

## SUBMISSION TO QUARANTINE & BIOSECURITY REVIEW INQUIRY

This submission deals with the consequences arising from AQIS' 2007 changes to the permitted genera and species of bromeliads that can be imported into Australia. An alternative approach is recommended.

### 1. Background

There are over 3,000 species, sub-species and varieties in the family *Bromeliaceae* (bromeliads), and over 10,000 hybrids. Importation of these plants has been occurring for over 100 years, with relatively large numbers imported in the 1970's to 1990's.

**It is important to note that none of these bromeliads has ever become a weed species in Australia.**

Importation occurs at two levels:

- Importation of a large number of plants of a small number of species or hybrids, through a few commercial nurseries.
- Importation of a small number of plants (typically less than 10) of a large number of species and hybrids, by collectors. Some of these plants subsequently become widely grown in Australia as offsets are distributed through swapping and sale amongst bromeliad hobbyists and keen gardeners.

This submission focuses on the collector "level" of importation. It is based on my personal experience (I have undertaken several importations from Germany and the United States of America over the last five years), as well as the experiences of other importers.

There are several challenges associated with obtaining bromeliads from overseas hobbyists and nurseries. They are:

- Typically, they will only have a few plants for sale of a given species or hybrid. Plant availability frequently changes and, because of the slow propagation rate of bromeliads, a given plant can often become unavailable for several years. So, it is often a case of "buy it now or miss out".
- If you travel overseas to buy plants, it is rare for you to know precisely what will be available before you depart.
- Many bromeliad species have not been botanically described or, in the case of hybrids, formally registered. For example many *Tillandsia* (a bromeliad genus) species are labelled as:  
'*Tillandsia sp*' collection location e.g. '*Pinat del Rio*'.  
Further, not only are many hybrids unregistered, but their parentage is unknown.

The 2007 AQIS changes require that a 6 page questionnaire be completed for each species/hybrid that is not on the improved importation list. (The questionnaire is designed to ensure that species/hybrids that could become weeds in Australia cannot be imported). Many months can take place before an assessment is made and the species/hybrid is placed on the list of bromeliads that can be imported. (Currently, there are less than 10% of the described/registered bromeliad species on that list).

So the net effect of the 2007 AQIS changes, when combined with the realities of overseas' bromeliad sourcing (as described above), has been to severely curtail the importation of bromeliads by collectors.

This outcome is considered unreasonable when one considers the fact that no bromeliad species or hybrid has ever become a weed species in Australia.

## **2. Recommended Approach**

The approach used prior to the 2007 AQIS changes was workable and practical. It combined a "blanket approval approach" for species and hybrids from certain bromeliad genera with a case-by-case approval of species/hybrids from other genera. The vast majority of importations came in under the "blanket approval" genera. If necessary because of international conventions, this "genera level" approach could be modified to contain a listing of all known species for the genera which previously had "blanket approval". If this modification was made, it would be important to include a "species (nova)" listing for each genus to allow for undescribed species. A similar approach would be needed for hybrids.

It is recommended that AQIS adopt this approach.

This approach would also reduce the burden on AQIS of assessing many hundreds of questionnaires as well as the burden on individuals who have to complete them. It would enable AQIS, and its assessors, to focus on those plant species/hybrids that have some possibility of becoming weeds in Australia, unlike bromeliads.

## **3. Consultation**

The 2007 AQIS changes were introduced without consultation with bromeliad importers or bromeliad societies. All or most of these people and organisations would have been happy to discuss the issues with AQIS. This lack of consultation is unfortunate, as I have found AQIS field staff to be polite and helpful. However, this change was at a policy, rather than operational, level.

I would be happy to discuss my proposals with staff from the review or AQIS. My contact details are: phone (work) 07 3224 2898, email: bob.reilly@nrw.qld.gov.au.

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