

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee Report

1.1 On 16 February 2017, the Senate referred two inquiries to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (RRAT) for inquiry and report. The terms of reference for the two inquiries focused on the reported outbreak of white spot syndrome virus (which causes white spot disease) in prawn farms in the Logan River area and suspension of the importation of uncooked prawns.

1.2 At a time when the merits of inquiring into the serious matter of white spot disease should have been at the forefront of the Senate's considerations, focus rested on two competing motions. The need to respond quickly to the outbreak coupled with time constraints in the chamber did not provide an adequate opportunity for debate and negotiations on a single inquiry. The subsequent adoption of two inquiries into the same issues led to confusion amongst stakeholders and potential submitters.

1.3 These events demonstrate the importance of all senators working together cooperatively to establish useful terms of reference. Particularly as the white spot disease is a significant matter, and one which requires urgent committee consideration.

1.4 RRAT has a long history of working in a collegiate and cooperative manner. The application of best practice, which is the customary RRAT method, would have allowed the committee to discuss prospective terms of reference and to come to agreement on a motion for a single inquiry. It would have provided all interested senators an opportunity to consult on the inquiry and inform themselves of the issues. Unfortunately, in a context in which there is a high level of committee activity, the need for consultation and committee consideration can be overlooked.

1.5 The committee has now had time to consider matters regarding the outbreak of white spot disease and consulted on a terms of reference. Therefore, the committee recommends that the Senate withdraw the two current inquiries that were referred to the committee on 16 February 2017 and refer a single inquiry with new terms of reference (which are provided at Recommendation 2).

Recommendation 1

1.6 The committee recommends that the Senate discharge two inquiries relating to the importation of seafood and seafood products which were referred to it for inquiry and report on 16 February 2017.

Recommendation 2

1.7 The committee recommends that the Senate refer the following matters to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by 22 June 2017:

The biosecurity risks associated with the importation of seafood and seafood products (including uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat) into Australia, with specific reference to:

- (a) Management of the emergency response and associated measures implemented to control the outbreak of White Spot Syndrome Virus;**
- (b) The effectiveness of biosecurity controls imposed on the importation of seafood and seafood products, including, but not limited to, uncooked prawns and prawn meat into Australia, including the import risk analysis process concluded in 2009 that led to these conditions being established;**
- (c) The adequacy of Commonwealth resourcing of biosecurity measures including Import Risk Assessments;**
- (d) The effectiveness of post-entry surveillance measures and "end use" import conditions for seafood products including, but not limited to, uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat into Australia, since the import conditions implemented in 2010 were put into place;**
- (e) The impact of the outbreak of the Australia's wild and farm prawn sectors;**
- (f) The economic impact on Australian wholesalers and retailers;**
- (g) Domestic and foreign trade implications for Australian industries resulting from the suspension of importation of seafood and seafood products, including, but not limited to, uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat in Australia;**
- (h) Matters to be satisfied in the management of biosecurity risk before imports of seafood and seafood products, including, but not limited to, uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat into Australia could recommence;**
- (i) Any related matters.**

Senator Glenn Sterle
Chair

Senator Barry O'Sullivan
Deputy Chair