

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 01

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Incoming Passenger Cards

Hansard Page: 57 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Dr O'Connell—Can we come back to the time line on the checklist.

Senator SCULLION—I would appreciate that.

Dr O'Connell—I will break that down into two parts because I do undertake to come back with a time line on the specifics that have been raised. But there are aspects of this that have occurred, and perhaps Jenni Gordon can give a bit of clarity about that.

Answer:

Amended Incoming Passenger Cards to address Didymo risks will be reprinted shortly for distribution on New Zealand flights, ahead of a complete reprint for all routes later this year.

Discussions are also underway with airlines regarding the provision of in-flight advertising and specific announcements regarding Didymo in flights from New Zealand.

Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) brochures and tensa-barrier signs are on display in the major Australian international airports and announcements are being made in the arrivals halls of some airports to alert passengers to the requirement to present freshwater related articles for inspection.

AQIS has provided detailed advice and information to fishing groups and organisations and some have included a link to the AQIS website from their own site.

The AQIS website also has a range of information available regarding Didymo and the current arrangements in place for managing this threat.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 02

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Ernst and Young Report

Hansard Page: 58-59 (18/02/2008)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—I am specifically asking: will you provide the report to the committee? I understand that it is a 279-page report and it was on the cost-effectiveness of AQIS. I think this committee has worked very hard on these issues and deserves to have a copy of it. I would like an undertaking that you will provide a copy of that report. Further to that, following on from what Senator Scullion said before, that report is extremely damning if what was in the media is true. So I would like to go through some of the allegations and I would like a yes/no answer as to whether it is true.

In relation to what Senator Scullion raised about the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy, what is alleged is that there are no screening targets or effectiveness benchmarks for the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy, despite the threat posed by illegal fishermen, boat people, free movement from the Torres Strait islands et cetera. Is that true? Are there effectiveness benchmarks and screening targets for that strategy?

Mr Hunter—Senator, to go to the first part of your question, we would be happy to provide a copy of the report to the committee.

Answer:

A copy of the Ernst & Young report, *‘Review of Quarantine Border Security Strategies and Policies’* is attached for the information of the Committee.

[AQIS 02 attachment]

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 03

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Sea Container Inspections

Hansard Page: 60 (18/02/2008)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Ms Gordon—It is a combination of having resources available and also being able to identify where the risks are and which particular containers might have goods within them that will constitute a quarantine risk and being able to identify those largely on documentation. It goes to issues of us assessing, for instance, the likely effectiveness of fumigation on contents that are in a container.

CHAIR—So you have to rely on the consignors telling the truth?

Ms Gordon—We rely very much always on documentation. We have procedures in place when we identify that the documentation is not accurate to actually target specifically further containers that have been brought in by those brokers or by those importers. We have put them on lists. We will then target specifically to do physical inspections where we think the risks are until we are satisfied that those brokers and those importers have put in place procedures to address whatever concerns we found.

Senator HEFFERNAN—What is the record of getting a surprise?

Ms Gordon—I would have to come back with the specific details, but most of—

Senator HEFFERNAN—In other words, dodgy paperwork.

Ms Gordon—Most of our physical interventions on containers are random audits. They are not ones where people are advised ahead of time that we are going to open and physically inspect.

Senator HEFFERNAN—So, just roughly, is it one in a hundred? How many have a load of hoochiecoochie or whatever in it?

Ms Gordon—Senator, I think it might be better if I come back with a specific figure on that one.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Okay

Answer:

Import clearance effectiveness surveys of randomly selected containers show that 1.1% of consignments have commodity related quarantine concerns which have not been referred to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. These are mostly minor soil or plant material contaminations on the imported goods.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 04

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service – International Mail

Topic: Screening International Mail

Hansard Page: 61 (18/02/2008)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—What about Western Australia? Why is there a failure there on the mail?

Ms Gordon—I think those figures—and I would have to go back and check myself—were largely about the time it was taking to clear mail through the mail centres. Particularly at Christmas, as you would appreciate, with high volumes of mail it is often difficult to clear the mail as quickly as one would hope. As Mr Hunter has indicated, we have recently been given additional resources which we hope will enable us to clear mail in all mail centres much more quickly. The other thing that we have done with that additional funding is to change the way we work in the mail centres so that we are separating out some roles that can be performed by contractors and then use our quarantine staff for the actual inspection of the mail itself, rather than having them opening and closing parcels or mail products. That in itself, we hope, will ensure that we are meeting our targets more effectively.

Dr O’Connell—We will check for you, but I think there is a distinction being made between how quickly mail gets examined and whether or not it is examined. I think the mail is examined—

Senator HEFFERNAN—Is it a mandatory process?

Dr O’Connell—It is 100 per cent for mail.

Answer:

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) screens 100% of incoming mail using x-rays and detector dogs. Items suspected of containing quarantine risk materials are referred for a thorough secondary examination, requiring opening and physically inspecting the items.

The Australian Government has set an effectiveness target of 96 percent for ‘high risk items’ and 50 percent for ‘risk items’. Effectiveness is assessed on the amount of quarantineable material successfully intercepted at the border.

The Ernst and Young report states that AQIS has met its intervention targets for international mail in all states. In relation to effectiveness targets in Western Australia, the report states:

Since 2001/02 Western Australia has generally achieved the Government’s effectiveness target of 96%. However, since July 2005 the region has experienced variations and inconsistent levels of effectiveness, dropping to 30% in January 2006.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Effectiveness for international mail is measured through leakage surveys. Leakage surveys involve taking a random sample from mail items that have already passed quarantine intervention.

The number of samples taken each day for leakage surveys was chosen to give an adequate estimate of effectiveness over a three month period. The data quoted in the Ernst and Young Report refers to monthly data which is less accurate and more variable.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 05

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Oversized Tyres

Hansard Page: 62-63 (18/02/2008)

Senator Sterle asked:

CHAIR—I understand that. I should explain myself a bit better. Let us take the port of Fremantle in Western Australia. There are quarantine inspection stations where spraying et cetera is carried out. If the port is in Fremantle and if there is a privately owned quarantine facility in Kewdale, which is some 17 or 18 kilometres from the port, is that appropriate?

Ms Gordon—We would put in place requirements for the transport of any material that had to be taken from the port to a quarantine treatment centre to contain the quarantine risks that might be attendant on that particular import if, in fact, they had to be taken off the port itself.

CHAIR—Say they were full container loads, could they enter the port of Fremantle and then go by road on the back of trucks for 17 or 18 kilometres?

Ms Gordon—The answer is yes, they could, if that was where the quarantine approved premises was where the goods were to be opened and inspected and further decisions made about treatments or clearance.

Mr Hunter—By then the outside of the container would have been inspected so that any external quarantine risk material would have been subject to inspection.

CHAIR—What if it were goods that are oversized tyres, say? I am not sure what it could be. It could be something that does not fit in a container. Could you just throw a tarp over it and head off up Leach Highway?

Ms Gordon—No, we would be inspecting the goods at the port itself before they were released, to ensure that they did not have any quarantine risk. There are specific requirements in place for the transport of goods that might still have a residual quarantine risk. I would be happy to come back with further details on how that is managed.

CHAIR—If you could do that that would be much appreciated, thank you.

Answer:

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) inspects all oversized tyres at the wharf for contamination and mosquito concerns. Mosquito concerns are addressed at the wharf and, where possible, contamination is also removed or treated at the wharf. If this is not possible, contaminated oversized tyres may be treated at a Quarantine Approved Premise within the metropolitan area. Highly contaminated oversized tyres are not permitted entry into Australia.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Oversized tyres are usually transported in open topped containers which are inspected for external contamination before leaving the wharf. Break bulk oversized tyres are envelope tarped if AQIS determines there is a risk of contamination dislodging during transport to the Quarantine Approved Premise.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 06

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Vessel Standards

Hansard Page: 63 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—Is it a fact that your vessels would comply with the Queensland maritime board's requirements or is there a separate set of standards that you have applied to yourself?

Ms Gordon—I might have to come back to you.

Answer:

Australian Government vessels, including those owned and operated by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), are required to meet the legislative requirements outlined in the *Navigation Act 1912* (the Act) which is administered by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). All AQIS vessels comply with the requirements of the Act.

Australian Government vessels are not required to adhere to the state or territory legislation in which the vessel is operated; this includes Queensland Maritime Board requirements. However, the requirements of the Act for the standard of vessels and personnel qualifications either meet or exceed the standards set by the Queensland government.

AQIS vessels in Queensland are also inspected and certified annually by independent experts accredited by Maritime Safety Queensland.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 07

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: New Zealand Apples

Hansard Page: 64 (18/02/2008)

Senator Fielding asked:

Senator FIELDING—How long have you had those standard operating procedures?

Ms Gordon—Senator, I would have to confirm, but I think it was about August of last year—August 2007—but they were not finalised. We were still in the process of assessing the proposals and had not yet reached agreement.

Answer:

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) received the first draft of the standard operating procedures on 28 March 2007. AQIS received the latest draft of the standard operating procedures on 20 June 2007. The document has not been finalised.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 08

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: New Zealand Apples

Hansard Page: 67 (18/02/2008)

Senator Fielding asked:

Mr Hunter—As I mentioned earlier, Senator, the Australian Centre of Excellence for Risk Analysis were asked to provide advice on certain aspects of the sampling methodology that had been proposed by New Zealand in their SOP and work plan. Broadly, they confirmed the statistical advice that had been provided to AQIS but recommended a simpler approach to field sampling than that proposed by New Zealand. Essentially, that would require 400 trees be sampled in all orchards except for those orchards which have 300 to 400 trees, in which case all trees would be sampled. Basically, they recommended a simpler approach to the sampling methodology.

Senator FIELDING—Can their response be tabled?

Dr O'Connell—I would have to take that on notice, but I do not see any significant reason why we could not provide that to the committee.

Answer:

The Australian Centre of Excellence for Risk Analysis (ACERA) report “Evaluation of the inspection scheme for the importation of New Zealand apples” will not be tabled. The report was provided to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry as Government-to-Government-in-confidence. The report contains information that directly relates to the New Zealand apples Standard Operating Procedures and Workplan – which were provided to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service in confidence by Biosecurity New Zealand.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 09

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Imported Prawns

Hansard Page: 73 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—So there is no differential between the prawns in terms of their origin? But the ones that pass are not from New Caledonia, for example?

Mr Liehne—I do not think there are any prawns from New Caledonia coming in at this stage. I would stand to be corrected on that. I will take that on notice.

Answer:

The prawn Import Risk Analysis undertaken by Biosecurity Australia is generic risk analysis and the same import requirements apply to prawns irrespective of the country of origin.

No whole prawns or prawn meat requiring viral testing have been imported from New Caledonia since the interim quarantine measures came into full effect in September 2007.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 10

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Imported Prawns

Hansard Page: 73 (18/02/2008)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—Is there anywhere where there is 100 per cent failure?

Dr O'Connell—No, that is what I am saying. Not to my knowledge. There is no—

Mr Lihne—I would need to take that on notice.

Answer:

No.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 11

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Imported Prawns

Hansard Page: 75-76 (18/02/2008)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—To answer the logic that Senator Boswell was on about, if I am the bloke who is exporting them to Australia and you reject them, as the exporter to Australia do I then put them back on a ship and take them somewhere else or do I get them destroyed? You must know the answer.

Mr Liehne—I will have to take that on notice. I cannot answer that.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Surely someone knows the answer.

Mr Liehne—The rejection in Australia—

Senator HEFFERNAN—Surely somebody knows what is going on down—

Mr Liehne—The rejection in Australia is against the conditions that are applied to bring the product into Australia. Those conditions do not apply in other markets.

Senator HEFFERNAN—But surely you would know what the practice is in the trade with rejected prawns. What do they do with them?

CHAIR—Mr Liehne has taken it on notice. Does anyone have an answer to that?

Senator HEFFERNAN—For God's sake, surely you must know what they are doing with them.

CHAIR—I think we have established, Senator Heffernan, that we do not know.

Senator HEFFERNAN—No, no; come on!

Mr Liehne—We know what the requirements are. We enforce the requirements. I cannot give you an answer as to which proportion goes to where.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Well, who would know the answer to that?

Mr Liehne—I would need to check with the inspectorate as to what decisions are made. We will take that on notice.

Answer:

If a batch of imported prawns fails to meet import requirements after arrival in Australia the importer has the option to have the batch either destroyed, re-exported or processed (e.g. cooked or highly processed) in Australia under Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service supervision.

As at 7 March 2008, 109 consignments of imported uncooked peeled prawns have been tested. Of these consignments 70 have failed. Four of the failed consignments have been destroyed and 22 have been re-exported with the remainder awaiting re-export, destruction, or further processing.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 12

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: New Zealand Apples

Hansard Page: written question

Senator Fielding asked:

During Senate Estimates on February 18, 2007 AQIS stated they had consulted with Australia's apple and pear industry about New Zealand's draft Work Plan (WP) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The WP and SOPs are the plans through which New Zealand proposes to reach Australia's standard of 95 per cent efficiency of discovering one tree infected with fire blight from that orchard or region. AQIS stated at the hearing that the key elements of the WP and SOPs were discussed during a workshop in August 2007, where an Apple and Pear Australia Ltd (APAL) representative was present.

However, I have a copy of an email sent to AQIS on August 8, 2007 regarding the workshop, which states:

"As stated in the meeting I was disappointed that you were unable to provide the details of what New Zealand are actually proposing in the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) and work plans. Without this critical detail, the ability to provide informed comment was limited.

"Without the details being proposed by New Zealand on the SOP and WP, the discussions at the meeting were focused on the proposed audit framework ... I believe that the opportunity to engage the level of expertise present was limited to this area only."

Clearly this workshop cannot be considered as consultation with the industry. APAL was unable to offer input about New Zealand's SOPs and WP because it has never seen any information on these proposals. Yet, the New Zealand Government has consulted with its growers on the WP and SOPs.

Depending on the outcome of the current World Trade Organisation dispute, will AQIS commit to releasing this information to the industry and fully consulting with them on New Zealand's proposed Standard Operating Procedures and Work Plan before deciding whether or not to approve it?

Answer:

Refer to AQIS 08.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 13

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: New Zealand Apples

Hansard Page: written question

Senator Fielding asked:

On the week commencing October 29, 2007, AQIS received a report from the Centre of Excellence on New Zealand's Standard Operating Procedures and Work Plan. What advice did AQIS receive from the Centre of Excellence on New Zealand's Standard Operating Procedures and Work Plan? Please provide a copy of the report.

Answer:

Refer to AQIS 08.