

Import risk management

Wilson and Koob consider Biosecurity Australia's role in developing and protecting the best quality quarantine policy for Australia

Introduction

Australia's conservative approach to quarantine has helped preserve the favourable health status of our agricultural industries since Federation, and has been a key factor in developing many valuable export markets. We have a managed risk approach to quarantine, not a zero risk approach. Zero risk would mean no tourism, no international travel or trade, and would deny Australian primary industries access to produce such as new genetic material; for example bud wood, semen and seeds.

With the recent outbreak of citrus canker on a property at Emerald, Queensland, it is timely to reinforce the importance of adhering to quarantine measures developed to protect Australia's human, animal and plant health, and the environment.

The Australian Government has been at the forefront of efforts to reduce international trade barriers faced by Australian farmers. Our farmers export two-thirds of everything they produce and Biosecurity Australia works with them to help win market access into other countries—basing each case on sound science. Biosecurity Australia consults with trading partners on quarantine conditions that facilitate access for Australian exports to new markets and to preserve and improve existing markets.

Since the World Trade Organisation (WTO) came into force in 1995, Australia has gained access to hundreds of new markets for animal, plant and food products, and improved existing market access for many Australian commodities. The World Trade

Organisation Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (World Trade Organisation, 1995) – the SPS Agreement – has assisted in providing clear rules to help ensure fair, science-based market access conditions for Australia's agricultural exports.

On the import side, the SPS Agreement provides a framework to ensure imports do not pose an undue risk to agricultural production, public health or the environment. It provides a stable framework for Australia to consider requests from trading partners to import animals, plants and their products into Australia in a way that ensures the high standard of quarantine is maintained. The rules apply to food safety and animal and plant health, and allow countries to set their own standard or 'appropriate level of protection'. But these standards must be based on science, and should be applied only to the extent necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health. Biosecurity Australia undertakes import policy reviews, including import risk analyses (IRAs), to assess the pest and disease risks associated with proposed agricultural imports and to develop quarantine measures to manage those risks.

Import risk analysis

Australia may address requests for the import of animals, plants and their products, where there are biosecurity risks, by extending existing measures for similar products with comparable risks. Where measures for comparable biosecurity risks do not exist, a risk analysis is performed to determine the import risk

management measures needed to reduce those risks.

Import risk analyses are rigorous, science-based assessments, involving extensive research and consultation. We use expert panels consisting of members from Biosecurity Australia and other Australian Government agencies, State and Territory government agriculture departments, research and academic institutions, consultants and others selected based on the expertise needed for a particular analysis.

The risk analysis process conforms to Australia's international obligations, which derive from the SPS Agreement, and specific international guidelines and standards on risk analysis developed under the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE—the World Organization for Animal Health). Australian import risk management measures are based on international standards where they exist and where they deliver suitable protection from pests and diseases. Where such standards are not appropriate to Australia's level of biosecurity protection, or relevant standards do not exist, Australia imposes risk management measures supported by risk analysis.

Australia has a world-class reputation for import risk analysis. *The Import Risk Analysis Handbook* (Biosecurity Australia, 2003) describes the steps in Australia's IRA process—from receipt of an import proposal through the scientific risk analysis to deciding quarantine policy. The IRA process is open and consultative. Stakeholders (both in Australia and overseas)

have opportunities to comment and provide input at key points. Issues papers and draft IRA reports are circulated to seek scientific and technical input from all who wish to comment. Their input helps ensure all relevant information is brought to bear in developing quarantine recommendations. It is only then that the IRA report is finalised and the Director of Animal and Plant Quarantine may approve the new quarantine policy and associated import risk management measures.

Steps in import risk analysis

Initiation

- Submission of import proposals
- Policy development or review initiated by Biosecurity Australia

The first stage covers receipt of import proposals and initiation of import policy reviews by Biosecurity Australia

Scheduling and scoping

- IRA work program
- Consultation with States, Territories and other Commonwealth agencies
- Scope, approach and IRA Team membership
- Initial consultation with registered stakeholders
- Decision on scope, approach and membership
- Provision for stakeholder appeal
- Determination of appeal

This stage covers formulation of the work program, consultation with the States and Territories, and relevant Commonwealth agencies, decisions on the scope and approach of the IRA and membership of the IRA team, and relevant appeals provisions.

Risk assessment

- Initial work
- Consultation on the technical issues paper
- Preparation of Draft IRA Report
- Consultation with stakeholders on Draft IRA Report
- Notification to WTO
- Independent peer review

This stage involves conduct of the risk analysis work together with consultation with stakeholders, peer review and relevant international notifications. It is at this stage that the Draft IRA Report is prepared and issued for public comment.

Reporting

- Preparation of Final IRA Report
- Eminent Scientists Group considers draft final report¹
- Consideration of Final IRA Report
- Consultation with States and Territories
- Release of Final IRA Report and recommendation for a policy determination
- Provision for appeals on Final IRA Report
- Appeal determination

This stage involves report finalisation, final consultations with States and Territories and the appeals process for this stage of the IRA.

Final policy determination

- Notification of final policy determination

The last step is determination and notification of the administrative policy.

Biosecurity Australia has recently circulated revised draft IRA reports on apples from New Zealand and bananas from the Philippines, as well as a final IRA report on pig meat. In each case, an IRA panel composed of recognised scientific and technical experts has thoroughly assessed

all the available evidence and recommended quarantine measures to ensure that Australia maintains its favourable health status.

Example of an import risk analysis

Under the previous import policy, only Canada, Denmark and New Zealand were allowed to export pig meat to Australia. The pig meat import risk analysis (IRA) responded to pig meat access requests from Brazil, Canada, Chile, European Union (EU) Member States, Hungary, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Taiwan and the United States of America (USA) (Biosecurity Australia 2004).

The IRA started in May 1998 and is 'generic' in that it is not restricted to specific exporting countries. The import conditions recommended as a result of the IRA are applicable to any country. The IRA examined the risks attributed to all significant disease agents the import of pig meat could introduce into Australia.

A Technical Issues Paper was released in January 2001 and a public meeting was held on 1 March 2001 to discuss the paper, which identified 28 disease agents including:

- Foot-and-mouth disease virus
- Vesicular stomatitis virus
- African swine fever virus
- Classical swine fever virus
- Rinderpest virus
- Swine vesicular disease virus
- Aujeszky's disease virus

The Draft Methods Paper was released in October 2002, and the IRA Draft Report was issued for comment in October 2003. The Final IRA Report was released in February 2004 and contained:

- background information to the IRA, Australia's quarantine policy, the international framework for trade in animals and animal

¹ The Eminent Scientists Group inclusion in the IRA process was announced by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, on 15 July.

products, and Australia's current policy for import of pig meat;

- the method and results of risk assessment;
- recommended quarantine conditions for imports of pig meat;
- further steps in the IRA process; and
- a summary of stakeholder comments received on the Technical Issues Paper, Draft Methods Paper and Draft IRA Report and the responses.

The new quarantine conditions for imports of pig meat are the most stringent in the past 13 years, but more countries will be able to export to Australia providing they meet the requirements specified in the new policy. Specific conditions will be established for countries wanting access to the Australian market, based on their animal health status and the ability of their veterinary services and other authorities to inspect and certify their pig meat. Australia's new quarantine conditions involve a number of risk management measures, depending on the exporting country's animal health status, including:

- country, zone or herd freedom;
- carcass testing;
- cooking, freezing, curing and canning; and
- removing certain tissues or parts of the carcass—the head, neck, bones and major lymph nodes.

Conclusion

Every import risk analysis that Biosecurity Australia undertakes reflects Australia's commitment to ensuring a consistent, conservative and consultative approach to quarantine policy, based on high-calibre science. Comment of a scientific or technical nature is sought from stakeholders at specific times during the IRA process as it helps Biosecurity Australia to develop the best quality quarantine policy for Australia.

References

- Biosecurity Australia 2003, *Import risk analysis handbook*, Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra <http://www.daff.gov.au/irahandbook>
- Biosecurity Australia 2004. *Generic Import Risk Analysis (IRA) for Pig Meat—Final Import Risk Analysis Report*, Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra
- World Trade Organisation, 1995. *Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures*, World Trade Organisation website, http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/sps_e/spsagr_e.htm, viewed on 26 May 2004

Authors

John Wilson has contributed to Biosecurity Australia's engagement with stakeholders and the media for the past two years as communications manager. Over the past 20 years he worked as a news reporter in Canberra, Brisbane, Sydney and Wollongong and managed public affairs campaigns with several Australian Government departments, covering industry innovation, aid programs, employment, education, and diversity management, among other projects. He has been media adviser to several government ministers. John studied science at the Australian National University and won the Chief Minister's Marketing Prize in the ACT Enterprise Workshop.

Peter Koob has worked in emergency management for 15 years. This work has included 11 years managing emergency planning for the Tasmanian State government; one year in the Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action in WHO in Geneva; two years with Emergency Management Australia; and 18 months coordinating the development, conduct and evaluation of Exercise Minotaur. He specialises in risk management, emergency planning, training, and exercising.