

The Chairman
Quarantine and Biosecurity Review Panel
Canberra
Dear Sir / Madam,

133 Darling Road,
East Malvern 3145
Ph. (03) 9571 3871

Outstanding breaches of Australia's quarantine biosecurity regime - equine influenza, foot and mouth disease vine diseases and citrus canker amongst other examples have threatened Australian industries to the extent of millions of dollars. These breaches, even when dealt with, have left Australia's "pure" image tarnished forever, a matter of incalculable implications

A number of serious situations have gradually emerged which make it essential that your review strengthen our nation's defences against biosecurity incursions.

(1) Because recent breaches have not attracted strong sanctions against those responsible there is no incentive for global or domestic companies and their executives to restrain themselves from risking Australia's quarantine wrath if a possible profit is available. Jailing and heavy fining would redress this attitude.

(2) The link between our trade and quarantine departments has led to very weak demands by our negotiators when trade agreements with other nations have been made. This is despite the fact that Australia has the 'precautionary principle' available to it where potential risk is envisaged.

(3) Australia, an island, is well placed to aim at zero risk. a lack of resources and personnel has enabled those who wish to test the integrity of our systems to breach our regulations. This has led to unnecessary, insipid 'managed risk policies'- a poor substitute for an attainable zero risk policy.

(4) Other nations such as New Zealand will always attempt to shame us into accepting their food products despite the fruit diseases that have devastated their industries. We would surrender our right to defend our food industries if we acceded to their demands.

(5) Australian farmers quite efficiently produce almost every food requirement of the people of this nation. We should use every means to support their unsubsidised industries. If food becomes expensive it is never the fault of the farmers. The large super markets are responsible for food price hikes. These same super markets use imported foods to squeeze our farmers.

(6) Tests of Australian foods are more stringent than those obtaining for overseas products. Our slackness in testing overseas products from places such as China will eventually lead to outbreaks of disease.

*Australia should adopt a zero risk policy.

*This policy should be backed by the necessary resources to enable it to be effectively implemented.

*Australia's food standards should be immediately divorced from those of other countries (especially those of New Zealand)

*Trade and quarantine departments should be immediately separated as their aims are incompatible.

*All present bilateral trade agreements should be immediately reviewed and

*Australia should take advantage of the WTO statement that quarantine is not

a trade issue. It should therefore insist on its right to have the most stringent quarantine regime possible reinserted into the agreement. Our zero risk policy and the new government attitude would give us ample reason for such a review.

*Any new trade agreement with countries such as China where low health standards prevail (e.g. failure to report instances of bird flu), should be prefixed by our insistence that every piece of food imported is to be checked (no matter what the costs to the importer)

*When sophisticated science is required to ensure the integrity of our quarantine processes We should always err on the side of caution.

*As blame for the multi million dollar equine flue outbreak has now been placed with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, it is timely for the review committee to demand the immediate removal of the officials responsible.

*A board should be formed to find those bureaucrats responsible for past mistakes Citrus canker, foot and mouth disease etc and remove those responsible from their present posts.

* Any imports that have disease potential should be immediately removed from allowable lists e. g. salmon.

Yours faithfully

Brian Magree