

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2015

Agriculture and Water Resources

Question: 36

Division/Agency: Compliance Division

Topic: Honey testing

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator WILLIAMS asked:

I commend the announcement of the 100 per cent testing of Turkish honey. However, will the Department explain why it will no longer test for anti-microbials and other inputs which for me sounds a backward step.

Answer:

During August 2015 the department completed the review of honey testing. This review considered concerns over adulterated honey, compliance rate with the existing testing, laboratory capability and whether there were other standards within the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code that could be verified for compliance.

The review recommended that the department implement testing of imported honey for compliance with the honey standard for content of reducing sugars, moisture content and evidence of adulteration with C4 sugars and that testing for antimicrobial cease.

Antimicrobial testing had been in place for ten years and had a very high rate of compliance, varying between 97 to 100 per cent for each of the five antimicrobials previously tested for. This laboratory analysis is very expensive at approximately \$1 800 per sample. Given the high compliance rate and the high costs for analysis, the department decided to cease this border testing.

The department continues to monitor food safety issues and receives information on food safety incidents from Australian state and territory governments, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, industry associations and overseas governments. If the department considers it necessary to again test imported honey for antimicrobials, then testing could be implemented at that time or be targeted to a specific incident that has been identified.

Question: 37

Division/Agency: Compliance Division

Topic: Honey testing

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator WILLIAMS asked:

Turkish honey has been the problem and 100 per cent of Turkish honey will now be tested, but only 5 per cent of other honey imports from countries like Croatia, Egypt, Thailand and Vietnam will be tested. This is only a 1 in 20 chance of finding a contamination problem. The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council has checked honey from Egypt and found antibiotics in it but it escaped detection when it entered Australia. The honey was removed from supermarket shelves.

Isn't the 5 per cent testing leaving the door open for more "Turkish-style" honey entering Australia, and what is to stop a Turkish exporter mis-labelling their product to that of a country whose product is subject to the far less stringent testing?

Answer:

Australia has a robust risk based system for screening imported food. The surveillance of low risk foods has been prescribed at five per cent of consignments and provides information on general compliance with Australian food standards. Where non-compliance is found, the inspection rate is increased to 100 per cent of consignments until a history of compliance is established.

With honey, we will gather information on the compliance of honey from all other countries at the five per cent rate. Where we find evidence of adulteration, the testing of the honey will then increase to 100 per cent of consignments for that supplier and country combination. If there is evidence of widespread non-compliance in honey from a particular country, the department will then consider whether an approach similar to that for Turkey is appropriate.

The *Imported Food Control Act 1992* permits targeting of food for 100 per cent inspection where one of the following three conditions have occurred:

1. the food has been identified through a science based risk assessment as posing a medium to high risk to human health for a specific hazard
2. the food has failed a previous inspection or

Question: 37 (continued)

3. the department has reasonable grounds to believe that if the food were inspected it would fail the inspection.

This is in accordance with the World Trade Organisation agreement on sanitary and phytosanitary measures, where border intervention on trade must be no more trade restrictive than required to achieve the appropriate level of sanitary protection.

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Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2015

Agriculture and Water Resources

Question: 38

Division/Agency: Compliance Division

Topic: Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Biosecurity

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator SIEWERT asked:

How have processes changed in relation to advice from Food Standards Australia New Zealand and their extended risk evaluation, since the frozen berries incident?

Answer:

The department works closely with Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) on imported food issues. This close working relationship includes active surveillance of international food safety issues and incorporation of these incidents for discussion at the regular meetings between the department and FSANZ.

Since the frozen berries incident, the department and FSANZ have formalised the regular meetings. These meetings include discussion on emerging or emerged international food safety incidents and consideration of whether further action under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme is appropriate.

An example is the department's response to the foodborne outbreak of norovirus in Sweden that was linked to consumption of raspberries exported from Serbia. The department put in place increased border inspection measures for raspberries from Serbia following receipt of this notification.

Separately, the department is considering both regulatory and non-regulatory reform options to improve the management of imported food under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme to ensure food safety outcomes.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2015

Agriculture and Water Resources

Question: 39

Division/Agency: Compliance Division

Topic: Charter Flights

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator SIEWERT asked:

How many items have been seized from passengers on charter flights since last estimates? If so what items have been seized?

Answer:

There have been 70 items seized from passengers on charter flights since 23 February 2015. The data below is calculated from 23 February to 31 October 2015.

| Category | Number of items seized |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Animal Products | 23 |
| Fruit and Fruit Products | 21 |
| Plant and Plant Products | 7 |
| Contaminated Goods/Footwear/Packaging | 7 |
| Vegetable and Vegetable Products | 4 |
| Human Therapeutics | 4 |
| Grains/Legumes/Nuts | 2 |
| Biologicals | 1 |
| Soil/Mineral Samples/Fertiliser | 1 |
| Total | 70 |