflect 2024 expectations and protocols.

The new OrdGuard Plan developed by the Ord Valley Guard Committee, with membership from the local primary, logistics and tourism industries, local council and MG Corporation is continuing to build cooperation and communication through these partnerships and networks, and will lead to a broader base of knowledge, expertise, and shared responsibility.

The mission of the committee is to minimise the introduction, establishment, and negative impact of plant health threats in the ORIA region by creating a regional biosecurity framework and operational structure to collaboratively address and enhance awareness of regional biosecurity issues throughout the community.

The committee has developed a strategic plan (attached) with the following Objectives:

1. Greater confidence in Ord Valley pest status through risk-based surveillance planning and collection of data on pest presence and absence.
2. A more informed Ord Valley community with greater biosecurity understanding and commitment to surveillance.
3. Plant industries that are more resilient and prepared for future pest threats.
4. Improved collaboration and trust between partners that supports shared biosecurity goals.

The OrdGuard Plan outlines a range of Strategies to improve planning, prioritisation, preparedness, and coordination for surveillance; Improve surveillance delivery through data capture, quality, and access and increase effective engagement, awareness, and communication by an inclusive Ord Valley Guard governance structure and a robust funding model.

The implementation of the Ord Valley Biosecurity Plan will assist in reducing the risk of biosecurity incursions into the ORIA and reduce the possible outbreaks that would impact industry and the community in the Ord.

It is currently envisaged that the body to be formed will be an Incorporated Association called the Ord Valley Guard Association. The proposals are pending the next workshop meeting.

Biosecurity funding:

A key requirement for the Ord Valley Guard Plan is funding for its implementation. This includes employment of executive officer and operational funds to achieve the requirements in the strategic plan.

Specific biosecurity tasks that are required to be undertaken to manage the biosecurity issues in the irrigated agriculture of the Ord Valley.

- Collaborative surveillance activities to enable early-detection and rapid response.
 - Identify key pathways and pests to focus operational activities
 - Develop and implement programs to minimise the incursion of exotic and regional plant pests
 - Increased capability to detect and respond to new pests and reduce spread of established pests.
 - Action strategies and collaborative projects to reduce further spread of established key plant pests.
- Implement proactive and forward-looking approaches to surveillance and prevention activities in northern Australia.
 - Consider the impact from the expansion of Ord Stage 2 across State and Territory borders and the implications for quarantine and produce movement.
 - Increased awareness of current and emerging biosecurity threats to plant industries and the environment of the ORIA.
 - Engage the synergies with the NT across a range of industries in preparedness and management planning
- Biosecurity management is underpinned by science and technology-based innovative solutions
 - Improved information on pest status to support market access and maintenance

- An integrated, secure, data driven and technology-enabled biosecurity system oversee at our border and within Australia
- Map the people across industry with monitoring capacity and identification skills and align the priority focus.
 - Support training of landholders and stakeholders to adopt sound biosecurity practices in key areas of pest incursion management, on-farm, and area biosecurity
 - Engage with DPIRD's Emergency Preparedness Coordinator to roll out capacity building on responses to emergency management of incursions.
- A regulatory environment that supports response to current and future biosecurity challenges and opportunities
 - Effective risk management underpins decision making.

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development will employ a person to take on the role of executive officer for the committee and to assist with the implementation of the plan.

The Ord Valley Guard Committee is sourcing co contributions from other organisations to assist in the implementation of the plan. Grains Research and Development Corporation, Cotton RDC and Cucurbit industry have been approached for funds to assist with the implementation of the plan.

Initial support has been garnered from the members around the current committee including the Ordco, Kimberley Cotton Company, Ord Irrigation as the key farmer component, DPIRD will provide an office and employment support, the East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce and the Kununurra Visitors Centre are also future contributors.

The committee would like to formally source funds from the SWEK Biosecurity Reserve to assist in the progression of the planned activities and match with funds from the other sources outlined.

The Ord Valley Guard Committee would like to request Council amend the current biosecurity reserve fund purpose to: hold funds for use in emergency situations that threaten the biosecurity of the East Kimberley, and invest in preparedness activities to reduce the risk of outbreaks in the ORIA.

Funds requested from the Biosecurity Reserve: \$30,000 per year for five years.

Summary

- The ORIA is renowned for producing high-quality, clean, and safe agricultural products.
- The consequences from biosecurity risks include environmental damage, economic losses, and social disruption.
- To tackle biosecurity threats effectively, collaborative efforts are required.
- The Ord Valley Guard Plan is developed with membership from the local primary, logistics and tourism industries, local council, and MG Corporation.
- The implementation of the Plan will assist in reducing the risk of biosecurity incursions into the ORIA and reduce the potential for possible outbreaks that would impact industry and the community.
- The Ord Valley Guard Association will be an Incorporated Association.

- SWEK currently holds a Biosecurity Reserve of \$295,000 (June 2024).
- The current purpose of the reserve is to hold funds for use in emergency situations that threaten the biosecurity of the East Kimberley.

Request

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