

INDUSTRY WORKING GROUP ON QUARANTINE

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Attachment 11

23rd May 2002

The Committee Secretary
Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audits
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Attention Dr. John Carter

JPCAA Enquiry into Quarantine Effectiveness

Dear Dr. Carter

The Industry Working Group on Quarantine (IWGQ) writes in response to the invitation to make a submission to the above enquiry.

The attached paper (Att.1) is a brief outline of and comments on issues the IWGQ has a major interest in.

Since its formation in 1993 the IWGQ has been actively involved in a range of quarantine related activities and considerations. It made a substantial submission to the "Nairn Review" in 1996 and, when the Government's response to the report was received in mid 1997, the IWGQ participated extensively in activities relating to the implementation of all industry relevant recommendations. A listing of the current membership of the IWGQ is attached (Att.2)

The IWGQ continues to regard the "Nairn Review" report as the blueprint for AQIS, Industry and the community as far as quarantine issues are concerned. The IWGQ has, in close consultation with AQIS, underwritten the "Shared Responsibility" concept by way of direct and indirect investments in quarantine awareness programs, education, IT developments, development and implementation of co-regulation arrangements to name just some projects.

The IWGQ membership represents the majority of industry sectors that pays for the fully cost recovered Cargo Management Programs of AQIS to the tune of \$65.5mil per annum currently, up from \$45.4 mil in the last financial year.

It has a vital and valid interest in the operational, administrative and financial efficiency and effectiveness of quarantine in the pre border, border and post border areas.

The IWGQ appreciates the opportunity to comment.

Should you require further information or material relating to issues noted above please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours Faithfully

H. Krtschil
Chair
Industry Working Group on Quarantine

Att.

IWGQ Submission for the JPCAA

The coordination of AQIS with other border control agencies

The IWGQ generally supports closer co-operation between two main border agencies (customs and quarantine). The degree of and scope for improved coordination of AQIS activities & aims with those of Customs vary between activity areas. The ACS appears to be very much a border enforcement agency dealing with intentional criminal activities whilst AQIS tends to be a more facilitatory and co-operative by working in conjunction with industry and the wider community to achieve its regulatory aims.

The IWGQ is aware of and supports a number of arrangements between the two agencies where close co-operation, cross training and other collaborative arrangements are in place.

The IWGQ is also aware that:

- Cargo related quarantine activities provided by AQIS require special skill levels in a broad range of products (plants, seeds, biologicals etc) as well as risk elimination methods for these products such as fumigation, gamma irradiation, heat treatment etc.
- That these skill levels reside with staff employed in a variety of AQIS programs ranging from pre-barrier activities (off shore clearances, assessment of risks for the issue of import permits) through barrier (clearance of goods on arrival) to post barrier (animal and plant quarantine stations).
- The maintenance of these skill levels is essential to industry to support valid and efficient clearance services for goods subject to quarantine.

Impact of International agreements on quarantine activities

- AQIS is the world leader in the development and management of protocols for handling ballast water aimed at reducing the chances of exotic marine pest incursions. Australia, being a major exporter of bulk commodities, is particularly vulnerable to marine pest incursions from the in excess of 150 million tonnes of ballast water being discharged in Australian waters each year. Previously voluntary ballast water management and reporting requirements became mandatory on 1st July 2001. The shipping industry funded the development of the Decision Support System (DSS) – a risk management tool designed to categorise ships as having high risk or low risk ballast water. In implementing the mandatory ballast water management requirements, Australia is ahead of the

International Maritime Organisation that expects to finalise the International Convention for Ballast Water in 2003. The excellent co-operation between AQIS and the shipping industry has been instrumental in achieving this timely outcome.

The operations of AQIS that are beyond Australia's borders

There are a number of activities that have relevance to the area regarded as pre-border.

The IWGQ firmly supports third party inspection, offshore accreditation systems, co-regulation and audit regimes, in addition to direct AQIS offshore intervention / inspections, as valid measures to "keep the risk offshore". The IWGQ favours as many as possible quarantine mitigation measures being carried out offshore based on the integrity and competence of offshore systems. The IWGQ suggests that many imports are subject to commercial offshore QA based systems that are successful and should be considered to address quarantine concerns.

The IWGQ is actively involved in the development of offshore accreditation and risk minimisation systems for timber and fertiliser imports

Continued attention should be given to communication of Australia's import protocols and compliance obligations to overseas exporters and cargo management entities. Focussed direction of quarantine awareness, advocating compliance with Australia's import conditions is an AQIS priority

AQIS border operations

The increased use of sophisticated screening technology to check certain cargoes, in addition to better profiling, are all commendable initiatives by AQIS. Resources must be committed to intelligence gathering for effective profiling and the IWGQ firmly believes that the additional funds committed to border operations in the 2001 / 2002 budget marks a unique opportunity to gather the necessary data to enable thorough risk assessments and appropriate action at all points of the quarantine continuum. The IWGQ sees this as an essential step in ensuring better and more targeted deployment of resources that may ultimately lead to a more equitable cost recovery regime.

The introduction of co-regulation arrangements in a number of low quarantine risk areas, such as documentary cargo clearance, has assisted AQIS in freeing resources for deployment in higher risk areas.

The current arrangements where a number of State and Territory agencies are contracted to provide AQIS services should be reviewed with a view to all export and quarantine services being carried out directly by AQIS as one Commonwealth Agency.

Monitoring and surveillance within Australia for breaches of the quarantine barrier.

The IWGQ regards the post border monitoring and surveillance as an integral part of "risk management"

No matter how many resources are applied to border (barrier) inspection and clearance operations it is not possible to completely eliminate the entry of quarantinable plant or animal material into Australia via, cargo, vessels or aircraft. It is therefore critically important for Australia to have the capacity to rapidly and accurately detect any exotic plant or animal pest or disease incursions.

Opportunities to increase public awareness of, and involvement in, quarantine issues

The IWGQ is aware of a range of public awareness initiatives. In 2000 the IWGQ was awarded a National Quarantine Award for its development and publication of an extensive Quarantine Awareness CD-Rom aimed at the Cargo Logistics and Importing Industry. More recently the IWGQ is developing a similar package aimed at making overseas exporters aware of Australia's quarantine standards.

17th May 2002