



**DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL
AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Secretary

Dr M Kerley
Secretary
Joint Committee Of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Kerley

REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S QUARANTINE FUNCTION

I refer to the JCPAA's current review of Australia's quarantine function and your invitation of 4 June 2002 to the Department to provide a written submission which we were pleased to do so.

The Department has recently become aware of evidence provided by Mrs Pauline Semple, Acting Chief Scientist of the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, on 29 July 2002 and the subsequent report in *About the House*, the House of Representatives Magazine, November/December 2002. The Department would like to clarify some of the issues raised by Mrs Semple in evidence.

I have attached a supplementary Departmental submission to the JCPAA inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Ed Killesteyn
Acting Secretary
January 2003





**DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL
AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

**JOINT REVIEW OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT
REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S QUARANTINE FUNCTION**

**SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION
AND MULTICULTURAL AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**



Introduction

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this supplementary submission to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit's review of Australia's Quarantine function.

DIMIA refers to evidence given to the Committee on 29 July 2002 by Mrs Pauline Semple, Acting Chief Scientist, Queensland Environmental Protection Agency. DIMIA has only recently become aware of this evidence and seeks to clarify some of the issues raised.

Development of an interim protocol with Queensland Environmental Protection Agency for marine pest inspection procedures for FFVs and SIEVs

The Department has tried to contact Mrs Semple on a number of occasions after Mrs Semple's email of 21 May 2002. Unfortunately the officer most concerned with this issue was on leave and did not return to duty until early June. A number of telephone calls were made to Mrs Semple between 4 and 11 June when a message was left with a person in Mrs Semple's office advising that DIMIA was happy to work with Queensland EPA on an interim protocol and practical arrangements using the Northern Territory model, but that there were a number of issues which we wished to discuss. We were not aware at the time that Mrs Semple was on leave.

Telephone calls were subsequently made to Mrs Semple's office in July but Mrs Semple's telephone was not answered. In August DIMIA was tasked by the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries to provide additional input to the National Introduced Marine Pest Coordination Group (NIMPCG) national protocol. The Department recognises that the national protocol is a priority and considered that this had overtaken work on an interim protocol for Queensland. In November we were advised that there was still considerable work to be done on the national protocol and would not, therefore, be finalised soon which prompted DIMIA to contact Mrs Semple again to work on an interim protocol for Queensland.

Marine pest infestations on vessel seized by DIMIA

The vessel Wing Sang 108 was brought into Cairns by the Australian Customs Service in July 2000 in connection with Migration Act offences. AFMA was not involved. The vessel was seized by the Commonwealth and condemned as forfeited. The vessel was subsequently sold by tender for scrapping. In June 2001 we were advised that the tubeworm, *Hydroides sactaerucis*, had been detected on the hull of the vessel. After receiving serial and conflicting advice on what action was required DIMIA was informed that the Consultative Committee on Introduced Marine Pest Emergencies (CCIMPE) had recommended that the vessel's hull be scraped "as close to the time that the vessel might be moved from the port of Cairns". The Department contacted the owners and ascertained that there were no plans to move the vessel as there were no plans to begin work on scrapping the vessel in the immediate future. Further, it appeared unlikely that the owners had the resources to have the hull scraped. (The estimate of costs to have the hull scraped that was originally provided by the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) did not reflect the scope of the work and the costs were substantially

higher.) The Department was concerned that the impact of this economic pest be contained. To this end, DIMIA negotiated to purchase the vessel back from the owners and deeds of settlement and release were executed. The Department then arranged for the hull to be scraped.

In evidence to the JCPAA Mrs Semple advised that Wing Sang 108 was the probable source of tubeworm infestation in Cairns Harbour. At the time the Department received advice that the vessel had tubeworm infestation we were also advised that DSTO had confirmed that *Hydroides sanctaecrucis* had been found in Cairns in January 1999; that is 18 months before Wing Sang 108 arrived and 29 months before the tubeworm infestation was detected on the vessel.

The Department works cooperatively with a large number of Commonwealth and State/Territory agencies that need to be involved with the arrival of a SIEV. DIMIA considers that it acted decisively to limit the economic impact of tubeworm infestation on Wing Sang. The Department also reacted decisively to the subsequent discovery of the Green Lipped Mussel infestation and arranged appropriate treatment.

General comment

I can assure the Committee that DIMIA will work cooperatively with Queensland EPA should a SIEV arrive in the Queensland area of jurisdiction. In the meantime, we are more than willing to progress the protocol to address inspection of SIEVs for imported marine pests and the necessary treatment.