



An update on Australia's biosecurity system

By MONICA COLLINS, First Assistant Secretary, Biosecurity Operations Division - Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)

Since Tina Hutchison's last biosecurity update in April, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio has undergone some significant change.

In late July, the Honourable Julie Collins MP was sworn in as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry alongside Assistant Minister, Senator Anthony Chisholm. Minister Collins and Assistant Minister Chisholm replaced Senator the Honourable Murray Watt, who had served as our minister since June 2022.

In August 2024, with the promotion of Tina Hutchison to Deputy Secretary, Agricultural Trade and Regulation Group, I was asked to move from my role of First Assistant Secretary, Biosecurity Plant and Science Services Division to lead the Biosecurity Operations Division (BOD).

As the head of BOD, I am fully invested in progressing efforts to meet our regulatory obligations effectively and responsively to the changing environment.

From an operational perspective, the Australian Government's sustainable biosecurity funding has positioned the department to deliver. Our operational context is dynamic. The numerous factors impacting global trade and biosecurity risk – regional conflicts, geopolitical tensions, high energy prices, inflation, climatic events – will all weigh on how and where we respond. Despite this, the World Trade Organisation

forecasts predicted global GDP growth returning to 2.7% in 2025 and the Australian economy has demonstrated ongoing resilience that is supporting trade volumes.

As Australia heads into the peak 2024 trading period from October to December, biosecurity operations are committed to delivering efficient biosecurity regulatory activity that move compliant cargo and conveyances smoothly across our border. The peak trade season also coincides with a peak in biosecurity pests that thrive in our Spring/ Summer seasonal environment (see below) and so it's important that importers are aware of their responsibilities when it comes to biosecurity risk management.

Biosecurity is everyone's responsibility. We all have a role to play in safeguarding our nation's interests. Our partnerships with industry and importers are key to this. This year, industry's willingness to engage and partner with DAFF has delivered real progress on both strategic biosecurity initiatives and our day-to-day business.

Self-Assessed Clearance (SAC) cost recovery charge commences

Month-on-month, year-on-year, we have witnessed escalating pressure on the biosecurity system associated with soaring volumes of low value Self-Assessed Clearance (SAC) cargo driven by consumer demand for online shopping and e-commerce. Our ability to ensure this is a safe and efficient pathway has been strengthened through

the introduction of the new SAC cost recovery arrangement. An important part of this process was our collaboration with the Freight & Trade Alliance (FTA) and other industry stakeholders to design and implement the charge. A 36-cent per declaration fee now applies to businesses lodging short form, long form, or cargo report SAC declarations into the Integrated Cargo System (ICS). The department will continue to work with the estimated 70 liable reporting parties over the next couple of months, noting the first invoices will be issued with payments due in January 2025. More information about this charge can be found on the DAFF website.

Simplified Targeting and Enhanced Processing System (STEPS)

FTA members and industry stakeholders have played a key role in shaping our fit-for-purpose digital initiatives under the STEPS program, with three digital products released in 2024 in support of importers, brokers and other Approved Arrangement holders:

1. The Approved Arrangement Management Product (AAMP) now allows around 4,417 staff across all 3,600 approved arrangements to view and update their Approved Arrangement details online. AAMP is a time and money saver for both industry and government.
2. External Verification eCertificates (EVE) or digital sanitary and phytosanitary certificates went live via the Biosecurity Portal for 1,150 accredited brokers assessing

commodities under an approved arrangement. Digital certificates from new countries will be available through EVE as soon as they come online.

3. A limited release of the Biosecurity Cargo Status Tracker is giving brokers and importers reliable visibility of cargo being managed by DAFF. Full roll out to accredited brokers will be completed later in 2024. Updates to the report continue with industry at the forefront of design.

These products – along with others proposed for delivery this financial year, aim to make biosecurity import processes simpler and easier to comply with. We aim to modernise and digitise our services – and increase data sharing in a way that makes sense to both industry and government while maintaining effective biosecurity risk management. There will be ongoing engagement with industry.

2024-25 brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB) season – 1 September 2024 to 30 April 2025

We have had high rates of industry participation and compliance. Most FTA members and industry stakeholders are now familiar with BMSB seasonal measures, which only apply to targeted goods manufactured in or shipped from

target risk countries and to vessels that berth, load, or tranship from target risk countries during the season.

In the spirit of keeping biosecurity risk offshore, on 1 July 2024, AusTreat successfully replaced the Offshore BMSB Treatment Providers Scheme. AusTreat increases the department's coverage and flexibility in responding to biosecurity risk, and our assurance of offshore treatments, by setting the conditions to regulate pre-border biosecurity treatment providers. Increased assurance offshore means we can reduce intervention at the border, streamlining the border clearance process and facilitating trade. It also simplifies requirements for industry, with one set of conditions and one place to find information.

To date, we have received 218 applications from treatment providers seeking registration under AusTreat.

Strengthening partnerships with industry

As brokers and industry are aware, submitting compliant documentation and accurate requests for biosecurity services decreases intervention and moves goods across the border faster. We strongly encourage industry and brokers to use

the online help and guidance material already available. However, we have heard from industry about potential pain points or areas for further collaboration on new ways of doing business. We will be advancing a number of these over current months.

Our relationships with industry are more important than ever as we navigate the rapidly changing biosecurity and trade landscape. We are all responsible for a strong biosecurity system. Industry's willingness to engage on issues and the biosecurity system reforms and initiatives has been impressive, and we look forward to continuing these partnerships to safeguard the Australian economy, environment and way of life.



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