



# Evaluation of animal health status of countries, zones and compartments for imports of animals and products of animal origin

Countries seeking to export animals or products of animal origin to Australia may request Australia's recognition of their animal health status in support of these export objectives.

Australia's science and risk-based approach to recognising our trading partners' animal health status, disease-free zones and compartments reflects Australia's commitments and obligations as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) is responsible for evaluating the health status of countries, zones and compartments for disease agents of animal biosecurity concern, both terrestrial and aquatic. These evaluations are conducted with regard to Australia's import policies.

This material has been developed to help Australia's trading partners understand the process by which exporting countries can request an evaluation, and how these evaluations are conducted by the department.

## Initiating an evaluation

The competent authority (CA) of the exporting country must formally request an evaluation by writing to the department's Assistant Secretary of the Animal Biosecurity Branch. The following initial information should be supplied at this time.

- Scope of the evaluation requested (i.e. disease agent(s), country/zone/compartment status)
- Expectations of trade, including the animal or animal product proposed for export to Australia and estimated trade volume and value.

The department will formally acknowledge the request and assess the initial information provided to assign a priority to the evaluation relative to other existing work. A number of factors are considered during prioritisation, including established activities, available resources and existing scheduled evaluations.

WOAH provides official recognition of disease-free status for a number of terrestrial animal diseases, such as foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever and African horse sickness. A full list of these diseases is available on the WOAH website. Any request for Australia to recognise a country or zone as free from any of these diseases must occur after the country or zone has attained official WOAH recognition of disease freedom. Australia will then undertake its own evaluation.

## Information gathering

Once an evaluation is prioritised for commencement, the department may request further information, usually through a questionnaire for the exporting country's CA to complete. The department may also request assurance that the CA has sufficient resources to engage with the department during the evaluation. For evaluations of country-level disease freedom, the department may request information or ask questions about the animal health system, including:

- general information on geography and relevant industries
- animal health services and governance arrangements
- knowledge of relevant animal population demographics, distribution and movements, and underlying traceability systems
- import and export controls
- emergency animal disease response systems, including contingency plans
- infrastructure and resourcing of the CA
- laboratory networks
- national surveillance systems
- history of animal disease outbreak responses and vaccination practices.

In addition to the above information, evaluations of zones will require the exporting country to provide details on the following:

- disease management objectives for defined zones (e.g. enhanced surveillance for early detection, maintenance of disease freedom etc.)
- zone boundary details and history
- measures to ensure the integrity of zone boundaries
- surveillance and tracing in different zones.

Evaluations of compartments will also require the provision of further information on matters such as:

- the scope and history of the compartment
- biosecurity plans for the compartment, including measures to ensure its integrity
- competent authority management, control and/or oversight of the compartment
- compartment-specific surveillance.

To assist the evaluation process, all requested information should be provided in English and presented in an organised format. If the requested information is not provided or further detail is required, the department will request this information through further correspondence. If this information is not provided, there is likely to be a delay in reaching an outcome for the evaluation and could result in the department being unable to recognise the requested health status.

## Verification

The department routinely conducts verification activities to validate the information provided in support of an evaluation and to address identified biosecurity risks.

This may include targeted in-country verification visits or activities conducted as part of a broader CA evaluation to determine if the exporting country can meet Australia's import conditions for a particular animal commodity or commodities.

Alternative verification arrangements such as remote audits may be considered if the department's existing understanding of the CA, together with supporting information, is deemed sufficient to complete an evaluation. Considerations include whether the department:

- has evaluated the exporting country's CA on previous occasions
- has a well-established trade relationship in animal commodities with the country
- has existing knowledge of the country, zone or compartment systems and controls.

## Determination

Based on the information provided by the exporting country and verification activities, the department will make a determination on health status. The outcome is then formally communicated to the CA of the exporting country.

If the evaluation does not result in recognition of the country, zone or compartment's requested health status, the department will outline the reasons for this and follow the principles of procedural fairness in any further engagement with the CA.

If the evaluation results in recognition of the country, zone or compartment's requested health status, the department may undertake verification activities, such as on-shore testing to provide ongoing assurance.

## Change in health status

When an outbreak of a disease of biosecurity concern occurs in a country, zone or compartment previously recognised by the department as free of that disease, the department takes immediate administrative and regulatory actions on imports of relevant animal commodities to ensure Australia's appropriate level of protection can continue to be met.

After the outbreak has been eradicated, the exporting country CA can then request reinstatement of the country, zone or compartment's health status. Any request will need to provide evidence that the disease is no longer present, including that a suitable period has passed with no new cases detected.

The reinstatement process is similar to that for requesting initial recognition as described above, with information gathering focusing on the effectiveness of the eradication and/or control measures taken and maintained.

Verification visits or alternative arrangements may be required as part of a reinstatement process.

If an outbreak is unable to be eradicated but the CA has demonstrated effective control of the disease, a CA may request a new evaluation be undertaken with a revised scope. This may include a request for evaluation of zones or compartments as an alternative to country freedom.

## Details for correspondence

Assistant Secretary

Animal Biosecurity Branch

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Canberra City ACT 2601

Australia

## Further reading

- The WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement)
- WTO Guidelines to further the practical implementation of Article 6 of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
- WOAHP Official disease status
- WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code chapter on zoning and compartmentalisation
- WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code chapter on application of compartmentalisation
- WOAHP Aquatic Animal Health Code Chapter on zoning and compartmentalisation
- WOAHP Aquatic Animal Health Code Chapter on application of compartmentalisation