

Quarantine and Biosecurity Review Secretariat  
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
GPO Box 858  
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Australia

## **Quarantine and Biosecurity Review 2008**

### **Summary**

NATA's public and national interest obligations to provide a reliable testing and measurement infrastructure extend to the accreditation of laboratories undertaking a range of tests in the biological, chemical and veterinary pathology fields.

As a key stakeholder in NATA's laboratory accreditation activities, NATA regards a cooperative and effective level of communication with AQIS and Biosecurity Australia as being essential to facilitating relevant and responsive testing resources to meet both domestic emergency situations and routine needs associated with international trade. It is essential that NATA's existing communication channels with AQIS and Biosecurity Australia be further developed to meet increasingly demanding and complex requirements.

### **About NATA**

The National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia (NATA) is the national authority for the accreditation of laboratories and is recognised by the Commonwealth through a Memorandum of Understanding. NATA is a not-for-profit organisation operating for the public and national interest.

NATA accreditation provides a means of determining and recognising the competence of laboratories to perform a specified range of testing across a broad range of technical disciplines. This includes veterinary pathology laboratories performing diagnostic and health certification testing on a range of animal species such as those important to international trade.

The NATA accreditation process involves an evaluation of all elements of a laboratory's operations that contribute to the production of accurate and reliable data. It requires an on-site assessment against the accreditation criteria which cover:

- the competency, training, proficiency and supervision of staff;
- the appropriateness, maintenance/calibration and environment of equipment;
- the validity and quality control of the test methods in use;
- the accuracy, completeness and traceability of the records and reports;
- the procedures in place to manage and continuously improve these elements.

Accreditation criteria for veterinary testing and biological laboratories are based upon the international standard ISO/IEC 17025: 2005. This standard is recognised by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) as being essential to the accreditation of veterinary diagnostic laboratories.

Once accredited, laboratories are re-evaluated periodically to ensure their standard of operation is being maintained and new developments in methods and technologies are correctly adopted.

### **Mutual Recognition of Test Results - Overcoming Technical Barriers to Trade**

NATA is a full signatory to the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation's (ILAC) Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) which includes over fifty similar laboratory accreditation bodies. The ILAC MRA facilitates mutual recognition of test results across borders on the basis that laboratories are accredited under equivalent laboratory accreditation systems to international standards.

The ILAC MRA means that Australian exporters have a means of having test results for their products accepted by destination economies. Similarly, importers can have products tested to the relevant standards accepted in Australia by appropriately accredited laboratories off-shore.

### **NATA's Role in Biosecurity and Quarantine**

The technical infrastructure facilitated by NATA is highly relevant to several sections of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, particularly the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and the National Residues Survey.

NATA engages with Biosecurity Australia, the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and Animal Health Australia on relevant topics, particularly through SCAHLS, a subcommittee of the Animal Health Committee. NATA also has a direct relationship with AQIS covering accreditation requirements for export meat testing.

Some specific examples of NATA's laboratory accreditation activity relating to biosecurity and quarantine are as follows.

- Biological Testing
  - testing of imported foods for bacterial, fungal and viral contaminations;
  - accreditation of laboratories testing meat for export.
- Chemical Testing
  - testing of both exported and imported food for a range of contaminants including pesticide residues.
- Veterinary Testing
  - testing of pathogens associated with exotic disease outbreaks;
  - test results used for health certification of live animal exports.

### **Future Development of Biosecurity and Quarantine Relationships**

NATA's existing relationship with both Biosecurity Australia and AQIS are generally cooperative and productive. To ensure that our accreditation programs continue to be relevant to regulators, diagnostic laboratories, stakeholders and the wider community, NATA would, however, welcome a more proactive level of communication with Biosecurity Australia and particularly AQIS. It is important that the accreditation programs continue to develop and evolve in the directions most needed for effective biosecurity and quarantine.

On this basis, NATA would welcome participation by AQIS on the relevant accreditation advisory committee which has responsibility for recommending technical accreditation criteria – including requirements for laboratory staff, test methods, media, QC and reporting – proficiency testing requirements and accreditation recommendations.

NATA would also be happy to furnish the Review Panel with any additional information which may be required.

NATA  
30 April 2008