

## DEPARTMENTAL STATEMENT: Bovine serum imports

Australia takes a conservative and careful approach to biosecurity management to safeguard the health of Australian people, animals and plants. There are many exotic diseases and pests that could impact on Australia's economy, environment and way of life. Recent ABARES research found the impact of a Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Australia could cost our economy up to \$52 billion over 10 years.

The Australian Department of Agriculture is responsible for managing the biosecurity risks of all imported goods, plants and animals.

There has been recent public comment about investigations conducted by the department in relation to bovine serum.

Bovine serum is a blood product that has the potential to carry serious biosecurity risks, including Foot and Mouth Disease. It can only be imported from approved countries including New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

The department commenced inquiries in early 2013 after receiving information about the potential biosecurity risks associated with imported bovine serum.

The department pursues any allegation or potential contravention of the Quarantine Act. There are two components to the current issue: tracing and movement of product and management of biosecurity risk; and investigation into a potential contravention of Australian quarantine law.

The suspect material was imported by a number of companies. The department took steps to appropriately manage the biosecurity risk, including in some cases ordering suspect bovine serum into quarantine. The tracing of product is ongoing and there is currently no evidence that exotic animal diseases have been introduced into Australia.

The formal investigation into the potential contravention of Australian quarantine law was initiated arising from the biosecurity trace back process. The investigation covers a number of companies and import pathways.

In February 2014, the Federal Court considered the issue of a warrant granted to the department in relation to one company, Serana. Both parties consented to settle these proceedings before a final hearing:

- labelled bovine serum was returned to the company at this time
- unlabelled bovine serum was returned to the company after independent testing for biosecurity risk
- the department continues to lawfully hold electronic information by agreement between both parties and under a retention order issued by a magistrate.

The department is unable to comment further on ongoing investigations.