

In such a complex issue as Quarantine, there is a basic error in the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry which shows up an inherent weakness in the approach to quarantine. It is the statement that our quarantine must have "an Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP) of very low but not zero risk". Quarantine is also seen as a 'trade' issue.

On the latter point, the World Trade Organisation declares that quarantine is NOT a trade issue. Countries have the freedom to apply their own quarantine regime at whatever level they choose.

Regarding ALOP, there is always some minimal risk from tourists bringing in suspect objects. However, Australia's airport and harbour customs, as part of our national quarantine service, deal effectively with any minor disease threat via scanning equipment and sniffer dogs, though perhaps not 100% successful.

In contrast, how can serious risk from gigantic amounts of fruit or unprocessed meat from countries with exotic diseases be put on the same scale as a minimal disease threat from a tourist? Any comparison is unrealistic and misleading in terms of ALOP.

The assertion that comprehensive science is required for quarantine policy is undermined by the reality that science is often not exact. In light of inconclusive or opposing evidence, or where a potential risk is unable to be effectively assessed, Australia can justly and appropriately have recourse to the "precautionary principle". This would sensibly override the flawed policy of ALOP and its proposed application.

The logical conclusion is that while Australia may not always be able to maintain zero quarantine risk with tourists, it has the power to establish zero disease risk from international trade by a total blockage of suspect imports.

Yours sincerely, Peter Phillips