

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

26 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000285

Question Subject: Livestock ship with human crew - Fremantle WA

Type of Question: Spoken

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Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

Senator KENEALLY: Professor Murphy, it might help if you could clarify: this is a ship with livestock on it, but it would be required to provide a human health report to the federal department of agriculture—yes or no?

Prof. Murphy: I believe so, yes. That would be the normal requirement: any maritime vessel has to provide a health report.

Senator KENEALLY: I think this is useful for public education as well as for the committee: it's not just cruise ships or aeroplanes with people on them but also other types of vessels such as a livestock ship that has a human crew.

Prof. Murphy: Yes—any commercial vessel.

Senator KENEALLY: And those reports go to the federal department of agriculture.

Prof. Murphy: They go to the department of agriculture, yes.

Senator KENEALLY: I think last time we had testimony from the federal department of agriculture that they were a bit more than a postbox in terms of processing those reports. Are you not able to tell us any more as to when those reports were received by Agriculture and what they did with them?

human health risk assessment is delegated to the state and territory directors of human biosecurity—in Western Australia, that would be Professor Armstrong. If there were any human biosecurity issues, Agriculture would have dealt with him, as the delegated responsible person.

Senator KENEALLY: (A) **Just so we're clear: the reports go to Agriculture and then get sent to Western Australia?**

Prof. Murphy: There are a range of protocols. If they believe there are any human health risks in a state, they are required to consult with the director of human biosecurity in that state. Again, we are speculating about what has happened with this ship. We'd be very happy to provide you, on notice, with full information about the time line. All I know is what

I've told you already.

Senator KENEALLY: Premier McGowan has literally just finished a media conference. He's saying that the state only found out by word of mouth, from the docks, that there were crew members on board who were sick, and that the state government then got tests done.

(B) His claim is that the federal authorities—whether that's Border Force or Agriculture—knew that there were sick people on board but didn't tell the Commonwealth. Could you please take that on notice, if you're not able to answer now?

Prof. Murphy: We can certainly take that on notice

Answer:

(A) Under section 48 of the *Biosecurity Regulation 2016*, vessels (other than certain vessels travelling from certain areas in the Torres Strait) are required to provide a pre-arrival report to Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) between 96 hours and 12 hours prior to arrival in Australian territory. The pre-arrival report must include information about any ill travellers on board the vessel.

Vessels providing a pre-arrival report are required to update that report during the voyage if there is any change by providing a human health update.

If the pre-arrival report indicates that there are ill travellers with signs or symptoms of one or more listed human diseases (LHDs), a biosecurity officer will screen those ill travellers for LHD risk, including COVID-19 risk, using the Traveller with Illness Checklist (TIC).

Any ill travellers identified through the TIC as having a risk of having a COVID-19 or any other LHD, are referred to the state and territory Human Biosecurity Officer or Chief Human Biosecurity Officer for further management.

(B) The Director of Human Biosecurity appoints Human Biosecurity Officers within states and territory health departments. These departments assume full operational responsibility for human health assessments in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) in each state.

Requests for information about communications occurring between DAWE and Western Australia government are best directed to those organisations. However, it is the Department's understanding that DAWE immediately notified the Western Australian Department of Health when they became aware that there were ill crew with elevated temperatures on board.