

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2015

**Agriculture**

**Question: 22**

**Division/Agency:** Biosecurity Plant Division

**Topic:** Review of possible entry pathways for Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA).

**Proof Hansard page:** 131 (23.02.2015)

**Senator SIEWERT asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT:** I wrote to the minister, who did answer my questions, around the incursion in New South Wales of red imported fire ants, which, I understand from the response, is not related to any previous incursions. Is that a correct understanding? He also said that you were undertaking a review of the possible entry pathways in order to re-evaluate the risk of each pathway. I am just wondering where that review is up to and the timeline for the process.

**Ms Mellor:** We have initiated some work on pathways—so vessels, containers, machinery et cetera—in which ants may be a problem and from where. These have a different genetic make-up than the ants that were found in Queensland some years ago. So the compliance people are actually now doing an analysis. Even though red imported fire ants are sourced in Argentina, it does not mean that that is where the container or whatever came from. So they are just trying to work out at the moment where some of the risk pathways are that are now emerging by virtue of the different genetics. As a result of that, we are reviewing our surveillance plans in ports around Australia. In terms of the timing of that review, I would have to take that on notice and come back to you. It is work that has been scoped already, and I do not know exactly what point of progress it is at.

**Senator SIEWERT:** If you could take it on notice, because the letter does not give a lot—it was good in that it at least let me know that that was going on, but it would be appreciated if you could give me a timeline of when you expect it to be completed. As I understand it, the letter also says that the nest has been eradicated.

**Ms Mellor:** That is right.

**Answer:**

The Department of Agriculture completed a review of risk pathways associated with the recent Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) detection in Port Botany as part of the response to the incursion. The department is now reviewing broader risk pathways for exotic tramp ants and will complete an assessment of current processes to mitigate the risk of entry by May 2015. The findings from this project will inform more detailed analysis of specific risk areas. In addition, as part of normal business, the department is reviewing surveillance activities in port areas.

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**Question: 23**

**Division/Agency:** Biosecurity Plant Division

**Topic:** Mixed consignments of goods into Thailand

**Proof Hansard page:** 131-132 (23.02.2015)

**Senator BACK asked:**

**Senator BACK:** Look I am just interested in this issue with the Thai government in terms of mixed consignments of horticultural produce. Can you please give me an update on where we are with that issue: oranges and mandarins, apples and pears.

**Ms Mellor:** I will ask Ms van Meurs and Ms Calhoun to assist you with that.

**Ms van Meurs:** We are aware that the Thai government has raised some concerns about mixed consignments of goods into Thailand. We have asked our counsellor to work with the Thai authorities to clarify the position. We have also written to the Thai authorities to clarify the position. At the moment, it seems that there is some sort of confusion around the same consignments entering Thailand, so we are just trying to resolve that at the moment.

**Senator BACK:** What was the catalyst that caused their concern in the first place?

**Ms Calhoun:** We are still working through the exact issues of what the catalyst was there. We understand that the container that went needed to be treated under the same conditions. We were of the understanding that we could put it on the same certificate and send it. When it arrived in the port, there were some questions around how that is managed, which is what we are trying to clarify with the Thais at the moment.

**Senator BACK:** So there has not been a question of breakdown of phytosanitary standards?

**Ms Calhoun:** No, there has not. They were treated to the conditions which we certified, and my understanding is that both the consignments have been cleared subsequently.

**Senator BACK:** At the moment, then, mixed products are not being accepted but individually presented products are.

**Ms Calhoun:** That is right.

**Senator BACK:** Secretary, it would be good if, when it has been resolved, we can get some feedback. I would be appreciative.

**Answer:**

The resolution of mixed consignments of fruit being imported into Thailand is on-going. When the issue is resolved an update will be provided.

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**Question: 24**

**Division/Agency:** Biosecurity Plant Division

**Topic:** Plants that may threaten the environment

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator BULLOCK asked:**

Of the plants on your watch list is there any plant that, while not posing a threat to human, animal or plant health could cause such significant damage to Australia's environment, biodiversity or ecosystems as to constitute a national emergency?

**Answer:**

The freshwater diatom *Didymosphenia geminata*, commonly known as didymo or rock snot, is an invasive plant that would cause significant damage to Australia's environment. It forms a thick brown layer that smothers rocks and submerged plants in freshwater rivers and streams with consistently cold water and low nutrient levels. Should this pest be detected in Australia, a response would be considered under the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement. This agreement establishes national response arrangements, including cost sharing for pests and diseases of national significance and which would likely have national impacts.

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**Agriculture**

**Question: 25**

**Division/Agency:** Biosecurity Plant Division

**Topic:** Manual of Importing Country Requirements

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator BULLOCK asked:**

How many complaints have you received from exporters about the accuracy of information in the Manual of Importing Country Requirements?

**Answer:**

None.