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Department of Health and Aged Care

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SUBMISSION TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION: PREPARING FOR, AND RESPONDING TO, FUTURE PANDEMICS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES - SUPPORTING DOCUMENT

In addition to the answers provided via the online survey, please find below further summary information supporting our recommendations in relation to the proposed pandemic instrument and amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR) for the Department of Health and Aged Care's consideration.

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) welcomes any new pandemic instrument and changes to the IHR that will better position both Australia, our region, and the international community to prepare for, and respond to, new public health threats. We strongly support the priorities and principles that are guiding Australia's engagement, in particular the following:

- A One Health approach: recognising that the relationship between human, animal and environmental health should guide pandemic prevention;
- Enhance global, regional, and national health capacities to better position the international community to respond to pandemics and other international health emergencies;
- Enhance sharing of information on diseases with pandemic potential (noting the need for enhanced and improved inclusion of the wildlife and environmental sectors)
- Ensure alignment with other relevant international agreements.

Q1: HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BE IMPROVED TO MORE EFFECTIVELY PREVENT, PREPARE FOR, AND RESPOND TO, FUTURE PANDEMICS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES?

Wildlife Health Australia has three recommendations for this question. We explain in more detail below by indicating challenges and solutions.

Recommendation One: Lead with prevention initiatives (as opposed to response initiatives)

- Prevention comes first in a pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response program. The OHHLEP model (figure 1) provides a very useful summary of the different activities associated with prevention versus preparedness and response¹. For example, prevention includes minimising disease risk needs at its source by addressing the fundamental drivers of disease emergence and re-emergence.
- Disease prevention is also far more cost-effective than response.
- However, implementation requires cross-sectoral approaches. For example, regulatory frameworks developed to protect of human health need to also consider conservation, sustainable use and management of biodiversity.
- One Health tools and processes such as disease risk analysis² and other aligned processes³ are critical to prevention, as they are aids to improved decision making under uncertainty.
- Embedding a One Health⁴ approach will be critical to ensuring true cross-sectoral prevention activities are implemented and effective.
- Multilateral benefit-sharing systems must be utilised to strengthen pandemic prevention following properly risk analysed management interventions. Article 8 Option 8C provides a useful example of a prevention initiative, with options such as the WHO/World Bank Pandemic Fund as financing mechanisms^{5,6} to support review and development of prevention systems and frameworks.

¹ One Health High-Level Expert Panel (2023) [Prevention of zoonotic spillover: From relying on response to reducing the risk at source](#). White paper/Opinion piece.

² Examples from wildlife health: [IUCN/ WOAAH Guidelines on Wildlife Disease Risk Analysis](#); [IUCN/ WOAAH Manual of Procedures for Wildlife Disease Risk Analysis](#)

³ Driver-Pressure-State-Impact-Response Framework ([DPSIR framework, as used by Australia's State of Environment Report](#)), to improve prevention based solutions. This framework is based on a concept of causality, where social, demographic and economic developments in society drive (D) human activities that pressure (P) the environment, changing the state (S) of resources (the quantity and/or quality). The change has negative impacts (I) on society and the environment, to which society responds (R) with adaptive, preventive or mitigative actions (EEA, 1999; Martins et al., 2012)

⁴ Article 3 Option 8A, Article 5 Option 5A, Article 11 Option 11B, Article 15 Option 15B.

⁵ Article 8 Option 8C – Parties propose to establish a universal health and preparedness review mechanism.

⁶ Article 6 paragraph 3 – to re-enforce and integrated approach, including Disease Risk Analysis, referred to risk assessments in the Article.

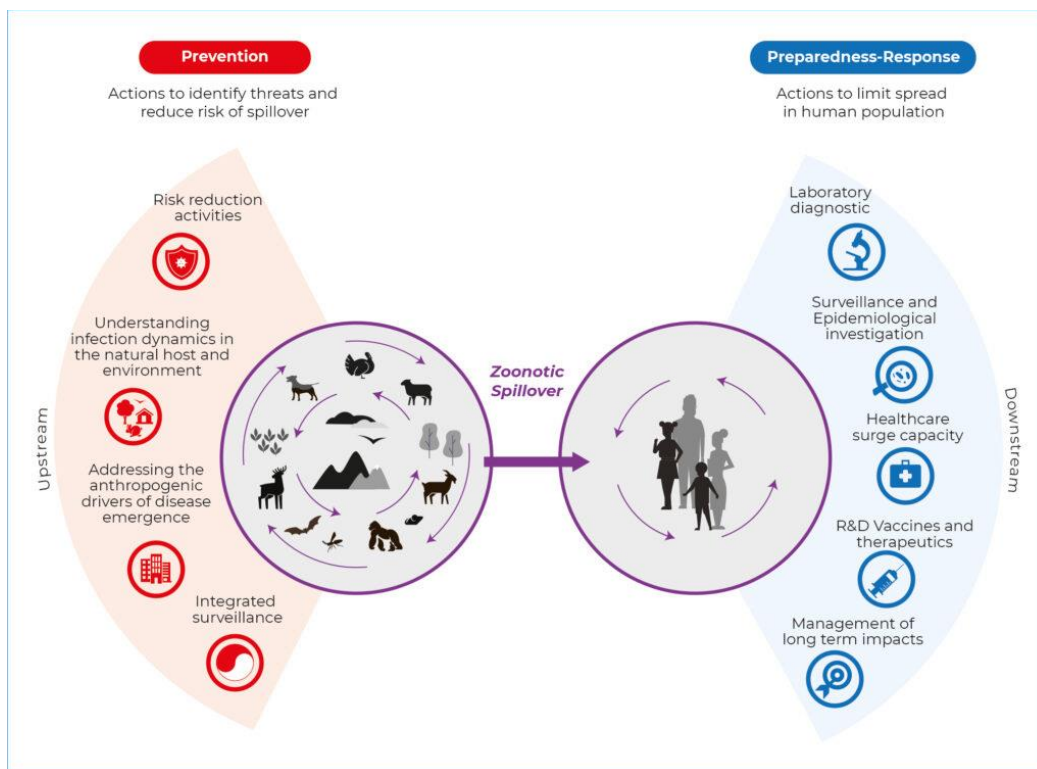


Figure 1: Prevention of zoonotic spillover to humans¹

Recommendation Two: Utilise and support existing mechanisms and frameworks to inform planning and decision-making and information/intelligence exchange.

- Integration of information from the animal (domestic and wild), plant and environmental sectors (e.g. One Health intelligence) is critical for pandemic and disease emergency planning and decision-making.
- “Many of the Quadripartite organisations have recently invested significant amounts in modernizing their information and intelligence systems, and therefore any initiative to connect existing information should be targeted to add value to existing systems, rather than attempt to replace them”⁷. Noting opportunities still exist to enhance inclusion of information from the wildlife health and environmental sector into these One Health systems⁸.
- Most countries work within one or more existing international and regional frameworks⁹ that require coordination across sectors, disciplines, and jurisdictions.

⁷ Evidence for a Quadripartite systems-based approach to pandemics underpins enhanced intelligence integration globally. [One Health, Breaking Institutional Silos and Achieving Health for All, Quadripartite One Health Intelligence Scoping Study - Final report](#), [Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources \(EIOS\)](#), [UNEP report on preventing the next pandemic](#), [World Organisation for Animal Health \(WOAH\) Terrestrial and Aquatic Animal Codes and Manuals](#), [World Animal Health Information System \(WAHIS\)](#), [FAO EMPRES Global Animal Disease Information System \(EMPRES-i\)](#).

⁸ Example include [Global Biodiversity Information Facility](#), [Species360](#), [Atlas of Living Australia](#), inclusive of information relating to the protected or listed status of species e.g. [IUCN Red List](#).

⁹ Frameworks can also take the form of strategies, regulations, resolutions, conventions and codes of practice.

Recommendation Three: Improve risk communications, coordination and collaboration of effort.

- Risk communication channels between all relevant sectors and stakeholders needs to be further improved and enhanced to build trusted relationships and partnerships to gain global community participation. Transparent, open, and timely sharing of, and access to, accurate information¹⁰ is needed to reduce uncertainty when managing risk and advance collective action.
- Improved risk communications, coordination and collaboration requires the World Health Assembly to embrace the One Health process and recognise and act on intelligence from other members of the Quadripartite as well as non-government organisations, inclusive of those with a remit for wildlife health or the environment. It therefore follows that:
 - All members of the Quadripartite have a role to play;
 - Indigenous and other under-represented communities need to be included in the decision-making process;
 - Existing communications between front-line environmental organisations¹¹ and health decision-makers should be utilised to provide joint situational understanding of risk;
 - On-the-ground intelligence and learnings should be continually integrated¹² to ensure feasible and sustainable implementation and uptake.
- Establishing cross-sectoral risk communication, coordination and collaboration at a national and international level will generate the insight and deep knowledge necessary for good decision-making to achieve context specific and appropriate risk management goals.

¹⁰ As per Article 3 paragraph 5

¹¹ For example: [International Union for Conservation and Nature](#)

¹² [Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, OECD report on lessons learnt from the CoVid-19 response](#)

Q2: WHAT ISSUES DO YOU THINK NEED TO BE PRIORITISED TO GUIDE THE WORLD'S FUTURE PREPARATION FOR, AND RESPONSES TO, FUTURE PANDEMICS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES?

Wildlife Health Australia has two recommendations for this question. We explain in more detail below by indicating challenges and solutions.

Recommendation One: Prioritisation of a systems approach via One Health is the key to preparation and response to pandemics and international health emergencies.

- A systems approach is critical when planning for and responding to pandemics and international health emergencies^{13,14}.
- Biodiversity and natural systems are under pressure. Many emerging infectious diseases that affect humans originate in wildlife. The same environmental changes that threaten biodiversity (e.g. land use change, climate change) are also driving the increasing emergence and re-emergence of infectious disease¹⁵. A One Health approach needs to clearly acknowledge the importance of wildlife health to ensure health system resilience.
- Our understanding of the causes and epidemiology of wildlife diseases is often poor and exacerbated by limited surveillance and research efforts. This in turn reduces the ability to reduce or mitigate disease risks. Monitoring of, and response to, wildlife health should be acknowledged as essential elements of disease prevention, preparedness, surveillance or monitoring program, epidemiological investigations, and/or outbreak responses for all health sectors. For example, surveillance of free-ranging wildlife based on assessed risks, especially at human-wildlife interfaces both within countries and across boundaries is integral to pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response.
- A systems approach extends to community resilience for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems. Global reduction in mental health resilience following pandemics should also be acknowledged and assessed, with prioritisation of solutions, for resilient communities and health care professionals across all sectors¹⁶. For example, human-wildlife conflict can impact the mental health of frontline wildlife health professionals which in turn can lead reduced workforce sustainability.

¹³ [Emerging Infectious Diseases of Wildlife - Threats to Biodiversity and Human Health](#); [Emerging Infectious Diseases in Free-Ranging Wildlife—Australian Zoo Based Wildlife Hospitals Contribute to National Surveillance](#); [One Health, emerging infectious diseases and wildlife: two decades of progress?](#)

¹⁴ [Systems Thinking to Improve the Public's Health](#)

¹⁵ [IPBES Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#).

¹⁶ [Fostering resilience and mental health support in a post COVID-19 environment](#)

Recommendation Two: Prioritisation of issues that enhance whole system resilience by promoting conservation and biosecurity integration are key to preventing, and responding to future pandemics

The text must emphasise that people are part of nature, and that the health of people and their domestic animals, depends on recognition that maintain healthy human populations depends on the inter-dependent links between people and the rest of nature¹⁷. Accordingly, the proposed agreement should:

- Acknowledge that system resilience is key to pandemic prevention and that human activities resulting in negative impacts to biodiversity reduce system resilience. This coupled with increased human-wildlife interactions increases the risk of pandemics¹⁸.
- Emphasise that reducing pressures on biodiversity and decreasing environmental degradation nationally and internationally will reduce risks to human and wildlife health across all sectors, and therefore the conservation, sustainable use and management of biodiversity is key to prevent, and respond to, the next pandemic.
- Ensure effective messaging is in place to drive economic investment in the conservation, sustainable use and management of biodiversity, as well as health promotion and increasing system resilience¹⁹.
- Link to and encourage uptake of existing frameworks, treaties and instruments, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global biodiversity framework.

¹⁷ One Health: A new definition for a sustainable and healthy future

¹⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic is intricately linked to biodiversity loss and ecosystem health, The Global Resilience Partnership, Planetary Boundary Model

¹⁹ An early analysis of the World Bank's Pandemic Fund: a new fund for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response Preventing, Preparing for, and Responding to Disease Outbreaks and Pandemics: Future Directions for the World Bank Group

Q3: IS THERE ANY OTHER INFORMATION YOU WOULD LIKE TO PROVIDE THAT MIGHT HELP TO GUIDE AUSTRALIA'S ENGAGEMENT ON A NEW INTERNATIONAL PANDEMIC INSTRUMENT AND CHANGES TO THE IHR?

Wildlife Health Australia's position on when Australia should reconsider support for any Pandemic Instrument.

- If One Health is not included as the underlying approach to future risk management.
- If a preventative, pro-active approach is not included.
- If wildlife health and conservation are not recognised as critical elements.
- If there is insufficient consideration and alignment with current international agreements²⁰, including recognition of the importance of the Quadripartite and use of existing mechanism.

Overall

WHA supports inclusion of Article 5 Option 5A and Article 23 which recognises the importance of involvement by Quadripartite organisations in future disease emergency and pandemic concerns and notes Article 15 - International collaboration and cooperation.

However, consideration of the Quadripartite and other systems and frameworks needs to be strengthened to ensure disease risk prevention, preparedness and response strategies are not duplicative of other lines of work and respect regulations and systems already in place and ensured opportunities to build on existing interagency coordination mechanisms are identified.

²⁰ For example: *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*, *Ramsar Wetlands Convention* and the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)*, *Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement)*.

ABOUT WILDLIFE HEALTH AUSTRALIA

Wildlife Health Australia is the national coordinating body for wildlife health in Australia. Our mission is to lead national action on wildlife health to protect and enhance the natural environment, biodiversity, economy and animal and human health through strong partnerships. We work with up to 120 different government and non-government agencies and organisations and play a key consultative role in Australia's animal disease and biosecurity networks. Our membership operates as a network of forty member organisations and over 750 individual members. This includes government agencies (including environment, health, and agriculture portfolios) and non-government partners (including universities, independent researchers, zoos and aquariums, private veterinarians, and rehabilitators).

Wildlife Health Australia is trusted and consulted by both government and non-government stakeholders. We assist Australian government sectors, with consideration of Australia's federated system, through the administration of Australia's national wildlife health system.

Wildlife Health Australia is a respected partner in the international communities of wildlife health and One Health. We host Australia's World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) focal point for wildlife health, nominated by the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer as Australia's WOAH Delegate, and the co-chair of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Wildlife Health Specialist Group. Our Chief Executive Officer advises the WOAH on their Wildlife Health Framework and contributes a wildlife health perspective to issues involving the Quadripartite. In 2023, WOAH agreed that Wildlife Health Australia establish as a WOAH Collaborating Centre for Wildlife Health Risk Management in the Indo-Pacific within the speciality Drivers of Emerging Risks.

More information on Wildlife Health Australia is available at:
<http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au>