

To the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs,
(submission in support of Petition 026).

In the year since presenting Petition 160 in August of 2020, there have been a number of disturbing developments associated with the Blackwood Biosecurity Inc (BBI). During October of 2020 the feral pig hunters employed by the BBI, using the majority of funding generated from the collection of levies combined with the State Governments Office of State Revenue monies, were criminally convicted of animal cruelty offences associated with the methods employed to capture and kill a pig. The fallout from that event has seen the disintegration of the BBI committee and the employed staff members walking away from the Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG), leaving a void which has not been properly filled and a so called community/state government endorsed activity not being adequately performed. This highlights previous concerns outlined with the inadequacy of the RBG model and the Biosecurity Agricultural Management act (BAM act 2007) that dictates its legitimacy and legislated authority.

At a recent AGM gathering of the BBI on September 2 2021 (for the 2019-2020 financial year) attended by a number of concerned members of the Boyup Brook community including councillors and the current Shire President who have continued to strongly oppose the RBG concept and levy, it was revealed by the acting chairman (borrowed from another Leschenault RBG), that the committee was attempting to regroup. The BBI failed to hold its 2019-2020 AGM in that year and as a result matched funding from the state government had been withheld although levies were still being collected at a local level. None of this information had been publically conveyed back to the community until that point, including budgetary allocations which were glossed over and poorly explained. The AGM was conducted improperly and showed a lack of understanding with no new members being elected to the committee, programmed rabbit virus releases being deemed a failure and no mention of foxes as a priority. Weed programmes and a new pig virus release were touted as a shining light for the future although action on the ground can only be minimal with current funds and membership with a promise of more activity in Boyup Brook, who have no desire to accommodate them.

In an attempt to dispel the Boyup Brook petition from being re-instated the Hon Alannah MacTiernan MLC, Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food; Ports; Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development Jobs & Trade, on the 1st February 2021, sent a letter to the people who had signed last year's petition citing amongst other myths that "In the Boyup Brook Shire alone, the BBI's co-ordinated efforts have also removed 1500 foxes over 2 years and 530 feral pigs in the past 18 months". This was a blatant misrepresentation of the facts as the some 1500 foxes were, in my educated opinion ,eradicated by the communities own efforts through their annual red card fox shoots (2), which has run successfully for over 20 years in Boyup Brook without the BBI's assistance. Incidentally, the BBI whom have solely been administering the Bridgetown fox shoot in recent times, were unable to do so in 2021 for lack of a committee and community support. As for the 530 feral pigs, we know that community levies collected, funded illegal activities associated with at least one animal, leaving the other 529 'that were claimed', in uncertain territory. The group were questioned on these figures at their AGM and were unable to give an explanation on how they had been misconstrued by the Minister or in fact ultimately their legitimacy. The Minister also mentioned "from the groups inception to when it applied for recognition, (Feb 2017) the group

has held at least 22 community events, including many within the Shire of Boyup Brook" and that "The catalyst to the groups forming was a community meeting held on 12th May 2014, which was attended by 40 community members".

Clearly with now over 600+ signatories from Boyup Brooks some 1000 rated levy payers and the continual dysfunctional bungling of the BBI, the consultation process has not received community recognition. The number of events prior to 2014 is very questionable and unsubstantiated at the least and widespread community support of the RBG's concept as well as the collection of the Declared Pest Rate(DPR), has been strongly opposed by Boyup Brook and it's Shire Council since 2016 as my previous submission outlined. Many members of the community have written to the Minister on various occasions concerned with ongoing issues associated with this broken model/legislation and have ,arguably, not received appropriate responses. The RBG model rollout state-wide and the underlying resentment of paying the DPR with variable results being achieved from programmes deployed by numerous RBG groups with differing governance structures and priorities, begs the question of the adequacy of the Departments response to the massive task of controlling biosecurity issues faced by communities across this state. I believe that in the pastoral regions of Western Australia there is almost a "blackmail" approach of collecting the DPR or else lease agreements will not be renewed!

In my opinion and the majority within the community of Boyup Brook, it is time for the concerned minister to face facts and re-think this lack lustre approach to the many declared pests threatening our agricultural sector. I strongly recommend that the levy applied to Boyup Brook be removed as it has not been adequately endorsed through proper consultation and the associated collective funds have been misused through an inadequate governance structure being poorly administered . This will allow the community to continue as it was, controlling its own pests with the assistance of the Local Government ranger services, where non-compliance can be properly dealt with and accountability of programmes are measured and monitored closely . This is an approach the shire was previously pursuing through its own Biosecurity Committee whilst being involuntarily committed by the State Government to adhere to the RBG concept and fund the ensuing DPR levy.

Yours sincerely

Graham Aird