Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

The import risk review for natural casings - issues paper: Webinar transcript

[Duration: 28 minutes and 34 seconds]

12 February 2025

Introduction

This is the transcript of a webinar presented by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, about the *Import risk review for natural (sausage) casings: issues paper*. The 43 participants included government and members of industry organisations.

Transcript

[Webinar begins]

Screen 1 [Video description: Webinar text over a green background with two pictures. The first image is of sausages on a plate and the second image is of a person's hand, making sausages.]

Brian Clarke:
Good afternoon, everybody, we will just give everyone a couple of minutes and then we'll start today's webinar and discussion.

We'll just wait one or two minutes and then get started.

All right. People seem to have stopped trickling in, so we'll just get started. Good afternoon, everybody, my name is Brian Clark and on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry I'd like to welcome you.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today and myself and the team here in Canberra (we acknowledge) the Ngunnawal people and I extend that recognition to the traditional custodians of all the lands that you join us from across Australia. I acknowledge and respect the continuing culture and connection to land, sea and community and pay my respects to elders both past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

Thank you everybody for coming to the webinar today. With me today I have Sam Beckett from Animal Biosecurity in the Department of Agriculture.

The purpose of the webinar today is to discuss the department's issues paper for natural sausage casings and to address any questions that you may have.

Questions today can be asked at any time during the presentation, if you press the Q&A box at the top, your option to ask questions will appear down the side or down the bottom of your

screen. If you do have any questions, please pop them in that chat at any time and today we'll do the best we can to answer any questions.

Given the nature of the issues paper that we've presented today, we will do our best to answer any questions you pose however if there are any specific scientific or technical questions, we might take those on notice and respond after the webinar.

After the webinar there will be both a transcript and a set of questions and answers available, placed on the website.

Just before we start, I'd really like to thank a really large team that's been involved in this work over many years. Sam who's with me today, Lionel, Louise, Helen, Jonathan Early, Jonathan Taylor; within the department who have done a lot of work on this issue over quite a long time, to get this piece of work to the point we're having this conversation today. And today really is the start of a conversation we are going to be having with you all regarding the import risk assessment of natural sausage casings.

Today we'll talk through the issues paper we have prepared, and Sam will give a brief presentation to start the conversation.

This is the first step of the import risk assessment process. And over the course of the review there will be many more opportunities for you to engage with the department. Particularly if any of our stakeholders feel that there are any gaps or conclusions we've drawn on the basis of evidence that we've set out, and whether or not they're reasonable or unreasonable. And this really is an ongoing opportunity for you all to interact with us.

So, a really brief agenda for today, as I mentioned, Sam will give a brief presentation, really just outlining the import risk analysis process and the issues paper so far. And then I will do my best to answer some of the questions that we've received in advance and then we'll move (to) any questions that we receive from yourselves today.

What I'll do now is I'll hand over to Sam, and again please place any questions you may have into the chat as we go through the webinar.

Sam Beckett:
OK thank you Brian, I should be on screen now. This won't take very long; I've just got a small handful of slides to go through to help position the issues paper and I guess help us to frame some of the questions you may have about it.

We'll talk about the import risk analysis process, we'll talk about the background to the review, WOAH – the world organisation for animal health – recommendations, research provided by industry, the assessment of proposed conditions for key diseases and next steps for the review and then I'll bounce back to Brian to answer any questions.

OK, I think most of you will be familiar with the 8 steps that we generally follow in undertaking biosecurity import risk analysis – BIRA, or an unregulated import risk review. We start the process, and there's a range of triggers that can start off the IRA or BIRA and we'll talk about that in the next slide. We then assess the biosecurity risk, we release the draft report, we consult with the public, we finalise the risk analysis, we publish the final report, we develop import conditions, then we publish import conditions on BICON.

We're currently at the assessed biosecurity risks step in this process at the moment. We don't typically release an issues paper at this step. We're doing so now, it's not unprecedented but it's not common. We're doing so now because, as Brian has pointed out earlier, we have some issues around the science that we feel would like to air with our stakeholders separately to the broader considerations that will be in the risk assessment itself.

These are fairly specific matters we wanted to put in front of people ahead of that risk assessment process. This is where we're up to at the moment.

So why have we started the review for our conditions for natural casings? Well, there's really two broad groups of reasons. Back in 2015, the Inspector General for Biosecurity recommended that the department review its import conditions for casings. This was both on an operational and policy level, but also to consider new scientific information. That's pretty much verbatim one of, I think there were four, recommendations, in the IGB review. The others are much more operational. We've taken that on board, we've had a good look at the science and that's going to be a big part of what we do in this process.

The second key reason was that industry came to us, first in 2013 and then subsequently in 2017, with alternative conditions for our consideration in respect of the importation of natural casings. These were treatment with salt or phosphate supplemented salt for at least 30 days at a temperature of 20°C, in a nutshell.

Noting that the existing conditions that we have for this commodity are basically country freedom of diseases for each of the relevant livestock species, and noting the casings must only be released from biosecurity control after at least 30 days from the date of slaughter.

The reason we're receptive to this proposal is that we recognise in the department that the sausage casings industry is becoming increasingly globalised, and I guess the processing for key steps in the in the production of casings is moving to countries like China, to Egypt, to Turkey, to Morocco. All of these countries are not on our free list for importation of natural casings, so our country-freedom-based import protocol is problematic from that standpoint.

I think the other thing we recognise is that as an industry becomes more integrated globally, there's an increasing emphasis on the need for provable provenance. And again, this is an issue that's quite difficult in the context of natural casings.

We're interested to look at this proposed change, this treatment with salt or phosphate salt for 30 days at 20°C. We want to have a good look at that and see how efficacious we believe that will be in respect to the key diseases we're interested in.

The other thing that we need to point out at this early stage is that it's not just Australia that has gone down this route. We know that the World Organisation for Animal Health, so, WOAH, in its Terrestrial Animal Health Code, has moved over to recommendations that are very similar to those that have been put forward here. (The) recommendation from the code here, we've got treating for at least 30 days either with dry salt, or with saturated brine with phosphate supplemented dry salt containing 86.5 percent sodium chloride, 10.7 percent disodium phosphate and 2.8 percent trisodium phosphate.

For African swine fever, the recommendation is 12°C or above, the classical swine fever is 20°C or above, for foot and mouth disease it's 12°C above and peste-des-petits ruminants it's 20°C or above. So very, very similar conditions for those that have been put forward to us.

Research provided by industry included a body of research commissioned by the global sausage casings industry. This focused on the inactivation of the key WOAH listed diseases. It evaluated the security of the treatment protocol. We don't know, we suspect that the same body of research probably underpinned WOAH's redevelopment of its own recommended conditions as those that were put to us. We recognise that. We've reviewed the research independently; we focused only on the inactivation of the key diseases. We have not considered other elements of biosecurity risk. That's very important at this point as today's discussion, which is about the issues paper, is focused solely on the inactivation of those key diseases, it's not focused on biosecurity risk which has broader considerations.

Our findings in summary, and you can go to the issues paper to see a little bit more detail about these. We have significant, but not complete inactivation at or above 20°C with salting or phosphate supplemented salt for African swine fever virus, Classical swine fever virus and FMD virus - for those three, we've got that.

We then see that we've got swine vesicular disease, it's resistant to sodium chloride at any temperature, although inactivated by phosphate supplemented salt at 20°C. There's limited inactivation of all viruses above 25°C.

We're unable to identify applicable data for peste-des-petits ruminants virus, although we've had an interesting question on that topic and Brian might address that when we come through to the question section.

The next steps from here: the scientific assessment will be carried through to the risk review. This is when we look at the entry and exposure pathway. Again, what we've done so far is specifically about the science. We haven't looked at that in respect of the entry and exposure pathways. We then look at opportunities for establishment and spread, also very important. We look at the consequences of entry, exposures, establish and spread. We look at unrestricted risk and when necessary, we look at risk mitigation – and that is the industry proposal.

Those are the next steps from here.
Questions? I'm going to bounce back if the IT works, to Brian for the questions and answers.

Brian Clarke:
Thanks very much Sam for that initial discussion. Basically, the process from here is for us to work through a couple of questions that we've had pre-submitted. I'd also at this time, like to really encourage you, if there are any further questions you have, either from the issues paper, or anything we've talked about today, or for anything I talk about in any of the answers; to put those into the chat.

The first question we've received is - well, I guess this question really summarises a few different queries we receive: *'Will import conditions be changing, will new countries be added to the approved lists of countries?'.* At this stage, as Sam has really discussed earlier on, we are in our first stage, or in the in the early stages of import risk assessment at this time. As we start moving through the process, as we move towards risk mitigation, it's at that point that we will start determining what appropriate import conditions may be.

The next question we received prior to coming today is around swine vesicular disease: *'Should consideration be given to removing SVD from this review?'.* That again goes into our risk assessment process. One of the primary steps in our risk assessment process is hazard identification. At the hazard identification stage of risk assessment, we do an assessment not just of the diseases that we've discussed today, but of all hazards which may be present or

affecting our import risk for our natural sausage casings. And at that point, we will consider all diseases as to whether further assessment is required. And then at that point we will further consider swine vesicular disease.

In a similar vein, regarding our conclusions to classical swine fever. Classical swine fever is resistant to many treatments, and so the further question has been: *'Could a 30 day treatment with salt temperatures above 20°C be considered within the review?'* That is again the sort of information that we will be considering during the review. This really is a very early stage and our purpose for going out for the issues paper was really to establish that, as the question indicates, that our current understanding of the state of the science around salting and inactivation is complete and is accurate.

Those are the sorts of considerations that we will be discussing as we continue to move through the full risk review process, and as I mentioned, there will be lots of ongoing options and ongoing opportunities for you all to engage further with us.

Again, this is a very similar question to the previous one relating to foot and mouth disease: *'Could the conclusion of FMDv inactivation include the information that FMDv was not detectable at 30 days post-treatment when stored and salted at higher temperatures (room temperature, 20°C and above)?'* And in principle my answer kind of remains the same, in that we are at this point, establishing our understanding of the science around inactivation and many of these questions will be those we consider in significant amounts of detail, moving forward into the risk assessment.

And again, around peste-des-petits ruminants: *'Could the review acknowledge this fact, and ensure that it is reflected in the eventual pathways analysis?'* Again, at this stage what we're looking for really is to make sure that we understand the current status of the science around inactivation. Risk scenarios and pathways or for exposure pathways are again a fundamental component of the next stage of our risk review. As part of our review, we will obviously consider both entry and exposure of peste-des-petits ruminants through sausage casings. And then we can go forward from there.

At this stage I'd really like to invite you, if there are any further questions, to place any of those in the chat.

At this stage I don't have any. So, what I'll do is just give people a minute and then go forward at that point.

Again, just probably to reiterate, this really is step one of our process.

I'm starting to see a question in chat: *'Will we see more streamlined input permit conditions for casings from approved countries. Ovine casings and Porcine casings are covered under two different BICON cases for different import conditions.'* As I discussed earlier on, those are the types of conditions which we will be working through as we reach towards the end of the import risk assessment process. At the moment we are working through and you will have opportunities to comment directly on the import permit conditions as we move through the process.

The next question is: *'How long does the process usually take'*. Our processes are very dependent on the review of the science but also from yourselves and the types of comments and impacts from various stakeholders that we receive. In general terms a BIRA or a biosecurity

regulated risk assessment takes around 30 months. An unregulated risk assessment can take more or less time than that process. We will do our best to keep you engaged with all of the various steps and how long we expect each step to take. And I would encourage everybody to register directly as stakeholders on the website and that will make sure you receive up to date information.

As well we've been asked again '*Globally as far as Australian standards is 30 days in salt is the minimum period for sale of casings, shouldn't that be the minimum time for inactivation review'*. And again, those are the types of risk management measures and standards that we consider as we move forward. These are the types of further considerations around are there specific requirements that we would need to regulate, and how we would regulate those as we move through the review process.

Anonymous has asked *'Is the consideration universal across species or might it be that decisions are made at a species level.'* We undertake biosecurity risk assessments at a disease level, so in this instance we are looking specifically at hazards. Where there are, in this instance hazards that are universal across species such as foot and mouth disease which effects all of the species in question, obviously our consideration for that disease will be universal across the species used to produce sausage casings. In the case of, for example, peste-des-petits ruminants which really does only affect sheep and goats specifically, as a primary hazard, we will consider that as a component of the risk assessment. And that will be detailed as we go through the risk assessment process. So yes, we do take the specific hazards into consideration, at a hazard by hazard level perhaps, as well, at a species by species level.

'Are we considering doing a review of the science or doing tests in relation to salt in 20°C'. The department at this stage has done a review of the current existing science. The next step, which is what we've published at this point. Our next step is to work through the review process and again to determine where our next steps are. The department does reasonably, extensively work with industry to conduct scientific reviews where we consider it necessary to gain further information and where that information might not be currently available, where we can. Most recently, the dairy review specifically considered science performed by the CSIRO in lumpy skin disease. We are always willing to consider. And as mentioned by Sam in his initial introduction around the Inspector General of biosecurity's instructions to us, our role is to be considering those factors. At this stage we do not have any specific plans to conduct laboratory field work in this space.

Whilst people are coming up with any more questions I might just get Sam to jump to the next slide.

I will give everyone a few minutes. I really would encourage people to be placing comments ideally through the have your say process that the department runs. Following this presentation we have extended the consultation period to the 14th of March. Sorry, that says 2023 it's clearly, 2025. The comment period is going to be open for this issues paper for another month, and the transcript will soon be available on the natural sausage casings website, which is the link given below.

I haven't seen any other questions come in. Our next steps will be to put out specific responses to questions, including all those we've covered today. If you do have other questions you would like us to cover outside of that and publishing the question and answer document we are more than happy to do so, you can get in touch with us through the have you say website.

On that note what I might do is thank everybody for your attendance and I really do encourage you to stay in touch with us as we move through this process over the next period. Please do register as a stakeholder both in that have your say page and at the natural sausage casings website. That will be the main venue by which we move through.

All right, we have one more question. *'With hazards, do we take into consideration the amount of residual virus remaining in casings that would be needed for a virus to spread'.* Yes, basically this question is asking do we consider viral load that would be present following a specific treatment. In this case it would be the salting treatment that we've proposed. And the answer is that yes we do. That is a component of both our entry and exposure components of our risk assessment. What we are looking to do for all hazards including the ones we've talked about today is understand all ways - what both the likelihood of the hazard occurring is and the consequence as well. Clearly, one factor is viral load however it's not the only factor and certainly the consequence of the disease, the stability of the virus and the specific infectious load that is required, or effective dose that's required are all individual components that we take into consideration as we go through risk assessment of any hazard. The answer is yes, we do. As we do with all of our types of reviews.

I'll pause probably for another 30 seconds or so and then we'll go from there, just to see if anybody else has any further questions at this point.

Alright, I'll again, just thank everybody for attending and look forward to continuing our engagement with yourselves as we move through the risk assessment process.

I hope everyone has a good afternoon and we'll be in touch. Thank you.

[Video ends]

[End of transcript]

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.