



AGRICULTURE PROTECTION BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



ANNUAL REPORT 2002/03
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2003



Government of Western Australia

AGRICULTURE PROTECTION BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



ANNUAL REPORT 2002/03

For the year ending 30 June 2003

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STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

ENABLING LEGISLATION

The Agriculture Protection Board is established under the *Agriculture Protection Act, 1950*.

LEGISLATION

The Agriculture Protection Board is responsible for the administration of the following statutes:

Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act, 1976
Plant Pests and Diseases (Eradication Funds) Act, 1974
Argentine Ant Act, 1968

LEGISLATION IMPACTING ON THE BOARD'S ACTIVITIES

In the performance of its duties and functions, the Agriculture Protection Board complies with the following statutes:

Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Western Australia) Act, 1995
Agricultural Produce (Chemical Residues) Act, 1983
Animal Welfare Act, 2002
Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 1988
Biological Control Act, 1986
Disability Services Act, 1993
Equal Opportunity Act, 1984
Explosives and Dangerous Goods Act, 1961
Export Control Act, 1982
Financial Administration and Audit Act, 1985
Firearms Act, 1973
Freedom of Information Act, 1992
Government Employees Superannuation Act, 1987
Health Act, 1911
Industrial Relations Act, 1979
Library Board of WA Act, 1951
Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act, 1981
Official Corruption Act, 1988-94
Plant Diseases Act, 1914
Poisons Act, 1964
Public Sector Management Act, 1994
Quarantine Act, 1908
Salaries and Allowances Act, 1975
Seeds Act, 1981
Soil and Land Conservation Act, 1945
State Supply Commission Act, 1991
Statutory Corporations (Liability of Directors) Act, 1996
Wildlife Conservation Act, 1950
Worker's Compensation and Assistance Act, 1981
Workplace Agreements Act, 1993

In accordance with subsection 31(1) of the *Public Sector Management Act, 1994*, the Agriculture Protection Board has complied with the public sector standards, codes of ethics and the code of conduct, that are prescribed in the Act. There were no applications for review of alleged breaches of the standards lodged during the period to 30 June 2003.

In the financial administration of the Agriculture Protection Board we have complied with the requirements of the *Financial Administration and Audit Act, 1985* and every other relevant written law, and exercised controls which provide reasonable assurance that the receipt and expenditure of monies, the acquisition, disposal and the incurring of liabilities have been made in accordance with legislative provisions. Further, at the date of signing, we are not aware of any circumstances that would render the particulars included in this statement misleading or inaccurate.



Chris Richardson
Chairman



John O'Brien
BOARD MEMBER



30 September 2003

The Hon. Kim Chance MLC
Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Minister

As required under section 66 of the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1985*, and in accord with the extension of time granted by you pursuant to section 70 of that Act (appendix 8), I now have pleasure in submitting for your information and presentation to Parliament, the Annual Report of the Agriculture Protection Board of Western Australia, for the year ending 30 June 2003.

The 2002/03 year was once again a year full of challenges for the Board. It's ability to respond was strengthened with the formal appointment of additional members to fill all remaining vacancies mid-way through the year. I thank you for your support in this regard, Minister, and again commend my fellow Board members on the professional manner in which they have discharged their duties.

As a result of ongoing complaints over record dog numbers, including observations of high animal numbers in areas previously thought to be free of dogs, the Board commissioned an industry evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing Wild Dog Control Program. The evaluation was carried out by a panel of producer representatives under the chairmanship of Board Member Mrs Michelle Allen. A total of 25 recommendations for improvement were put forward by the panel in its final report of 30th May 2003. A number of the more routine recommendations were implemented immediately by the Department of Agriculture. The Board saw fit to make the report available for a 2-month period of public comment which concluded on 15th August 2003. A number of additional comments were received. Following careful consideration of all material, the Board agreed to accept all panel recommendations and is now proceeding to address those requiring more strategic / fundamental reforms.

The report again highlighted the need of sufficient funding to enable adequate management of declared plants and animals on government-held as well as privately-held lands. Private landholders within the State's agricultural areas in particular continue to express dissatisfaction at levels of control activity on government managed lands. However, it is clear in many instances that these same landholders are not investing significantly in control work on their own properties. The Board believes the ongoing complaints will continue until such time as the present arrangements for funding and management are modified to help meet the communities' expectations, however we must not fall into the trap of building unrealistic expectations for the community in regard to the level of service that the Government can fund and deliver in isolation from community involvement, both from a financial and practical perspective. The Board continues to work with the Department of Agriculture and others to examine suitable regionally-based alternatives. These will be explored in more depth during the coming year, in close consultation with affected parties.

Funding of declared plant and animal control on and in relation to land held under pastoral lease was also an issue during 2002/03. The quantum of the Agriculture Protection (AP) Rate was increased by 10% for the 2002/03 financial year, in order to begin closure of the otherwise widening gap between costs of service provision and available revenues. Board Members spent considerable time and energy consulting with pastoral industry representatives in order to determine an appropriate further increase in the rate quantum to apply in 2003/04.

Following your response to the recommendations of the Davies Review in September 2003, the Board worked hard to establish the new grain grower advisory committee in time for it to contribute to the development of a significantly revised Skeleton Weed search program for the summer of 2002/03. Individual growers were asked to accept responsibility for searching their own properties with assistance as necessary from the newly formed Local Action Groups. Modest financial assistance was provided from Program funds to support the operation of these Groups. The revised approach worked extremely well, aided in part by the relatively poor harvest. Grower feedback made it clear that additional assistance would be needed during a harvest more in keeping with the norm. This has been acknowledged via recommended modifications for the developing 2003/04 Program.

Work on the development of a replacement for the existing legislation underpinning the Skeleton Weed Program continued during the 2002/03, culminating in draft 2 of the so-called *Grain and Seed Crops (Pest Control Funding) Bill 2003*. Unfortunately the draft new Bill was not produced in time to be considered by Parliament prior to the expiry of the existing Act on 31st October 2003, necessitating further amendment of the Act to remove the expiry provision. Detailed consultation with affected parties will commence in the near future.

At the Board's request, officers of the Department of Agriculture continued to investigate options for the private manufacture of poison bait products. Preliminary discussions with several prospective proponents prove fruitless but provided the momentum for a follow-up tender process through the Department of Conservation and Land Management, seeking alternative manufacturers for its 1080 dried meat fox bait requirements. No suitable tenderers were identified. With private sector options tested and discounted, the Board initiated further talks with DCLM regarding the potential for a whole-of-government approach to poison bait research, development, manufacture and application. At the time of writing, joint-management of the DCLM and APB facilities had essentially been agreed between the respective parties. The Board is hopeful that volume throughput can be increased under a more commercial approach, leading to improved returns on total government investment and per unit savings on bait products for end-customers.

The review of health concerns over former workers involved with the use of herbicides in the Kimberleys during the period 1975-1985 entered a second phase during the year, with the preliminary findings of Dr Harper's work giving rise to the need for more detailed, scientific assessment by a panel of eminent medical experts. At the time of writing, findings of this second more detailed phase are still awaited.

Significant progress in biosecurity planning was again achieved throughout the 2002/03 year under the various Guard™ initiatives, with both the Board and the Department continuing to work with the stakeholders concerned to progress implementation of the various Plans and, particularly, to ensure clear understanding and agreement as to the respective responsibilities of industry and Government.

Members continued their focus on enhanced consultation processes and increased stakeholder engagement throughout the year. The newly constituted Zone Control Authority network functioned well, with ZCA meetings increasingly integrated seamlessly with those of the Department's District Consultative Committees, and members of both networks intermixing and jointly considering a much broader range of issues. The partnership between the Board and the Department's senior management was also further strengthened via regular contact, exchange of ideas and mutual attendance at a range of relevant functions. Although future advisory arrangements still remain somewhat unclear post enactment of the *Agriculture Management Bill*, Members remain committed to working closely with their industry peers and with Departmental staff, and have separately confirmed their interest in continuing their leadership under a new legislative framework. We look forward to assisting you to develop this in the months ahead.



Chris Richardson
Chairman

THE CURRENT INDUSTRY SITUATION

Western Australia's agricultural industry is a major contributor to the State's economy, with agriculture and fisheries production worth a total of AUD \$6.2 billion for 2001/02. Total agri-food industry exports for the same period were worth AUD \$4.4 Billion and accounted for 14 per cent of the State's exports. Grains, mainly wheat, dominate the State's agricultural exports. About 93 per cent of wheat produced is exported representing a significant share of the national grain exports.

The success of our export market growth is partly due to the State's geographic isolation from other ecosystems, but good management and constant vigilance also keep Western Australia free from many serious animal and plant pests, diseases and weeds affecting our neighbouring States and other countries around the world.

International market reforms such as the development of Free Trade Agreements, significant growth in regional consumption, increased production diversity and efficiency, and a stronger focus on premium products and value-adding practices, provide potential for the State's agricultural exports to continue to increase in the future.

At the same time, the risk of introduction of unwanted pests and diseases continues to grow with increased international and interstate movement of people, products and equipment resulting from constant advances in communications and transport technology.

In company with the WA Department of Agriculture, the Agriculture Protection Board continues to play a crucial role in protecting the State's agricultural and environmental resources from the potentially harmful effects of exotic plants, plant diseases (particularly insects) and animal pests.

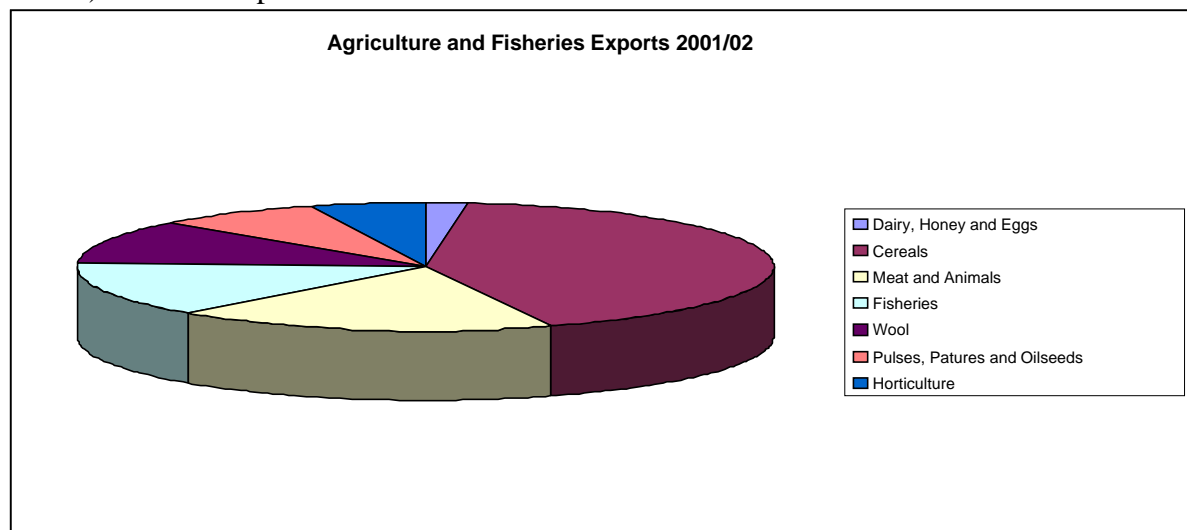


Figure 1: Agriculture and Fisheries exports 2001/02 for Western Australia – source

AIMS AND PURPOSES OF THE BOARD

OBJECTIVES

The APB is a statutory authority established by the *Agriculture Protection Board Act 1950* to minimise the impact of Declared Plants and Animals on agriculture and related resources.

Since 1 July 1997, the Board's operational services have largely been delivered on its behalf by the WA Department of Agriculture, according to a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies. Utilising its statewide network of Zone Control Authorities to engage local communities and stakeholders as necessary, the Board continues to advise the Minister and Director-General of Agriculture on a range of biosecurity issues, including declared plant and animal control.

In addition to its statutory role, the Board also oversees the full range of activities delivered through the Plant and Animal Industry Programs of the WA Department of Agriculture. In conjunction with its responsibilities to manage Declared Plants and Animals, the Board ensures a holistic approach to agriculture protection is achieved through its involvement with the Interstate and International Quarantine, Chemical Management, and Animal and Plant Health Management Programs in Western Australia.

Via repeal of the Board's enabling and administered legislation, it is intended that enactment of the *Agriculture Management Bill* will eventually formalise these arrangements. The Bill remains under development and is scheduled for introduction into State Parliament in the Spring 2003 session. There is general agreement that a case exists for the Board's continued operation post enactment of the Bill but, as yet, its future role, responsibilities, membership and working relationship with the Minister or Director General of Agriculture has not been finally determined.

As part of the transfer of resources to the Department of Agriculture, the latter delivered operational services during 2002/03 on a 'free of charge' basis, to enable the Board to meet its statutory responsibilities. This Annual Report includes these 'free of charge' services, as well as those also delivered by the Department but funded from Trust Funds over which the Board retains full control. Other protection activities falling outside of the Board's statutory responsibility are reported within the Department of Agriculture's Annual Report.

POWERS OF THE BOARD

The *Agriculture Protection Board Act, 1950* and the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act, 1976* ('the Protection Act') prescribe the Board's roles and responsibilities. The Protection Act empowers the Board to do all such things necessary to manage, control, and prevent, the introduction and spread of certain plants and animals, in order to protect agriculture and related resources.

DECLARED PLANTS AND ANIMALS

In accordance with Sections 35 and 36 of the Protection Act, the Board has the power to 'declare' species of plants and animals for the whole of the State or any part of it, and may restrict the entry, keeping, movement, control or management of each declared species by regulation. It may also approve management schemes to control populations of native animals with pest potential.

The Board assigns declared plants and animals to various categories, which determine the management action required for each species.

Declared plants

- P1 Plants that should not be introduced (prevention).
Nearly all declared plants are in this category.
Declared plants are also placed in one of the following categories for the whole or part of the State.
- P2 Plants that should be eradicated (eradication category).
- P3 Plant numbers and distribution, or both, should be reduced (control category).
- P4 Plants that should be prevented from spreading (containment category).
- P5 Plants that should be treated only on roads or reserves.

Declared animals

- A1 Animals that should not be introduced.
- A2 Introduced animals that should be eradicated.
- A3 Animals that should not be kept.
- A4 Animals that should only be introduced under conditions and restrictions.
- A5 Animals whose numbers should be reduced and kept under restriction.
- A6 Animals that should only be kept under restrictions and conditions.
- A7 Native animals for which there is a management plan to regulate numbers without endangering the species.

Introduced Declared Animals may be included in three categories, relating to:

- introduction of the animal (Categories A1 or A4);
- control of the animal (Categories A2 or A5);
- keeping of the animal (Categories A3 or A6).

In accordance with Section 37 of the Protection Act, each year the Board publishes in the Government Gazette a complete list of all Declared Plants and Animals and their management categories. A copy of this list (as at 30 June 2003) is attached at Appendices 3 & 4.

AUTHORISED PERSONS

The Board appoints authorised persons under Section 11 of the Protection Act, to carry out designated functions for the management of Declared Plants and Animals including:

- entering any land to look for Declared Plants and Animals (a warrant signed by a Justice of the Peace is required in order to enter a dwelling);
- issuing a notice upon an owner or occupier of land to control or restrict the movement of Declared Plants and Animals on, and in respect to, that land;
- seizing and destroying (or dealing with in another way) anything, including animals, that carry or contain prohibited materials (such as weed seeds);
- searching vehicles, vessels, aircraft or trains for declared plants and animals;
- issuing permits for the introduction and keeping of Declared Animals;
- undertaking or arranging operational work on public, leasehold or private land at the request of the occupier. Where the occupier has failed to fulfil his or her obligation to control a pest, an inspector of the Board may enter a property to undertake control work and may recover the costs from the landholder.

CORPORATE PROFILE

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Section 5 of the *Agriculture Protection Board Act 1950* establishes the Board. There are 12 members including the Director General of the WA Department of Agriculture who is appointed ex-officio with no retiring date.

The other eleven (nominee) members of the Board are appointed by the Minister for Agriculture for terms not exceeding three years. They may be reappointed for further terms. Nominee members are selected under two streams of appointment:

- Six members are appointed on the basis of their wide experience in the rural industry or the protection of rural industry resources, or qualifications relevant to the powers and duties of the APB [Section 5(2)(b)].
- Five members are appointed through nominations received from Zone Control Authorities (ZCAs) [Section 5(2)(c)].

The Chairman of the Board is appointed by the Minister under Section (3) of the *Agriculture Protection Board Act 1950* and is selected from those members appointed under the first stream of appointment [Section 5(2)(b)].



Members of the APB (from left to right) Peter Brown, Ron Creagh, Rob Gillam, Brian Young, John O'Brien, Michelle Allen, Chris Richardson (Chairman), Keith Wright, Graeme Robertson, Maxinne Sclanders, Keith Bridgart

The Board met six times during the 2002/03 financial year. In addition to normal Board meetings, members attended numerous industry, District Consultative Group and ZCA advisory meetings.

Nominee members of the Agriculture Protection Board:

Member	Expiry date of current term	Stream of appointment
Mr Christopher Richardson (Chair)	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (b) & 3
Mr Robert Gillam	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (b)
Mr Ron Creagh	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (b)
Ms Maxinne Sclanders	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (b)
Mrs Michelle Allen	December 2003	Section 5 (2) (b)
Mr John O'Brien	December 2003	Section 5 (2) (b)
Mr Keith Wright	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (c)
Mr Michael Blackburn	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (c)
Mr Peter Brown	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (c)
Mr Keith Bridgart	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (c)
Mr Brian Young	December 2004	Section 5 (2) (c)

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

In order to facilitate the intended integration of the two agencies, since 1 July 1997, the Board's operational services have largely been delivered on its behalf by the WA Department of Agriculture, according to a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies. The MOU defines the type and standard of services to be provided, the basis for determining the level and cost of services, and the responsibilities of both parties to the agreement.

A key role of the Board under the MOU is to provide strategic policy advice for the Department's full range of biosecurity initiatives.

The MOU also contains a Performance Monitoring Plan which provides a basis for evaluation of service delivery by both parties.

A summary of the biosecurity services delivered under the MOU is outlined later in this report - see Major Highlights of the Year.

STAFF OF THE APB

The APB Manager, Mr Tony Richman, is responsible for oversight of the Board's interests under the MOU. He ensures the Board meets its corporate governance responsibilities, and provides independent policy advice to the Board. Mr Richman is the sole full time employee of the Board, with all other former employees previously having been transferred to the Department's employ. As such, the Board's Approved Average Staffing Level (AASL) as of the 30 June 2003 was 1.00 full time equivalent (FTE). During the year, the Board's long-serving Executive Officer, Mr Richard Walker, assumed full-time responsibility for coordinating the development of the *Agriculture Management Bill*. Mr Mark Woods was seconded from the Department to provide executive support to the Board in Mr Walker's absence.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI)

Under the MOU, the Department is responsible for managing the Board's information requirements as coordinating any associated FOI applications. The Department also holds a record of the Board's correspondence and publications. FOI applications may be forwarded to:

Mr Phillip Elliott
FOI Coordinator
Department of Agriculture
3 Baron-Hay Court South Perth WA 6151
Telephone: (08) 9368 3412
Fax: (08) 9368 1205

CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

Under the terms of the MOU, the Board has adopted the Department's Customer Service Charter. Copies of the Charter are available from:

Department of Agriculture,
3 Baron-Hay Court South Perth WA 6151; or

any country office of the Department of Agriculture.

ADVISORY ARRANGEMENTS

The Board is at all times supported by a network of statutory advisory committees (Zone Control Authorities) across rural and regional Western Australia. A total of 20 ZCAs operated during the 2002/03 year. A map of zones located in the Pastoral and Agricultural areas is attached at Appendices 5 & 6.

The role of a ZCA is to:

- monitor service delivery throughout the zone in respect of the management of Declared Plants and Animals, and report to the Board;
- advise the Board on issues of concern within the zone and on policies and strategies appropriate to the zone;
- ensure that the Board receives a representative "snapshot" of the views of stakeholders within the zone;
- help raise the awareness of stakeholders within the zone in respect of agricultural protection and biosecurity issues;
- advise the Board in the formulation of Declared Plant and Animal Control fund budgets (pastoral zones only).

In addition to these duties, when called upon to do so by the Minister for Agriculture, each ZCA is required to nominate one of their member for prospective appointment to the Board under Section 5(2)(c) of the *Agriculture Protection Board Act 1950*. Nominations were called to fill 5 Board vacancies during the 2002/03 financial year. Members Brown (Kalgoorlie), Young (Lake Grace), Wright (Kimberley), Blackburn (Waroona) and Bridgart (Albany) were subsequently appointed.

To further the integration of the Board and the Department of Agriculture, ZCA meetings were routinely held in conjunction with meetings of the Department's District Consultative Groups throughout 2002/03. This enabled the membership of both groups to consider the full range of biosecurity, sustainability and market development issues. The new network of Zone Control Authorities and District Consultative Groups are functioning well and providing the Agriculture Protection Board with feedback on biosecurity threats in their zone. Identifying and prioritising these threats is the key to the development of local strategies which will assist the agricultural industries to protect themselves from the various biological threats.

To enhance the consideration of regional biosecurity issues, the Board agreed to hold two Pastoral Conferences in 2002/03 and to broaden the list of participants to include all ZCA members within each Pastoral Region. The Southern Rangelands Regional Conference was held in Kalgoorlie on the 18th and 19th September. The Northern Rangelands Regional Conference was held in Broome on the 24th and 25th October 2002.

Other non-statutory committees provide specialist advice to the Board and leadership for specific activities including:

- The Skeleton Weed Committee (SWC);
- The various steering committees included under the 'Guard Plans' such as GrainGuard™, StockGuard, BeeGuard™ and HortGuard™;
- Footrot Eradication Campaign Advisory Committee (FECAC).

In addition to these committees, in the conduct of its business, the Board consults with a wide range of industry groups, including but not limited to the Western Australian Farmers Federation (WA Farmers) and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association (PGA).

TRUST FUNDS ADMINISTERED BY THE BOARD

Agriculture Protection Board Trust Fund

This fund is established under the *Agriculture Protection Act, 1950* to manage the funds of the Protection Board for the effectual exercise of its duties. The costs of operation of the Board in 2002/03 were met from reserves within this fund.

Funds established by the Plant Pests and Diseases (Eradication Funds) Act, 1974

The *Plant Pests and Diseases (Eradication Funds) Act, 1974* provides for the establishment of separate trust accounts to manage funds raised through compulsory contributions from growers of grains and seeds. Funds so raised are used to meet the cost of eradicating skeleton weed, certain insect pests and certain plant diseases, and for payment of compensation to affected producers as a result of eradication efforts. Following Ministerial endorsement of the recommendations of a group set up to review the continuing need of this Act, Cabinet approval was obtained to begin drafting of replacement legislation which could be used to fund attempts to eradicate potentially any pest or disease of broadacre grain and seed crops. Operation of the existing Act was extended for a further twelve months to 31st October 2003, to allow continued development of the so-called Grain and Seed Crops (Pest Control Funding) Bill 2003 (refer to the 'Legislative Reform' Section for further details). Funds established under the present Act and operating during the 2002/03 financial year were:

Skeleton Weed Eradication Fund - A fund established to manage contributions received from grain growers through a compulsory levy on grain receipts to fund the eradication, and prevention of spread, of skeleton weed in Western Australia.

Resistant Grain Insects Eradication Fund - A fund established to receive monies collected via the Skeleton Weed Eradication Fund, to be used for the eradication of resistant grain insects.

Declared Plants and Animal Control Fund (DPACF)

A fund established under the Protection Act, to manage monies collected through rating of land held under pastoral lease. Rates received are matched by an equal government contribution drawn from the Consolidated Fund (CF). All monies are credited to the DPACF and subsequently spent on programs approved by the Board, on the advice of the pastoral ZCAs, to control Declared Plants and Animals on and in relation to the pastoral leases.

During the year, the Board consulted extensively with pastoral representatives regarding rate increases necessary to ensure adequate levels of control work were able to be maintained. A 10% increase took effect for all 2002/03 rate assessments. The Board recommended and the Minister subsequently agreed to increase the quantum of the rate to apply in 2003/04 by a further 45%. In related moves, the Board agreed to support industry's request for amendment of the *Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976*, to remove existing constraints on the ability to rate zonally whilst still preserving the dollar-for-dollar matching contribution from State Government.

Research Grant Account

This fund was established to manage grants received for research related to the control of Declared Plants and Animals.

CLIENT FOCUS

Planned inspection regimes are regularly carried out to detect infestations, implement management programs and monitor regulatory compliance. Findings are recorded using the computerised Field Reporting System (FRS). The FRS is now integrated with other information systems maintained by the Department of Agriculture, such that staff are now able to access complete information relevant to a given client or a given property with which the Board/Department have dealings. Refer to the 'Client Resource Information System' Section for further details.

Table 1. Property numbers recorded within FRS*

Number of properties	At 30/06/03
Agricultural Region	24,067
Pastoral Region	675
Small Holdings (< 50 ha)	42,648
Total	67,390

* Excludes about 800,000 properties less than 0.2 ha, mostly found in the Perth metropolitan area.

A total of 7,153 properties were inspected during the 2002/03 year, representing about 11% of those in which the Board and/or the Department of Agriculture had an interest.

REVIEW OF HEALTH CONCERNS OF FORMER APB WORKERS

Dr Andrew Harper's report examining this issue was delivered to the Minister for Agriculture in June 2002. While Dr Harper did not confirm that the herbicides caused some former workers to become ill, he identified a number of issues that gave rise to concern. The Technical Committee set up to support Dr Harper in the review recommended to Cabinet that an expert medical panel be established to scientifically assess Dr Harper's preliminary findings and further advise Government on a number of his recommendations.

In November 2002, following Cabinet endorsement, the Department of Health established an Expert Medical Panel that had access to the best medical expertise available in Australia. In February 2003 the Expert Medical Panel provided an interim report to the Minister for Health in which it outlined progress with the projects it had requested.

The Government has responded to several of Dr Harper's recommendations. In particular, in December 2002 it established a Kimberley nurse support and liaison service for former APB workers and their families. The service is based in the Derby Aboriginal Health Service and is accessed in person or by telephoning 1300 722 060. The support service has been extended until 30 June 2004 after which time its longer-term future will be assessed.

The Department of Agriculture further investigated allegations that a large quantity of unlabelled herbicide had been supplied to the APB's Kimberley weed control program during the 1970s. The conflicting information obtained meant that it could not be confidently concluded that a very large consignment of 2,4,5-T herbicide had been received in the northern pastoral regions. There were however, adequate observations to believe it may have occurred.

In order to scientifically and medically deal with the claim of high dioxin contamination in 2,4,5-T herbicide, the Expert Medical Panel requested a critical examination of the likelihood that herbicides with dioxin levels above the regulated limit of 0.1mg/kg were used

in APB's weed spraying program in the Kimberley. It is useful to note that since detailed investigations commenced in 1999 there has been no evidence via sampling and analyses that 2,4,5-T with high dioxin levels was used by APB spray teams.

The Expert Medical Panel is expected to report on its findings in September/October 2003.

Costs for the Expert Medical Panel and the nurse support and liaison service are being equally shared between the Departments of Agriculture and Health. For the financial year 2002/2003 costs were around \$162,000. Based on the medical panel's additional projects and the continuation of the nurse support and liaison service, the Health Department has estimated costs for 2003/2004 to be in the vicinity of \$150,000. This total of \$312,000 is less than the initial estimated expenditure of \$326,000.