
From: Sheena Avison [avison@y7mail.com]
Sent: Monday, 28 April 2008 9:44 AM
To: Quarantine Biosecurity Review
Subject: Fw: Quarantine and Biosecurity Review
Attachments: SUBMISSION COVERSHEET.jpg

To whom it may concern,
I wish to submit my recent experiences with AQIS and the quarantine system.

My husband and I began importing Adeniums (desert Roses) 3 years ago. In this time we have imported several thousand plants from Mumbai, Thailand and Taiwan. We mainly use three nurseries from Thailand and in the past we have had over 3,000 plants released from these nurseries, often after tests have been done which in some cases have shown some of the plants have Cucumber Mosaic Virus (a common virus that is already prevalent in Australia). The majority of these plants have been sold throughout Australia.

In the past two years I have had four shipments come in from the same nurseries that have provided the earlier plants, most of these plants have been repeat orders. I have had many tests done on these plants and apart from 40 plants which are 20 each of two species, the remainder of the shipments which would total almost 2,000 plants have tested clear to virus or with CMV. The 40 plants have shown a different virus which after testing was shown to be a Tobiomosaic virus, this virus also showed up in samples sent from our nursery which determined that it was already in circulation and had already been released into the community. I have told Aqis that I am prepared to have these 40 plants which are isolated from the rest destroyed.

Apart from a couple of hundred plants that were released recently after almost 18 months in quarantine, the remainder of our plants are still being held in quarantine and AQIS are asking for MORE tests.

When I asked why were the ones that tested clear or with CMV, not being released I was told they did not know which ones they were now as they had been muddled up! I have also been told that they (being AQIS) 'THINK' that it might be a more virulent form of CMV. None of the tests already conducted give any indication of this.

Your question: 'Should the effectiveness of research on quarantine and biosecurity issues be evaluated? Absolutely, at present it appears to be a joke! As for the payment, it has cost us \$thousands and so far we have had little released even though the results indicate that there is not a threat and plants with the same symptoms have already been released.

As for the payment, why would the government want to change it! At present Us! the poor importer is paying for the testing and consequently the gathering of information for AQIS.

My argument is Why issue an Import Permit when it does not appear that the plants will be released even when they are shown to be clear of virus or only infected with a common virus! To say that the plants will not be released 'BECAUSE THEY THINK...They might have another virus'. Why make people do tests when they won't take any notice of the

results?

After discussion with other importers and past importers the general conclusion is that the Aqis staff that do the inspections in quarantine at 6 weeks, 12 weeks etc, do not have the knowledge needed to make a judgement on the plants and consequently the plants are being retained far longer than is necessary.

In regards to Aqis not being any more Trade Restrictive than is necessary. Our plants are low security, they are put in a pot and stuck on a patio. We have paid and paid to have tests done and redone on the plants in quarantine with the constant same results, they do NOT show that they have anything that previous consignments THAT HAVE BEEN RELEASED had, Yet, they (Aqis) have not only restricted our trade, they have ground it to a halt. We are not a big commercial establishment we are a mature couple trying to etch out a living without going on the dole and the problems with Aqis not releasing our plants has put us in a dire situation yet we must concede to do more tests in hope that we will get the plants out and at least be in a position to recoup some of our already heavy costs.

I have been in contact with Anthony Wicks AQIS in Canberra and our State Member of Parliament Rosa Lee Long, unfortunately neither have been able to help us achieve a result.

There desperately needs to be an independent ombudsman where people in our situation can go to get some help when it comes to the stage that we and many others are at. Someone who we can take our test results to and have them mediate on our behalf.

I have been informed that they Aqis want MORE tests done on 5% of our plants. We have no choice but to go ahead. We have been informed by Tasguard that these tests could cost \$2,500 and Vanessa Brake from Aqis Brisbane has stated that there is no guarantee that they will release the plants even if they do prove to be clear of virus or with a common virus and that we will be asked to destroy the plants or re-export them. I consider we have no choice and that changes definately need to be made in the way that decisions are made and people are treated. We don't have a wage put in our bank every month like public servants we are fighting to earn a living and when it is made impossible as in our case, there is something very wrong with the system.

I am sure that I could prove through tests that some of the plants that have been released to us in the past would have exactly the same symptoms and virus's that are in some of the plants in quarantine that they will not release.

I cannot help but wonder how long it will be before someone is financially destroyed by decisions that are made that are later proven to be incorrect. I think then we may see cases end up in court.

I hope some good comes out of this Review.

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