

**Report of the Border Rationalisation Taskforce
“STURGESS REPORT”**

A precis of views from Industry members of the AQIS Industry Cargo Consultative Committee (AICCC), the peak consultative body which covers all aspects of the shipping, cargo handling and importing quarantine task.

The Terms of Reference, inter alia, state that it was the Government's wish to achieve the most **cost efficient** and **effective management** of border control functions by Customs, Immigration, Quarantine (CIQ) agencies whilst maintaining and, where possible, improving the effectiveness and **integrity** of the CIQ systems. The term further state that: **In framing its recommendations the Task Force is to consult with and report on the views of stakeholders**

The Task Force commenced its work on 1st July 1998 and was required to report to Government by 30th September 1998.

On 31st August 1998 when the Government assumed a caretaker role:

- the Task Force had not completed its fundamental research without which, it said, it could not commence consultation with stakeholders.
- the Task Force deemed it inappropriate to consult with stakeholders as required under its terms of reference.
- yet other reviews, such as the Quarantine & Export Advisory Council (QEAC) reviews of Horticulture and Fish Export Programs continued to conduct public consultative meetings with stakeholders.

It is difficult to accept that an important undertaking such as this one had not completed its fundamental research some four weeks before report date and that it can formulate valid recommendations without consultation.

- It is the view of industry members that, in the absence of any consultation, they are entitled to question the grounds upon which any recommendations of the Task Force are based.
- A number of peak industry associations have conveyed their vital interest and concern at the lack of consultation on these matters to a number of Ministers with (CIQ) portfolio responsibilities.
- Industry, this year, will contribute by way of direct cost recovery some **\$35mil** to AQIS barrier programs and **\$64mil** to the ACS.
- The cost structures of AQIS and the Australian Customs Service (ACS) are apparently fundamentally different. Serious concerns exist that any possible merging of these two structures might have detrimental implications for those who pay for the “services”

Cost efficiency, management effectiveness and integrity issues in relation to quarantine, have been addressed jointly by AQIS and industry as part of the AICCC consultative arrangement since late 1993.

- The AICCC operates on the “**shared responsibility**” principle and deals with its tasks in a facilitatory fashion, which contrasts with the regulatory mission and culture of the ACS.
- Industry has committed in excess of \$1.2mil of its own funds to foster “informed compliance” by way of co-regulatory arrangements to assist with quarantine tasks.
- Industry would have serious concerns that this effort is diminished by a possible loss of emphasis on quarantine if a merger with a law enforcement agency was contemplated.

The report has not been released although it has been with Government now for over three months. Some press reports speculate, in an informed fashion or otherwise, on its recommendations and contents. Industry members foot the bill for the activities of these agencies by way of cost recovery. They are vitally concerned with the impact full or partial implementation of the recommendations may have yet they are neither informed nor kept advised.

Industry members reiterate their preparedness to participate in a consultative process on these issues.