

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

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 79

**Division/Agency:** Border Compliance Division

**Topic:** Cruise Vessel Management Process

**Proof Hansard page:** 92

**Senator SIEWERT asked:**

**Ms Mellor:** We operate quarantine services in Tasmania under a service level agreement with the Department of Primary Industries in Tasmania. That has been in place for a number of years. That service level agreement, or MOU, memorandum of understanding, is coming to a conclusion in June this year. Over the course of the last two years we have been having a look at the level of service required in Tasmania. It is diminishing quite substantially. An example might be that we have changed the way that we do certain kinds of inspections or the need for certain inspections. We have been in very close discussion with senior staff from the Department of Primary Industries in Tasmania for the last two years. Yes, it is going to diminish, because the need for the service diminishes.

**Senator SIEWERT:** I understand that one of the issues that is causing some significant concern about the reduction of services is cruise ships. One of the thoughts is that cruise ships are inspected in Sydney and therefore do not have to be inspected in Tasmania; is that correct?

**Ms Mellor:** The first point of entry is the place where we do quarantine services into Australia.

**Senator SIEWERT:** So the point that is being made to me is that there are problems when those ships arrive in Tasmania.

**Ms Mellor:** I am not aware of any particular problem. The normal process, no matter where the ship tranships around, is the first point of entry; what we are looking for is the entry into Australia.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Are you saying that none of those ships is inspected in Tasmania, anyway?

**Ms Mellor:** No, they would not be. If they have been inspected in Sydney or if they have been inspected in Brisbane they have been inspected in their first point of entry into Australia.

**Mr Hunter:** We have had a practice in the past where we have done what they call day tripper surveillance, but on the basis of some risk assessments that we have done we have almost dismissed that as a function. There is no biosecurity effective outcome for us to be able to do that.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Do you mean people who are going from the cruise ship onshore?

**Question:** 79 (continued)

**Mr Hunter:** Onto the mainland, yes. They might have first boarded in Melbourne and then have gone to Tasmania and then they day trip in Tasmania.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Up until when have you done that process?

**Mr Hunter:** I would have to take that on notice. The bottom line is that we have done a lot of work with the cruise lines and the shipping agents in relation to ensuring that the provisioning of food, which is where the risk is, is not to be taken off board by those day tripping passengers. We have done surveys. There is pretty sound science around all of that that there is no biosecurity outcome for us to continue to do that.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Even though where they can go is within easy reach of orchards?

**Mr Hunter:** As I said, there is a lot of surveying and scientific analysis that we have behind all of that; it suggests there is no effective biosecurity outcome.

**Senator SIEWERT:** You are aware that there is an example of a dog escaping from a cruise ship in Tasmania?

**Mr Hunter:** No. That has not been brought to my attention.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Perhaps I can provide that information to you. I have been told that there is an example where a dog escaped from a cruise ship.

**Ms Mellor:** We would welcome you providing that to us.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Did they find it?

**Senator SIEWERT:** I am not sure. I am sorry?

**Ms Mellor:** We would welcome that. Certainly our colleagues in Tasmania have not provided us with that information.

**Answer:**

Cruise vessels that first port, for example in Sydney, are subject to programmed verification at other destination ports throughout Australia, including Tasmania. These verification measures are applied where the department has assurance from the vessel operator, or has knowledge of, the provisioning of on-board food for its duration in Australian waters, and the vessel has a compliant history.

Cruise vessels that operate under these arrangements are provisioned with fresh fruit in Australia. Cruise vessel operators are also required to have in place onboard announcements (for shore excursion passengers), in-cabin information and at gangway reminders by the vessel's crew.

Since October 2013, 42 programmed verification inspection and/or interventions have been conducted on cruise vessels nationally.

**Question: 79 (continued)**

During the period Oct 2013 to March 2014, these verification measures, covering many tens of thousands of day-tripper passengers nationally, detected 18 pieces of fresh fruit that were provisioned in Australia, and several sandwiches.

Of the 10 cruise vessels arriving into Tasmania over that same period, programmed verification measures were applied to 4 of those vessels on 9 separate occasions. The results from those programmed verification measures found 3 day-tripping passengers to be carrying small quantities of fruit, dairy and egg items. According to the provisioning information provided by the cruise vessel operators, these commodities were provisioned in Australia.

The programmed verification measures have been in place since February/March 2013 – the implementation was preceded by a six week trial.

The Department of Agriculture is unaware of any instances where a dog “escaped” from a cruise vessel. The department is aware of an Australian companion dog identified disembarking with its owner in Tasmania in November 2013. The owner had a valid Department of Agriculture import permit for the dog.

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

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Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 80

**Division/Agency:** Border Compliance Division

**Topic:** Carbendazim

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator XENOPHON asked:**

Although carbendazim is banned for use within Australia, imported oranges and frozen concentrate orange juice (FCOJ) may still contain carbendazim. As the main provider of orange juice imports, Brazil continues to export carbendazim contaminated FCOJ to the country without limit, while domestic suppliers must find alternative fungicides and bear the cost of their development.

Given carbendazim contaminated FCOJ is cheaper than locally produced orange juice, these imports are putting pressure on local growers and threatening the future of the local industry.

What testing programs are in place to detect levels of carbendazim in OJ imports?

Can FSANZ provide detail on these programs?

**Answer:**

This question has been referred to the Department of Agriculture which administers the Imported Food Inspection Scheme.

The Imported Food Inspection Scheme is a risk based inspection scheme, targeting foods identified as posing a medium to high risk to human health and safety following a risk assessment by Food Standards Australia New Zealand. All other foods, such as orange juice and orange juice concentrate, are subject to surveillance monitoring at the rate of five per cent of consignments.

Currently, imported orange juice and orange juice concentrate are sampled for presence of carbendazim residues. Since border testing for carbendazim residues commenced during March 2013, there have been no noncompliant residues found.

Further detail on the Imported Food Inspection Scheme is available from the Department of Agriculture's website <http://www.daff.gov.au/biosecurity/import/food/inspection-scheme>.

In addition to this border inspection activity, each state and territory government have food legislation that requires all food, including imported food, to comply with Australia's food standards and the requirements for public health and safety. These government authorities and local governments then monitor food for sale for compliance with these requirements.

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**Agriculture**

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Given carbendazim contaminated FCOJ is cheaper than locally produced orange juice, these imports are putting pressure on local growers and threatening the future of the local industry.

What percentage of imports are tested for safe levels of carbendazim?

**Answer:**

This question has been referred to the Department of Agriculture which administers the Imported Food Inspection Scheme.

Five per cent of frozen concentrate orange juice consignments are sampled and tested for presence of carbendazim residues. Where residues are found, compliance with the Australian maximum residue limit for carbendazim is assessed.

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

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 82

**Division/Agency:** Border Compliance Division

**Topic:** Chemicals in imported frozen raspberries

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator XENOPHON asked:**

In December last year, tests by Today Tonight revealed banned chemicals in imported frozen raspberries. The majority of frozen raspberries in the supermarkets come from Chile or China, both countries without strict chemical regulations.

Today Tonight found that a number of brands contained traces of a number of fungicides and pesticides, some of which are banned here in Australia for agricultural use due to their carcinogenic effects on the human body.

The Today Tonight report stated only 5 per cent of these products are tested by authorities.

Could you advise me of the current testing programs for imported raspberries?

Has additional testing has taken place following the findings by Today Tonight?

**Answer:**

This question has been referred to the Department of Agriculture which administers the Imported Food Inspection Scheme.

The Imported Food Inspection Scheme is a risk based inspection scheme, targeting foods identified as posing a medium to high risk to human health and safety following a risk assessment by Food Standards Australia New Zealand. All other foods, such as raspberries, are subject to surveillance monitoring at the rate of five per cent of consignments.

Currently, imported raspberries are sampled and tested for the presence of 49 agricultural chemical residues (the department's imported food pesticide screen).

Further detail on the Imported Food Inspection Scheme, including the pesticide screen, is available from the Department of Agriculture's website

<http://www.daff.gov.au/biosecurity/import/food/inspection-scheme>.

No additional testing has taken place in response to the Today Tonight report.

Where a consignment fails testing under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme, further action is taken such as destruction, export or recall of affected product and the inspection rate for subsequent imports of the same product raised to 100 per cent of consignments.

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**Agriculture**

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In December last year, tests by Today Tonight revealed banned chemicals in imported frozen raspberries. The majority of frozen raspberries in the supermarkets come from Chile or China, both countries without strict chemical regulations.

Today Tonight found that a number of brands contained traces of a number of fungicides and pesticides, some of which are banned here in Australia for agricultural use due to their carcinogenic effects on the human body.

How many cases of imported frozen berries with violations against Australian regulations has the FSANZ identified in the past two years?

- a. What were the chemicals identified and levels of these chemicals in these cases?
- b. Have unsafe levels of chemicals been identified in any cases?

**Answer:**

This question has been referred to the Department of Agriculture which administers the Imported Food Inspection Scheme.

In the past two years, for imported berries, the scheme has identified one noncompliance with Australian maximum residue limits. The chemical procymidone was detected at 0.07 mg/kg in frozen strawberries from China. During this time the scheme has not identified any noncompliance in imported raspberries.

The Imported Food Inspection Scheme do not assess the food safety implications where a chemical residue is found in a food. The level is assessed for compliance with the Australian maximum residue limits published in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Where the residue is not compliant, the food is then subject to further action as a failing food under the scheme.