Department of Agriculture

Committee inquiry: Environmental biosecurity
Date Held: 31 October 2014

Question Taken on Notice

Question 1 (Hansard page 29):

Senator SIEWERT: It was not implied that they were so instructed. That is not what was suggested. One thing that was, however, was the perspective that voluntary redundancies had been focused on biosecurity.
Ms Mellor: Biosecurity makes up about 80 per cent of the department, so it is not a surprise that, when you have difficulty with your budget, the numbers would come out that way. I think I heard one of your witnesses say that there had been two programs cut. That is correct. The first one had been run in the regions. The cuts were not only budget driven; they were also driven by two additional things. They were driven by the shifting nature of risk analysis. We have found that there are a lot of things we used to look for that we do not need to anymore—egg noodles, mooncakes without meat and those sorts of thing. I have an officer with me who could run you through a huge list of things we do not look for anymore.
Senator SIEWERT: Could you perhaps give that to us on notice?
Ms Mellor: Yes, absolutely.

Answer:

As part of the ongoing reform of biosecurity services, the department completed a review of the identified low risk/ high volume products that resulted in amendments made to the Quarantine Proclamation 1998. These amendments allowed a specific list of low risk/high volume items to be imported for personal use through the passenger and mail pathways without requiring an import permit. The amendments mean officers are now able to spend more time targeting passengers or mail articles that may be carrying items that are a much greater potential risk to Australia's agricultural industry.

The following products no longer require an import permit when they are shelf stable commercially prepared and packaged and intended for the personal use of the individual:

Round 1 – 25 November 2011

- Noodles or pasta made from egg;
- Noodles or pasta that contain egg and/or meat as an ingredient;
- Instant use dairy-based powdered beverages (i.e. 3-in-1 coffee);
- Pork crackling and pork rinds;

Question 1 (Hansard page 29) continued:

Round 1 – 25 November 2011 (continued)

- Items embedded in resin (for display purposes only); and
- Returning Australian goods (products that are commercially prepared and packaged in Australia).

Round 2 – 4 September 2012

- Beef jerky
- Various dairy products
- Protein powder and supplements
- Infant formula (unaccompanied)
- Soups
- Whole egg products
- Processed egg products
- Pate (with or without egg)
- Finfish (excl. salmonid)
- Luwak coffee
- Prawn based food products
- Meat floss
- Polvorones
- Turf and elephant dung in resin

Round 3 – 8 August 2013

- Meat Jerky or Biltong
- Mooncakes containing egg but no meat
- Manufactured articles containing oyster shell (both personal and commercial consignments).

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Question Taken on Notice

Question 2 (Hansard page 33):

Senator WATERS: I will have to put quite a lot on notice. Senator Ruston touched on this one before. Are any of you considering the impact of investor-state dispute resolution clauses in forthcoming and existing free trade agreements and the impact it might have on our ability to introduce that new biosecurity bill?
Ms Mellor: That one, we probably would need to take on notice. We would need to confer with our trade colleagues—trade within the department and possibly with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Answer:

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is the lead agency for trade negotiations involving Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). Advice from DFAT is that ISDS in Australia's Free Trade Agreements will not impact on the Government's ability to introduce the Biosecurity Bill 2014. ISDS claims can only be made on the basis of the breach of an investment obligation. ISDS does not prevent the Government from changing its policies or regulating in the public interest, including in areas such as biosecurity and quarantine.

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Question Taken on Notice

Question 3 (Hansard page 34):

CHAIR: It is really just a question of yes or no. Are the IMO guidelines being applied or implemented in Australia?
Ms Mellor: There are biofouling requirements in Australia. I have two treaties in my head and I am not sure whether that one has been triggered and ratified in Australia yet.
CHAIR: Okay. Maybe you could take that on notice, rather than trying to struggle.
Ms Mellor: I am very happy to do that.

Answer:

Yes. The International Maritime Organization *2011 Guidelines for the control and management of ships' biofouling to minimize the transfer of invasive aquatic species* are being implemented in Australia.

Department of Agriculture

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Question Taken on Notice

Question 4 (Hansard pages 34-35):

CHAIR: The marine pest national monitoring strategy identified 18 high-risk ports around Australia whereby any monitoring will be undertaken. Can you explain what this monitoring will involve and whether there will be a public reporting of the results?
Ms Mellor: The intention is and has been that states and territories ought to be monitoring marine pest imports. Certainly some years ago the Commonwealth provided seed funding to the states and territories to do that. Not all them did. There has been some good results and not so good results. But it is the responsibility of the states and territories to understand what the pests are in their waters. From that perspective the expectation is that they will do that. It is difficult if they don't, because I cannot make them; they have to make their own decisions about the deployment of their resources. But certainly there have been a few issues with pests and diseases in the marine space and they are pretty attuned to it now.
CHAIR: Do you know if there will be public reporting of the results of that?
Ms Mellor: No, I don't. I would have to talk to my colleagues in the National Biosecurity Committee.
CHAIR: Could you take that on notice?
Ms Mellor: Yes.

Answer:

Results of marine pest monitoring—once available—are uploaded into the National Introduced Marine Pest Information System (NIMPIS). NIMPIS is publically available and users can search for information on specific pests as well as see national and international distribution data and maps.

NIMPIS can be accessed at www.marinepests.gov.au/nimpis.

Department of Agriculture

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Question Taken on Notice

Question 5 (Hansard page 35):

CHAIR: Great. Thanks. In the department's submission it says that there is an uneven implementation of the marine pest national monitoring strategy across jurisdictions. Can you just explain very briefly what that means and in what way is the implementation uneven?
Ms Mellor: Simply that they do not all do the surveys on a regular basis.
CHAIR: Okay, so they are just all different.
Ms Mellor: They are all different.
CHAIR: Is anything being done to address that problem?
Ms Mellor: At the moment in the election commitments of this government this department was funded to do an invasive marine pest species review, which we are in the course of doing. That does involve a bit of interaction with the states. It is a little bit robust on this stuff because we take the view that marine pests are as important as other pests and that we need to enhance the biosecurity knowledge and focus of them. Our department has done a risk assessment of 248 marine pests in the course of the ballast water thinking and the biofouling thinking. We have done that in collaboration with the states lack` but we actually need to know what is out there. In terms of managing risks we need to know what is out there. So there is some work going on through the election commitment of this government in the review to actually enhance the knowledge. I could bring back a progress report of that to a notice, if you wished.
CHAIR: Yes, that would be great. Thank you very much.

Answer:

The government has committed $5 million over four years for a review and strategic analysis into invasive marine species with a view to removal or eradication of these marine pests. The Department of Agriculture has commenced the review of national marine pest biosecurity arrangements to give effect to the government's commitment, and will report to government by mid 2015.

The department released an issues paper on 23 October 2014 seeking submissions on the effectiveness of existing marine pest biosecurity arrangements (including the National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions).

The issues and themes identified from submissions will be used to develop a discussion paper for release early in 2015. The discussion paper will outline opportunities for improvements to marine pest biosecurity arrangements. The department will seek feedback on the discussion paper, prior to preparing a final report for government consideration.

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Question 5 (Hansard page 35) continued:

As part of the review, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) is conducting a detailed assessment of the existing National Monitoring Strategy for marine pests.

ABARES will identify the characteristics of the existing National Monitoring Strategy considered impediments and identify improvements or new characteristics that jurisdictions would accept and be willing to implement. ABARES will provide recommendations on the scope and elements of changes that could be made to achieve a more simple and cost-effective monitoring framework with appropriate detection sensitivity.

ABARES has begun consultation with state and territory jurisdictions, organisations and scientific experts in marine pest surveillance.

Department of Agriculture

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Question Taken on Notice

Question 6 (Hansard page 29):

CHAIR: Yes, that would be great. Thank you very much. Is there a current priority list of threats and pathways for invasive species that may impact the environment?
Ms Mellor: One of the difficult things is that many of the things that affect the environment are already here.
CHAIR: You have a list in your submission that talks about all the things that are here and the process, but do you have a priority list of how you are going to deal with it?
Ms Mellor: There is the weeds list and then, from my perspective, in plant and animal health there are certain things that we worry about that could get here and affect the environment, way of life or production. To that end, things like didymo are high in our mind—or rock snot, and I do not like that in the *Hansard* but that is what it is. There are things that are high in our mind—Mexican feather grass, for example. There is probably, say, a 'top six on the Richter scale' that biosecurity scientists worry about and some of them are particularly invasive to the environment.
CHAIR: Are you able to provide what the department sees as those that are high in the mind?
Ms Mellor: Yes, sure.

Answer:

Six invasive species that are of high concern to the department and are considered as threats to the environment include; *Didymosphenia geminate* (didymo), *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, (root rot) *Mytilopsis sallei* (black striped mussel), *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (causes white nose syndrome in bats), tramp ants and the *Duttaphrynus melanostictus* (Asian black spined toad).

Department of Agriculture

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Date Held: 31 October 2014

Question Taken on Notice

Senator Urquhart asked officers appearing as witnesses at the inquiry into environmental biosecurity hearing held on 31 October 2014 the following question which was taken on notice:

Mr Thompson: The ones where we are funding national eradication responses: our total expenditure since 2001 both on and off deed has been $310 million.
CHAIR: That is Commonwealth?
Mr Thompson: Commonwealth funding.
CHAIR: How many programs?
Mr Thompson: Twenty two—they are plant, animal and the non-deed responses. Some of those were things red imported fire ant and Siam weed in the Top End which have had quite a history.
CHAIR: How many of those have related to invasive species that are likely to harm the natural environment?
Mr Thompson: I do not have them split like that. For example, some of them are ones like red imported fire ant—
CHAIR: Could you take that on notice?
Mr Thompson: We can.

Answer:

The national biosecurity system is focused on the protection of animal, plant and human health. Within this system, formal arrangements have been developed for national cost-shared eradication responses to pests and diseases across the animal, plant and environmental sectors.

These arrangements comprise the

- Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (2002)
- Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (2005)
- National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (2012)

While developed on a sectoral basis, the animal and plant agreements do not distinguish between the agricultural or environmental impact of a particular pest or disease. The animal and plant cost-sharing agreements provide for affected industry signatories that benefit from an eradication response to share the costs and decision making responsibility for that response.

These arrangements apply where a production industry sector benefits from a response, not because the impacts of a specific pest or disease are exclusively agricultural.

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Question 7 (Hansard page 29) continued:

The Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed does provide for responses to Emergency Plant Pest (EPPs) that primarily affect the environment particularly Category 1 EPPs.

Category 1 EPPs are defined as those that if not eradicated '*would cause major environmental damage to natural ecosystems, potentially affect human health or cause major nuisance to humans and/or cause significant damage to amenity flora; and have relatively little impact on commercial crops.* Similarly Category 2 EPPs are defined as those that if not eradicated '*would cause significant public losses either directly through serious loss of amenity, and/or environmental values and/or effects households, or indirectly through sever economic impacts on regions and the national economy, through large trade losses with flow on effects through the economy'*

For example the national eradication response to Myrtle rust was conducted under the EPPRD.

The National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement is an inter-governmental arrangement for responding to biosecurity incidents that primarily impact the environment and/or social amenity and where the response is for the public good.

Since 2001, twenty two eradication responses have been conducted at a cost of $310 million. Of these nine were in response to an invasive species with either a known or potential likelihood to harm the environment. These include the; four tropical weeds, red imported fire ants South East Queensland and Yarwun, Queensland), browsing ants, electric ants, Siam weed, Asian honeybees, citrus canker and Myrtle rust responses.

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Question 7 (Hansard page 29) continued:

Table One: Responses to Pest or Disease Incursions Under, or in accordance with, National Emergency Response Arrangements Since 2001

Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement	**Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed**	**National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement**	**Off-deed Arrangements**
Newcastle Disease	Banana freckle	Red Imported Fire Ant - Yarwun, Qld	Red Imported Fire Ant - South East Qld
Equine Influenza	Chestnut blight		Four Tropical Weeds
Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza	Cocoa pod borer		Browsing ant
High Pathogenic Avian Influenza, Maitland	Myrtle rust		Electric ant
High Pathogenic Avian Influenza, Young	Khapra beetle		Branched broomrape
			Siam weed
			Asian honeybee
			European house borer
			Citrus canker
			Grapevine leaf rust
			Torres Strait Fruit Fly Strategy (long term containment programme)

Department of Agriculture

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Question Taken on Notice

Question 8 (Hansard page 37):

Senator WATERS: Just on a related point about NEBRA: I note that the threshold before an eradication is attempted is that the eradication must be likely to be successful. Do you think that is a suitable threshold in responding to new, high impact invasives when it might be very difficult to achieve this level of certainty? And how does that sit with the precautionary principle?
Ms Mellor: Look, it is a very good question. The way I might answer that is to say that the overarching policy for quarantine, no matter what we are protecting, is eradication. Our mindset when we go into these things is not: 'It'll never work. We shouldn't give this a red hot go'. Our overarching policy is eradication. That is deeply seated in quarantine officials, biosecurity officials, environment officials and production officials. It is a difficult judgement call to make. The likelihood of success is very difficult to measure. In production we have a lot of history, we have a lot of economic analysis et cetera, and we are getting better at it in environment. We have not had, under the NEBRA—other than Yarwun's fire ants—a big one to manage, but what we also do is get our colleagues in ABARES—that is, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences—who are very experienced, to help in projecting what impact might be, and you would have seen in our submission a lot of references to their work. We have had them doing—it is not yet finalised—some assessment of the value of the environment from a biosecurity perspective. We ask: what if this happened, what would it cost and would it be possible sort of work? I will speak to the executive director of ABRS, but we should probably be able to make that available.
Senator WATERS: Thank you.
Ms Mellor: We have been doing some modelling, if you would like that, on what if one of these got in and what do you think we could do.
Senator WATERS: I will receive that with great interest.

Answer:

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) undertakes benefit-cost analyses (BCAs) to assist with incursion responses and broader biosecurity decision-making. Environmental benefits (that is, avoided impacts) are considered as part of these analyses.

In most BCAs environmental benefits are considered qualitatively using a constructed scale (negligible, low, moderate). In some BCAs where suitable data have been available, ABARES has estimated environmental impacts quantitatively (in monetary terms).

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Question 8 (Hansard page 37):

In its BCAs ABARES has focused on estimating the market benefits (that is, avoided losses) of eradication that can be estimated with available data. In most cases, the market benefits alone have been sufficiently large to justify the proposed investment in eradication. An example is the BCA conducted for the red imported fire ants (RIFA) incursion in South East Queensland.

Where relevant data are available, ABARES quantifies the environmental impacts. For example, in the Siam Weed BCA, ABARES valued the environmental impacts using the loss of grazing value in environmental areas because of competition from Siam Weed, and the expenditure by environmental managers to mitigate such impacts.

In some studies, if it appears that environmental impacts are large and likely to exceed the costs of management options, ABARES employs cost effectiveness analyses to identify the least-cost management option. The recently published Black Striped Mussel BCA is an example.

If it is not possible to quantify any of the environmental impacts because of insufficient data, ABARES identifies the particular environmental assets under threat and provides a qualitative assessment of the impacts. The BCA conducted for the red imported fire ants (RIFA) incursion in South East Queensland is an example of this approach.

References

Hafi A, Spring D, Croft L, Kompas T & Morey K, 2013, *Cost-effectiveness of Biosecurity response options to red imported fire ants in South East Queensland*, ABARES report to client prepared for the National Biosecurity Committee, Canberra, June.

Hogan L, Arthur T, Hoffman M, Symes M, Millist, N, Tennant P, Southwell D & Paplinska J, *Siam weed in Australia: economic and science-based assessment of policy options*, ABARES report to client prepared for the National Biosecurity Committee, Canberra.

Summerson R, Skirtun M, Mazur K, Arthur T, Curtotti R & Smart R, 2013, Economic evaluation of the costs of Biosecurity response options to address an incursion of *Mytilopsis sallei* (black-striped mussel) into Australia, ABARES report to client prepared for Plant Health Australia, Canberra, September.

Department of Agriculture

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Date Held: 31 October 2014

Question Taken on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

1. Your submission mentions (on p. 15) a new Invasive Pests Committee to replace the Australian Weeds Committee and the Vertebrate Pests Committee. Can you tell us more about the membership of this committee? How often does the committee meet? Are there representatives from environmental stakeholders and/or environmental departments?

Answer:

The National Biosecurity Committee agreed on 7 August 2014 to combine two of its sectoral committees—the Australian Weeds Committee and the Vertebrate Pests Committee.

The inaugural meeting of the new Invasive Plants and Animals Committee is scheduled as a teleconference for 21 November 2014 to formalise the membership, Terms of Reference, and the forward meeting schedule. Meetings may be at least once per year face-to-face and once per year by teleconference, with additional meetings scheduled as required (consistent with the practice of the former committees).

Membership is also expected to mirror that of the two previous committees—one member from each of the state and territory governments (bringing a whole-of-government perspective) and two members from the Australian Government (the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment), with observers from the New Zealand Government and relevant Australian Government agencies (such as ABARES, CSIRO and the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre).

Department of Agriculture

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Question Taken on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

2. Your submission states (on p. 16) that the *Australian Weeds Strategy* and the *Australian Pest Animal Strategy* are currently being reviewed, and that public consultation drafts of the revised strategies were expected to be released in September 2014. Can you advise what progress has been made in relation to those reviews? Have consultation drafts been released? What is the proposed timeline and process for finalisation of those reviews?

Answer:

The two strategies are being reviewed and revised by the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

Consultation drafts of the two strategies have not yet been released. It is proposed to release these in mid-2015 with likely finalisation later in 2015.

The National Biosecurity Committee is currently considering policy regarding the management of established pests of national significance which will provide policy direction to the two strategies.

Department of Agriculture

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Question Taken on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

3. The Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy is now 25 years old (discussed on p.30 of the submission). Have any reviews of this strategy been conducted? Has any consideration been given to reviewing this strategy?

Answer:

The *Administration of the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy* was reviewed by the Australian National Audit Office in 2011-12 (Performance Audit review No.46) which was tabled by the Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit in 2012.

NAQS activities were also reviewed in *One Biosecurity – A Working Partnership* (the Beale Review) in 2008 and in the report *Australia Quarantine A Shared Responsibility* (the Nairn Report) in 1996.

The effectiveness of the program is under continuous review, including annual assessment of surveillance risk pathways across northern Australia.

Department of Agriculture

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Question on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

4. The Invasive Species Council expressed concern that prohibited plant seeds can be easily bought from overseas and delivered to Australia over the internet[1]. What measures is the government taking to deal with online purchasing from overseas which may be in breach of Australia's quarantine requirements? How are such breaches dealt with?

Answer:

The Australian Government takes its role as Australia's key biosecurity manager seriously, including how we identify and manage the risk of harmful biosecurity risk material (plant, animal and biological material) entering the country.

The Department of Agriculture, on behalf of the Australian Government, uses a range of strategies to identify biosecurity risk material that may enter Australia through various pathways (eg. mail, cargo, passengers and natural pathways such as via birds). These include profiling, x-rays, detector dogs, visual assessment or inspection, manifest clearances and knowledge of seasonal and cultural events, along with suppliers pre-border.

Penalties can also be imposed for non compliant behaviour using the mail or cargo pathways under the *Quarantine Act 1908*. This includes up to 10 years imprisonment and fines up to $340 000 for individuals or $1 700 000 for a body corporate.

More than 99 per cent of items that come through the mail pathway are compliant with quarantine regulation. To identify the one percent that may not be compliant, the department screens a proportion of incoming international mail for high risk items.

The department acknowledges that mail order internet sales represent a growing pathway for plants and seeds entering Australia. In 2013–14 it seized 9693 seed items and for the first two quarters of 2014–15, 2 569 items have been seized.

[1] Invasive Species Council, *Submission 74 to Senate Inquiry into Environmental Biosecurity* , Attachment 1, pp 65–69

Written question 4 continued:

The department has also been working with internet seed suppliers to deal with online purchasing from overseas which may be in breach of Australia's quarantine requirements. For instance, eBay Australia has since updated its plants and seeds selling policy, which enables the department to report breaches of the policy to eBay and for that entity to then take action against the international seller. The site also incorporates warnings which are presented to eBay users intending to purchase certain plants and seeds. Investigations are also underway on the volumes and types of seeds being purchased by Australian eBay users to identify key entities for education and enforcement activities.

The department has written to other international seed suppliers (eg. Amazon and Chinese based on-line shopping sites such as Aliexpress and CNDirect). To date, over 120 suppliers have been provided with information on Australia's plant and seed import requirements.

The department is also:

- working with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and Australia Post to improve mail screening techniques.
- promoting the benefits of biosecurity through programs such as Border Security, fact sheets and web content, in-language radio interviews, and advertising through social media.
  - this increases public awareness and for the requirements to be communicated back to family and friends overseas.
- conducting education campaigns that target specific seasonal and cultural events.

As part of an educational exercise, in 2013 the department targeted 5165 Australians who had received non-permitted plant or seed imports through the international mail. A brochure was sent to the individuals informing them of Australia's biosecurity import requirements with links back to relevant pages of the department's website; 345 of the recipients sought additional information from the website and a further 41 people made contact with the department directly by phone or email.

In relation to the cargo pathway, goods valued at or below A$1000 that arrive in Australia by cargo must be declared in the Customs Integrated Cargo system (ICS). Those with biosecurity risk material (including seeds) trigger electronic profiles and as a result, are automatically referred to the department. The profiles are designed to target goods based on the description, previously identified non-compliant entities and importers, and high risk sources such as seed suppliers. They are refined based on the intelligence gained through data analysis, overseas sources and identified emerging risks.

In addition to the profiles, the department uses a number of other methods to manage the biosecurity risks presented by online purchases in the cargo pathway. These include document assessment, inspection of consignments and x-ray screening of randomly selected consignments (known as free line surveillance). The department x-ray screened a total of 109 320 randomly selected cargo consignments from 1 January 2014 to 31 October 2014. No consignments with undeclared prohibited seeds were intercepted.

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Question Taken on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

5. Your submission indicates (on page 37) that there have been 24 successful convictions for illegal importation since 2009. Are you able to give some more specifics in relation to these convictions? What sort of fines or penalties were involved?

Answer:

The following are successful convictions for *Quarantine Act 1908* matters dating back to 2009. Convictions during this period included matters with fines ranging from $137 - $40,000 and custodial sentences of up to four years.

Allegation	Convicted	Conviction/Sentence	Region
Illegal Importation of Plants	22/01/2009	$400 fine, 12 month good behaviour bond and disbursements of $105 ordered	South East
Illegal Importation of Live Bird Eggs and Plant Products	28/04/2009	Convicted and placed on a recognisance in the sum of $500 to be of good behaviour for 12 months. Pay $750 Court Fund plus disbursements of $123	South East
Illegal Importation of Live Crustaceans	16/10/2009	$1,250 fine plus $265.70 costs	South West
Illegal Importation of Live Animals	5/02/2010	18 months imprisonment with 4 months to serve plus $1,000 good behaviour bond on release for 24 months	North East
Illegal Importation of Live Crustaceans	29/03/2010	**Individual 1:** 3 years imprisonment - may be released after 6 months on $1,000 recognisance to be of good behaviour for 2 years. **Individual 2:** 3 years imprisonment - may be released after 6 months on $1,000 recognisance to be of good behaviour for 2 years. **Individual 3:** 3 years imprisonment on illegal importation and 1 year on attempting to pervert - may be released after 9 months on $1,000 recognisance to be of good behaviour for 2 years. **Both companies:** $40,000 fine	North East

Written question 5 (continued)

Allegation	Convicted	Conviction/Sentence	Region
Illegal Importation of Plants	5/05/2010	Find $137 costs and $100 12 month good behaviour bond	South East
Illegal Importation of Plant Products	27/07/2010	$1,500 fine and ordered to pay $129.50	South East
Illegal Importation of Plants	22/10/2010	$750 fine plus court costs of $65	Central East
Illegal Importation of Plants	7/01/2011	$3,500 in default 35 days imprisonment	North East
Illegal Importation of Live Plants and Crustaceans	28/01/2011	15 months imprisonment with a minimum 3 months to serve	North East
Illegal Importation of Plants	7/04/2011	$1,000 fine; 12 month good behaviour bond, $1500 court fund and $450 court costs	South East
Illegal Importation of Plants	30/05/2011	$2,500 fine	Central East
Illegal Importation of Plant Product	29/06/2011	$4,000 fine	North East
Illegal Importation of Insects	26/08/2011	$1,500 fine plus $75.90 court costs	North East
Illegal Importation of Live Fish	27/09/2011	$5,000 fine plus court costs of $79	Central East
Illegal Importation of a Live Animal	31/10/2011	$6,000 fine and 12 month suspended sentence	North East
Illegal Importation of Plant Cuttings	17/11/2011	$7,000 fine	North East
Illegal Importation of Plant Products	27/02/2012	$4,000 fine	North East
Illegal Importation of Plant Product	18/07/2012	$500 fine	South East
Illegal Importation of Live Plants	8/03/2013	$7,000 fine in default of 21 days imprisonment	North East
Aggravated Illegal Importation of Live Plants and Seeds	17/07/2013	Fined $4,000 for illegal importation and $1,000 for false customs declaration. A fine option offered (200 hours community service)	North East
Illegal Importation of Live Plants	18/07/2013	Convicted and fined $1,000 and to be of good behaviour for 12 months	North East
Aggravated Illegal Importation of Plant Products	21/01/2014	Convicted and fined $2026.57 and to be of good behaviour for 2 years.	Central East
Illegal Importation of Plant Cuttings	3/04/2014	Convicted and fined $7,000.	North East

Additional successful convictions for *Quarantine Act 1908* are provided below, which occurred following the Department of Agriculture's submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Communications References Committee in August 2014.

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Written question 5 (continued)

Allegation	Convicted	Conviction/Sentence	Region
Aggravated Illegal Importation of Aquatic Plant Material	19/08/2014	Convicted and sentenced to a 12 month suspended sentence, $3,000 bond and to be of good behaviour for a period of two years.	North East
Aggravated illegal Importation of plant products without import permit	14/10/2014	**Company**: Convicted and fined $12,000 **Individual:** Convicted and fined $6,000 in default 3 months imprisonment.	North East

Department of Agriculture

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Question Taken on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

6) Is there a priority list to determine which import risk assessments are undertaken first? How are these priorities determined?

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture considers a number of factors in setting priorities for its work program of biosecurity risk analysis. These include the level of biosecurity risk, implications for trade, and practical considerations including the availability of resources, including staff with relevant expertise.

Biosecurity risk is the primary consideration, including whether the work is needed to manage existing biosecurity risk to an acceptable level, or will increase organisational efficiency by enabling the department to focus on higher risk products.

Relevant trade implications include the anticipated benefits of trade (both import and export), any connection between an import request and Australia's export market access objectives, and complying with Australia's international obligations arising from trade agreements with its trading partners.

As noted above, practical considerations include the anticipated time required to analyse the risk, the availability of resources, including staff with relevant expertise, and whether the risk analysis can be simplified and/or combined with consideration of other import proposals.

Department of Agriculture

Committee inquiry: Environmental biosecurity
Date Held: 31 October 2014

Question Taken on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

7. In terms of prioritisation of risks, your submission (on pp 24-25) discusses the 'Risk Return Resource Allocation model'. How are priority invasive pests and their potential key pathways identified under the model? Your submission states (on p. 24) that 60 organisms of biosecurity concern are described in the model. Is there a list available of these organisms? How were these organisms chosen?

Answer:

The Risk Return Resource Allocation (RRRA) model is constructed to represent a comprehensive but mutually exclusive list of all organisms of biosecurity concern (Table 1). It does not identify invasive species, but identifies representative groups of species. The list does include some individual species, such as foot and mouth disease and Asian gypsy moth—where there are targeted biosecurity controls in place to deal with these organisms. The list is dynamic and can be revised as needed provided it remains comprehensive and mutually exclusive. Since the submission was made, the list has been consolidated to 53 organisms of biosecurity concern.

The list was developed with reference to many sources, including the Plant Health Australia (PHA) list of priority plant pests.

The RRRA model describes all possible means by which an organism of biosecurity concern could enter Australia, as a set of entry pathway models. These include cargo (which contains about 30 subpathways for things such as fruit and vegetables, live dogs and cats, machinery etc.), mail, passengers, conveyances and natural means. The association of organisms of biosecurity concern with pathways is based on intelligence from operational data collected by the department, import risk assessments and pathway reviews undertaken by the department, consultations with operational and scientific staff within the department, and external reports and publications.

Written question 7 (continued)

Table 1. RRRA organisms of biosecurity concern

Asian gypsy moth	Aquatic algae	Horticulture bacteria
Dinoflagellate	Aquatic bacteria	Horticulture beetle
Fruitfly	Aquatic fungus	Horticulture bug_thrips_mite
Foot and mouth disease	Aquatic invert_other	Horticulture fly_moth
Giant African snail	Aquatic invert_other_fouling	Horticulture fungus
Khapra_beetle	Aquatic micro_other	Horticulture nematode
Tramp_ant	Aquatic mollusc	Horticulture virus
Livestock bacteria	Aquatic virus	Horticulture weed
Livestock bug_thrips_mite	Aquatic weed	Nonagricultural bee_wasp
Livestock fly_moth	Broadacre bacteria	Nonagricultural fly_moth
Livestock micro_other	Broadacre beetle	Nonagricultural micro_other
Livestock Virus	Broadacre fungus	Nonagricultural Vertebrate
Avian bacteria	Broadacre mollusc	Nonagricultural weed
Avian virus	Broadacre virus	
Zoonotic bacteria	Broadacre weed	
Zoonotic micro_other	Forestry beetle	
Zoonotic virus	Forestry fungus	
Animal_other bacteria	Forestry nematode	
Animal_other micro_other	Forestry termite	
Animal_other virus	Forestry weed	

Department of the Environment

Committee Inquiry: Environmental biosecurity
Date Held: 31 October 2014

Question on Notice

The following question was provided in writing:

8. Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy sets a target to 'reduce by at least 10% the impacts of invasive species on threatened species and ecological communities' by 2015. Can you advise how we are progressing against this target? How is this being measured and monitored? What reporting is there?

Answer:

Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy

All Australian governments collaborated to develop Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030 (ABCS). Implementation is the responsibility of all jurisdictions and involves updating existing programmes and priorities for investment to address urgent and emerging issues, consistent with the principles of adaptive management. The Strategy was developed with interim national targets and includes a commitment to evaluate the suitability of these targets for progressing priority actions after five years. The ABCS will be reviewed in 2015 and will consider progress against the national targets, including their ongoing suitability for driving the implementation of priority actions to help stop the decline in Australia's Biodiversity.

Progress against invasive species target

The Australian government has invested in a number of programmes that contribute to reducing the impacts of invasive species on threatened species and ecological communities, including:

- $2 billion investment in local action to address threats to our natural assets through the National Landcare and Green Army Programmes.
- Appointment of a Threatened Species Commissioner who is working collaboratively with the community, industry, research bodies, Indigenous groups, non government organisations and all levels of government to broker solutions that avoid the extinction of Australia's native species, including addressing key threats such as the impacts of invasive species.

Additional examples of ongoing actions to address the impact of invasive species include:

- Identification and listing of key threatening processes under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and development of threat abatement plans.

Written question 8 (continued)

- The declaration of 32 weeds of national significance and national strategies for their control.
- Australia's biosecurity system which protects our environment and agricultural sector against the threat of alien invasive species through projects such as pest eradication on Macquarie Island and yellow crazy ant control on Christmas Island.
- The National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions which aims to prevent new marine pests and minimise the spread of established marine pests.
- The CSIRO's Biosecurity Flagship which is focused on helping to protect Australia from biosecurity threats and risks posed by serious exotic and endemic pests and diseases.
- The Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre undertakes research on strengthening management strategies for pest fish and major terrestrial pests including foxes, feral pigs, rats and mice, cane toads, feral cats and rabbits.
- Investment in feral pig control throughout the central Cape York landscape to mitigate the effects on turtle nest viability. The Aak Puul Ngantam ranger group has reported a reduction in predation of turtle nests from 100% nest mortality to 23% nest mortality over a 10km stretch of beach in one year.
- The strategic control of invasive grasses and riparian weeds at sites through the Kimberley, Top End, Gulf and Cape York. Focus is on weed species with the greatest potential impact on ecological health, landscape connectivity and those that disrupt fire regimes and degrade vegetation structure.

Monitoring and reporting

Reporting against the interim targets in the ABCS currently occurs as part of Australia's national reporting to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As a Party to the CBD, Australia is committed to implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its associated Aichi Biodiversity targets. Australia's fifth national report to the CBD was published in May 2014 and provides a summary of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity targets for the period 2009-2013, including targets relevant to invasive species control and the prevention of extinction of threatened species. One of the major aims of the ABCS review in 2015 will be to better align our national targets with the Aichi targets to ensure Australia fully meets its international obligations under the CBD in a manner that is consistent with our own circumstances and priorities.

Implementation of the ABCS requires the continued collaborative effort of the Australian, state, territory and local governments, and the private sector. All jurisdictions committed to monitoring their progress to inform the 2015 review. A long-term monitoring and evaluation framework, aligned against the revised set of targets, will be developed for the ABCS as part of the 2015 review process. This framework will also be informed by the work of the Threatened Species Commissioner, who has a role to identify ways to improve reporting on the success of threatened species recovery actions.