



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References
Committee interim and final reports:

Biosecurity risks associated with the
importation of seafood and seafood products
(including uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat) into
Australia

May 2018

Introduction

The Australian Government welcomes the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee's interim and final reports on biosecurity risks associated with the importation of seafood and seafood products (including uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat) into Australia. The government thanks the Committee members for their work in delivering the report and its associated recommendations.

The health and sustainability of Australia's fisheries and aquaculture industries is important to all Australians. The government is taking the outbreak of white spot syndrome virus (WSSV) very seriously. This outbreak had a significant impact on prawn farmers in the Logan River region. Long term establishment of WSSV in Australia would have a devastating impact on aquaculture and commercial fishing, including our \$358 million prawn industry, as well as the broader marine environment.

Australia is renowned as a supplier of high quality, safe and clean food around the world. This has long been underpinned by some of the strictest biosecurity rules in the world. These rules continue to help prevent the entry and establishment of exotic pests and diseases that have the potential to cause significant harm. Australia's farmers, natural environment, community and economy all rely on these rules to protect our unique way of life.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (the department) has already made improvements to the biosecurity controls in place to manage the importation of prawns. The resumption of trade in uncooked prawns and prawn meat was only allowed under more stringent, enhanced import conditions that provide an appropriate level of protection from the biosecurity risks associated with this product. The department will continue to work with state and territory governments, industry and the community to reduce the likelihood, and impact of, pest and disease incursions.

In addition, a review of the biosecurity risks of, and import conditions for, prawns and prawn products for human consumption is currently underway. The review will take into account current scientific information, trade patterns and international standards developed by the World Organisation for Animal Health. It will identify and categorise hazards of biosecurity concern associated with the importation of these products to ensure Australia is protected into the future.

Recommendations from the Committee's Interim Report

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources approve the use of other testing laboratories, in conjunction with the Australian Animal Health Laboratory, to determine the presence of the white spot syndrome virus in uncooked prawns and prawn product in Australia. The approved laboratories would adhere to World Organisation for Animal Health Standards.

The Australian Government notes this recommendation.

The Australian Government has confidence in AAHL's testing methods for WSSV and in its status as the national reference laboratory for animal diseases. The department has developed and approved a standardised testing procedure for WSSV, which has been implemented by AAHL and the other approved laboratories.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Senate extend the inquiry reporting date to 7 December 2017.

The Australian Government notes that this extension was granted.

Recommendations from the Committee's Final Report

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources introduce procedural guidelines that allow it to communicate confidentially with jurisdictional counterparts while pursuing biosecurity investigations. Such procedures should protect the integrity of investigations while alerting other jurisdictions to heightened disease risk.

The Australian Government agrees with this recommendation.

Processes to improve communication about heightened disease risks with state and territory jurisdictions are being implemented. This includes the confidential communication of critical biosecurity investigations.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources introduce amendments to the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, which provide the Director of Biosecurity with appropriate secure and advise powers in relation to specified goods or classes of goods.

The Australian Government agrees with this recommendation.

Legislation to provide the Director of Biosecurity with appropriate secure and advise powers was introduced into the Parliament in the Autumn 2018 sittings.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources implement an ongoing diagnostic testing training program for aquatic diseases with international trading partners, to assist those countries in improving their scientific disease testing capabilities, in line with the testing utilised in Australian laboratories.

The Australian Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The department is already collaborating with trading partners to support their ability to meet new import conditions for uncooked prawns. This includes collaboration on WSSV testing protocols. Work is also underway to propose and update new OIE testing standards for WSSV.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources consider regulations and enforcement mechanisms for the improved labelling of imported frozen raw prawns intended for human consumption. Particular consideration should be given to appropriate signage at the point of sale in the retail sector.

The Australian Government agrees with this recommendation.

The department will implement post border assurance protocols to assess the effectiveness of selected import conditions (such as not using uncooked prawns as bait). The department will work with states and territories, importers and major retailers to implement more effective mechanisms to prevent imported raw prawns intended for human consumption being used as bait.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources secure the co-operation of all jurisdictions to undertake an education campaign on the risks associated with using raw prawns intended for human consumption as bait.

The Australian Government agrees with this recommendation.

An education campaign is being already progressed through the Fishing Ministers' Forum.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources urgently complete its review into the import conditions for prawns and prawn products. The review should consider updates to the 2009 Import Risk Analysis on the basis of scientific evidence and with regard to the views of other jurisdictions.

The Australian Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The department has commenced a review of the biosecurity risks of, and import conditions for, prawns imported for human consumption. The review will take into account scientific evidence provided by stakeholders, including jurisdictions. This will be a complex review that, depending on inputs and the availability of relevant science, could take some time to complete.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources allocate to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resource sufficient resources in order to complete the review of import conditions for prawns and prawn products as soon as is practicable.

The Australian Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

Resources have been allocated and the review has commenced. The department undertakes reviews of import conditions in line with the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and guidelines, standards and recommendations developed by international organisations such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Extensive engagement with various stakeholders is required including exporting countries, industry and state and territory jurisdictions. The scientific and technical work relating to the risk assessment is detailed and complex as is the consultation given the wide ranging views of stakeholders. Like recommendation 6 above, these factors will dictate the course of the review and timeframes for completion.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, in collaboration with seafood and aquaculture industries, establish a seafood industry and science consultation group, which has the ability to present its views on biosecurity to relevant state, territory and Commonwealth ministers.

The Australian Government agrees in principle with this recommendation.

The department will ensure that there are effective consultation mechanisms that will enable the seafood and aquaculture industries to present their views on biosecurity issues to relevant state, territory and Commonwealth jurisdictions. A roundtable for consultation with stakeholders representing these groups was held in February 2018. The department consults with these stakeholders' regularly through Biosecurity Advice notices and will continue to meet face-to-face as required.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that in developing an aquatic Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement, Animal Health Australia and the Aquatic Deed Working Group consider alternative options to the 'three thirds' funding arrangements.

The Australian Government agrees with this recommendation.

A mechanism to agree on alternative funding shares to the 'three thirds' default has been considered by the Aquatic Deed Working Group and included in the draft Aquatic Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement.