



## Submission for Quarantine and Biosecurity Review from Council of Heads of Australasian Herbaria

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The Council Heads of Australasian Herbaria (CHAHA). CHAH is the peak body representing the Australasian Herbarium community. This includes all major Australian state and territory herbaria including:

- **Plant Biodiversity Centre** (State Herbarium of South Australia), Adelaide (AD)
- **Queensland Herbarium**, Brisbane (BRI)
- **Australian National Herbarium**, Canberra (CANB)
- **Tasmanian Herbarium**, Hobart (HO)
- **National Herbarium of Victoria**, Melbourne (MEL)
- **National Herbarium of New South Wales**, Sydney (NSW)
- **Northern Territory Herbarium**, Darwin (DNA)
- **Western Australian Herbarium**, Perth (PERTH)

together with a Council Member representing the constituent collections of the **National Collection of Fungi** (including BRIP, DAR and VPRI) and a representative of the **Australian University Herbaria**.

CHAHA co-ordinates activities within the Herbarium community that help Australia deliver sound outcomes for biodiversity. These activities include documenting Australian plant and fungal diversity and making it publicly available (e.g. Australian Virtual Herbarium), providing identifications for new and emerging weeds, and being the authoritative body for plant and fungal names (both native and introduced) within Australia. The core business activities of all herbaria are dependent on strong, long-standing programs for exchange and loan of material, both nationally and internationally. The exchange of material with international herbaria is fundamental; the identification and description of new species relies on sound comparisons with related taxa that may occur in other parts of the world. Herbaria have been managing the risks associated with exchanging material for over 160 years, and have strong internal processes and procedures to protect these irreplaceable collections and mitigate risks associated with damage by pests

*How do Herbaria contribute to achieving protection of Australia's bioresources?*

Australia's major Herbaria are the authoritative source of expertise on Australia's floral biodiversity. Herbaria maintain reference collections of dried and preserved specimens of plant species from around the world. Herbarium specimens are essential in the identification of new and emerging weeds. Herbaria are also pivotal in identifying and helping to manage risks associated with potential weeds. In order to be able to accurately identify exotic species, Australian herbaria rely on the loan and exchange of specimens with international herbaria. Accurate identification is critical for making an assessment on the risks associated with any new introductions. A controlled flow of material into and out of the country is a pre-requisite for achieving these outcomes.



Australia's quarantine and biosecurity systems are appropriate to maintain its ALOP (very low risk, but not zero) when it comes to the import of herbarium specimens for loan or exchange. Current rules regarding the importation of herbarium specimens appropriately reflect their low level of risk to Australia's human and animal health, to agriculture, forestry, fisheries and the environment. However, there are a number of issues that have been identified by CHAH.

**Current issues that negatively impact on the Herbaria's ability to provide Australia with sound biodiversity information.**

Herbaria strongly support the objectives of Australia's quarantine and biosecurity policies and comply with Australian quarantine regulations associated with the import of herbarium specimens for loan or exchange. However, CHAH is concerned by inconsistencies in the handling and processing of herbarium material by AQIS. In some cases, this has resulted in irreparable damage to, and even destruction of valuable specimens. This led to key countries terminating all exchange and loans with Australian herbaria, thereby severely restricting our ability to protect Australia's biodiversity. The Australian herbarium community has worked closely with AQIS over the past two years to resolve these matters, but a number of issues remain.

**1. Import Permits**

Some of the inconsistencies in the handling of herbarium material can be traced to inconsistencies in the import permits issued to major Australian state and territory herbaria.

For example, there is currently a lack of clarity and consistency with defining higher risk herbarium specimens. Under current herbarium import permits, material of the same plant species must be treated differently depending on whether it has been received as a loan from another institution, or as a donation to be retained by the Australian institution. CHAH is working directly with AQIS Plant Programs to resolve these matters.

Recommendation 1. That AQIS adopts a uniform and consistent Import Permit for all Herbaria.

**2. Should herbaria be required to be a Quarantine Approved Premises (QAP)?**

CHAH accepts that QAP registration is important in managing risks which have the potential to threaten animal, plant or human health. However, given the nature of quarantined herbarium material, the internal quarantine procedures and protocols, and the tightly controlled access to individual herbarium premises CHAH believes that the QAP requirements for herbaria should be reviewed and reduced.

**Recommendation 2. That Biosecurity Australia (BA) and AQIS review Quarantine Approved Premises requirements for herbaria. CHAH is proposing to prepare a detailed submission.**

**3. Communication with stakeholders**

Communication between herbaria and AQIS is impeded by the lack of integration between the different areas (Plant Programs, QAP, etc.). Seeking information is often difficult, time consuming and ineffective; these difficulties are amplified by the frequent rotation of staff within AQIS.

Over the last 12 months, the Australian herbarium community has worked closely with individual AQIS employees and teams to improve understanding of the needs of herbaria and quarantine requirements. CHAH recently initiated a workshop where staff from Plant Programs (Canberra) and Australian state and territory herbaria were able to discuss quarantine and biosecurity specifically in relation to the importation of herbarium specimens.

AQIS and BA do not have adequate systems for communicating relevant changes to policies and procedure to stakeholders. Updates and alerts received from AQIS and BA are frequently irrelevant to herbaria, and appear to be relevant to a small group of stakeholders. Conversely, important changes to the requirements for the importation of herbarium specimens have occurred with inadequate advice to stakeholders.

There appears to be a lack of integration between AQIS and BA. This has led to difficulties in obtaining clarity on specific import requirements.

**Recommendation 3. That the organisational structures and communication systems between AQIS and BA be reviewed and that AQIS and BA improve communication mechanisms with stakeholders.**

***4. Developing a working relationship with AQIS officers in each state and territory.***

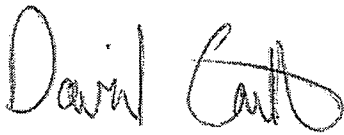
An ongoing issue has been trying to establish effective communication lines between each herbarium and AQIS officers in their state or territory. CHAH accepts that staff changes are inevitable, but it is important that new AQIS officers are inducted and fully informed about herbarium specimens and how they are to be handled. Currently, the Mail Risk Manager/ Program Development Officer at the Melbourne Gateway Facility is working closely with Plant Programs (Canberra) and herbarium staff to develop and implement a consistent and streamlined approach to the handling of herbarium specimens. A standardized procedure for the handling of herbarium specimens by AQIS Mail program manages risk, ensures traceability, allows for consistent interpretation of import rules and reinforces the importance of handling herbarium specimen with care.

Each state and territory herbarium is also being encouraged to further develop their relationship with AQIS officers by inviting them to tour their herbarium to see quarantine procedures that are in place within each herbarium. These visits provide an opportunity to inform AQIS officers of the work conducted in the herbarium and gain a better understanding of the business that we are involved in. It also provides an opportunity to view the diversity of specimens held within each herbarium.

**Recommendation 4. That AQIS incorporate a compulsory training module on Herbarium material for all new AQIS officers to improve understanding within the AQIS community of the standardised procedures for handling herbarium specimens and the importance of this material.**

## Summary

Core business of Australia's major state and territory herbaria is closely aligned with AQIS and BA's mandate to protect Australia's pest and disease status. However, some aspects of current AQIS requirements impede the ability of herbaria to effectively provide the services necessary to identifying and managing risk associated with protecting Australian biodiversity. CHAH is already working closely with AQIS (e.g. [redacted] (Plant Programs) and [redacted] (Melbourne Gateway Facility)) on a range of specific issues. CHAH seeks to develop a consistent and uniform approach to herbarium material that provides for a sound mechanism that will allow loan and exchange programs to operate without the risk of damage or destruction to the specimens. For this to be effective there needs to be improved communication and greater consistency within AQIS, and between AQIS and BA, and more effective communication between AQIS, BA and stakeholders.



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