

Stakeholder comments

Draft review of import conditions of brassicaceous vegetable seeds for sowing

Comments submitted by: Phil Crooker

I'm concerned about the impact of the proposed draft on organic growers. It is impractical or even unlikely that a grower or a seed importer would be able to get a foreign country's NPPO to certify areas free of the fusarium and anthracnose diseases (if such an area exists), nor is there likely to be an 'organic' method of treating for these diseases ready to hand (at least not without research), nor in the short term is it likely that local seed growers could meet the demand.

I agree these diseases need to be prevented from entering Australia – there have been too many quarantine failures over the years – yet a mechanism needs to be found to deal with these threats to brassicaceous plants that doesn't preclude organic production.

As per section 4.4, it may be that some seed producers/exporters can obtain disease-free certification from their NPPO. In absence of this, I suggest there be a mechanism for seed importers to pay AQIS to inspect seed lots on arrival in Australia while ensuring packaging will adequately contain potential pathogens. Should the seed be free of these two pathogens, it be released to the importer, otherwise it be destroyed.

Another possible method would be to have the producer/exporter pay their quarantine or other accredited body to inspect the seed prior to export, subject to an AQIS/Biosecurity arrangement with the country involved. This obviously would be a safer approach provided such an arrangement can be made.

I know these suggestions are vague, I've been out of the field for many years, yet I feel it is unconscionable to just leave organic growers to obtain regulatory certification without any assistance. The likes of Cargill and Monsanto will hardly be inconvenienced by the requirement to treat seed [I sincerely hope AQIS will be diligent in inspection of treated seed lots – it seems optimistic to assume 100% kill of the pathogens in treated seed as is implied in the Draft]. Organic producers will be forced out of production without help from the Department of Agriculture.