

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 60

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Product storage

Proof Hansard page: 119

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: Sure. In terms of storage of the product before it leaves California to come here, can you confirm for me that the protocol states that the rooms that the products are held in for the entire length of the cold disinfestation process are supposed to be kept closed and unavailable to through-traffic?

Ms van Meurs: I would have to take that on notice. It is a normal requirement in our import conditions that, when we are exporting product and it needs to be treated, and that product is destined for Australia, it is marked that way.

Answer:

The import conditions for fresh table grapes from the United States of America (USA) require that table grapes be securely stored.

Most cold rooms used for treatment and storage of USA table grapes are very large. It is not necessary to maintain a dedicated cold room for each Australian disinfestation treatment lot, and to lock down the room for the duration of the treatment. Secure storage is considered to be achieved during pre-shipment storage (including disinfestation treatment) through strict labelling and identification requirements for every pallet of table grapes, block stacking of each treatment lot, and through physical segregation from other treatment lots and any other fruits, by physical barrier or distance.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 61

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Protocol checks

Proof Hansard page: 119

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: Can you tell me who representing the department actually checks to see that the protocol is being respected?

Ms van Meurs: The majority of imported table grapes are actually inspected by Australian Department of Agriculture officers in California.

Senator BACK: The reason I asked the question, Ms van Meurs, is that it was reported to me, last weekend or the weekend before, that a Western Australian grape producer was at one of these facilities and stood by and watched product destined to go to Australia not being held in a closed room, and a continual movement of vehicles, and crates of grapes going in and crates of grapes going out. I was not there so I cannot validate it, but this person's report was: 'There was no awareness at all by the people who operated that facility that these grapes should have been held—should have been closed off.' And he said, 'The capacity for the grapes to be mixed up was so obvious.' And, whilst grapes and voting slips have nothing in common, when I heard this story all I could think about was the situation that occurred in the state and federal elections in WA this last year, when state and federal voting slips, boxes and packages were all in the same building. I was particularly concerned to learn that.

I can do nothing other than to ask you to take that on notice and to report back to the committee, to satisfy the committee, that indeed what was reported to me was incorrect, or to report the action that has been taken to correct it. With all of the concern that exists over the actual virus itself, a breakdown of that type would make the so-called quarantining of that fruit a nonsense.

Answer:

The cold rooms may be used for single or multiple pre-export cold disinfestation treatments. The cold rooms must maintain segregation between treatment lots, and between treatment lots and other fruits – which prevents infected or infested table grapes potentially abutting table grapes for Australia, and reduces the risk of cross-contamination. The strict product/pallet identification requirement for table grapes destined for Australia ensures that substitution or mixing of pallets does not occur.

Australia will raise this matter with the USA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 62

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Vectors in Australia

Proof Hansard page: 120

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: You were speaking about UC, Davis, which I know well, having been on the faculty there twice, but not in oenology. It is still unknown, it has been reported to me, what vectors can spread the virus. The Californian industry has spent \$750,000 trying to halt the spread across US grape-growing states, and it is known that the Virginia creeper leafhopper is one vector, however the virus has been found in states where the leafhopper does not exist. Are those two statements known to you? If they are, would they be a cause of concerns in terms of the integrity of this product coming in?

Ms van Meurs: As you say, we have had conversations with the University of California. Our view is that there are no potential known vectors in Australia. As you have pointed out, the Virginia creeper leafhopper is not in Australia. I would have to take on notice the issue around the weeds, but our view is that there is no known vectors in Australia.

Answer:

Research in the United States of America showed that *Erythroneura ziczac* (Virginia creeper leafhopper) can transmit grapevine red blotch associated virus GRBaV under experimental conditions. GRBaV has been confirmed to be graft transmissible and the movement of planting material is considered to be the major pathway for the dissemination of this pathogen across the USA. Therefore, GRBaV can occur in locations without a known vector. Australia has recently reviewed the grapevine propagation pathway and has recommended measures to manage GRBaV; further information can be found at:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.au/ba/reviews/final-plant/grapevine-propagative>. Further information on the association of GRBaV in the table grape pathway can be found in appendix D of the *Final non-regulated analysis of existing policy for Californian table grapes to Western Australia*
http://www.agriculture.gov.au/Style%20Library/Images/DAFF/_data/assets/pdffile/0005/2325380/Final-non-regulated-CA-tgrapes-to-WA.pdf.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 63

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: National Pineapple Industry Biosecurity Plan

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator CANAVAN asked:

The National Pineapple Industry Biosecurity Plan (2008) allocated the highest level of threat to *Erwinia chrysanthemi* (strain *Dickeya* sp.), or bacteria fruit collapse, in terms of entry potential, establishment potential, spread potential and economic impact. The Departments report, page 40 'Final import risk analysis report for the importation of fresh decrowned pineapple (*Ananas comosus* (L.) Merr.) fruit from Malaysia' December 2012, says that there is up to a 2% chance of latent infection of the bacteria *Erwinia chrysanthemi* (strain *Dickeya* sp.), from imported pineapples (or 4t/annum given that Malaysia plans to import 200,000t per annum). On that assessment is it fair to say that the bacteria will enter with Malaysian or Philippine imports at some stage?

Answer:

Industry Biosecurity Plans are developed through a process led by Plant Health Australia and are intended to rank potential threats to assist industries prioritise biosecurity planning. While there are similarities in the ranking system used in Industry Biosecurity Plans and the Import Risk Analysis (IRA) process followed by the Department of Agriculture, an important distinction is that Industry Biosecurity Plans consider all potential pathways by which an exotic pest could enter Australia, including illegal pathways and natural spread. The methods used in Industry Biosecurity Plans also follow different guidance to assignment of qualitative likelihoods when compared with the Department of Agriculture's IRA process. Therefore, the ratings assigned and overall rankings of priority pests in an Industry Biosecurity Plan are not directly comparable to an IRA conducted by the Department of Agriculture.

The final pest risk assessment for *Erwinia chrysanthemi* (pineapple strain, *Dickeya* sp.) acknowledged that there was a potential for some pineapples carrying the bacterium to be imported to Australia. This was fully taken into account in the risk assessment.

In assessing the volume of trade, the department took into account that a small volume of trade would occur. Malaysia has indicated a potential capacity to export 200 tonnes of fresh decrowned pineapple fruit to Australia per annum.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 64

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Bacteria *Erwinia chrysanthemi*

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator CANAVAN asked:

The consequence impact score is assessed in a geographical context being Local, District, Region and Nation. The consequence for the bacteria *Erwinia chrysanthemi* (strain Dickeya sp.) was assessed as E meaning that it was significant at a regional (State) scale. In other countries where this bacteria has entered there has been up to a 50% production impact. Given that the department has assessed the risk of establishment and spread as High, was this consequence assessment based on geographic 'coverage' of Australia or the relative impact to the Australian industry (given that nearly all pineapples are in Queensland a 40-50% production impact in this State would be a 40-50% impact to the Australian Industry – which should surely result in a F or G rating)?

Answer:

According to the Import Risk Analysis (IRA) methodology the impact scores are based on the estimates of the magnitude of the potential consequences at four geographic levels, i.e. local, district, regional and national.

The pest risk assessment estimated the magnitude of the potential consequences of this bacterium on plant life or health to be of major significance at district level, significant at regional (state) level and minor significance at national level. The Department of Agriculture considers this impact score of 'E' to be appropriate.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 65

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Ginger from Fiji

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator CANAVAN asked:

Is the science that determined the methyl bromide treatment for ginger from Fiji as an adequate treatment for burrowing nematode *Rhizopholus similis* available to the public and does the science conclusively determine the depth to which the nematode burrows so that the treatment is 100% effective (given that on occasion 'grocery' ginger is bought and planted in Australian gardens).

Answer:

The risk analysis for *Radopholus similis* is contained in the final Import Risk Analysis report for fresh ginger from Fiji which is publically available on the Department of Agriculture's website. The risk analysis describes the collective measures to manage the risks posed by *Radopholus similis*. Methyl bromide fumigation is just one element of these measures. Visibly infested material is removed from the pathway at harvest, during washing, grading, curing and packing. This is confirmed by official phytosanitary inspection by Fiji and Australia. Fumigation is used to ensure that any recent *Radopholus similis* infestation, where symptoms may be difficult to detect and where pests are expected to only be present close to the surface, will be managed. No *Radopholus similis* or any other quarantine pest has been found on imported Fijian ginger.

The risk analysis for *Radopholus similis* is contained in the final Import Risk Analysis report for fresh ginger from Fiji, which is publically available on the department's website. The risk analysis outlines the science applied to determine the Biosecurity risk posed by *Radopholus similis* and describes the collective measures to manage this risk. These include removal of visibly infested material at harvest, during washing, grading, curing and packing, and the fumigation treatment. For infestation to be visible, the ginger must be infested for some time and the lesions caused by *Radopholus similis* often include fungal and bacterial rots, which makes them even more obvious. The absence of infected ginger is confirmed by official phytosanitary inspection by Fiji and Australia.

Question: 65 (continued)

Methyl bromide fumigation is applied to the final product for export to ensure that any recent *Radopholus similis* infestation, where symptoms may be difficult to detect and where pests are expected to only be present close the surface, is managed.

There is strong empirical and scientific evidence to support the effectiveness of methyl bromide but no treatment is 100 per cent effective, which is why there are a number of measures in the import conditions to ensure that Australia's appropriate level of protection is achieved. Methyl bromide has a very long domestic and international history of effective use as a quarantine fumigant. It continues to be the most widely used fumigant in quarantine treatments because of its broad action against a wide range of quarantine pests (including nematodes), and its ability to easily diffuse and rapidly penetrate a wide range of commodities. Australia uses methyl bromide on the produce we export to ensure the biosecurity requirements of importing countries are met.

No *Radopholus similis* or any other quarantine pest has been found on imported Fijian ginger.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 66

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: IRA decisions

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator CANAVAN asked:

There is no public tabling of the science and actual probability results used for IRA decisions, no peer review of the science for IRA decisions or no ability to appeal the science used for IRA decisions. Are there confidentiality issues or risks to National Safety and if not why is this information not made more transparent?

Answer:

The Import Risk Analysis (IRA) method is included in the methods section of each report. The IRA is published as a draft report for stakeholder comment. All scientific information used in the report is referenced. All stakeholder comments are considered in developing a final IRA report and the IRA report is amended where relevant science is provided. For expanded IRAs the Eminent Scientists Group (ESG) then evaluates whether the department properly considered stakeholder comments and whether the conclusions of the revised draft IRA report are reasonable.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 67

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Pineapple and Ginger IRAs

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator CANAVAN asked:

The Senate Inquiry has recommended that the pineapple and the ginger IRA's be redone, is the department taking these recommendations seriously?

Answer:

The Senate Inquiry report on ginger from Fiji, pineapple from Malaysia and potatoes for processing from New Zealand is a report to the Parliament. The Government is currently considering the report and it's response to the recommendations made in the report.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2014

Agriculture

Question: 68

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Compensation for growers if IRA is proven incorrect

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator CANAVAN asked:

What compensation is there for growers if the IRA is proven incorrect and a serious disease or pest entry occurs?

Answer:

These are three formal agreements in place which set out arrangements for responding to exotic pests and diseases that are detected within Australia and have the potential to impact on animal, plant or human health or the environment. Both the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement and the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed provide for, amongst other things, owner compensation for certain costs if their animals, crops or property are directly damaged or destroyed. The National Biosecurity Environment Response Agreement contains similar provisions, providing that the beneficiary party is contributing to the response.