# Seedy sales – the costly risk of buying plants & seeds online

Program overview transcript

(Duration 1 hour 19mins 10secs)

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## Introduction

This is the transcript of a webinar, presented by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. This webinar explores bee biosecurity in Australia, why it is important, and what is being done to protect our bees from exotic pests and diseases.

## Transcript

[Webinar begins]

Steve Peios:

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to the Australian Biosecurity Series Webinar, Seedy Sales - the Costly Risk of Buying Plants and Seeds Online, hosted by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. My name is Steve Peios and I will be facilitating today's forum. A big thank you to everyone for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us today. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. I extend that recognition to the traditional custodians of all other lands on which our staff are gathered today, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples attending.

Today's webinar will focus on what you need to know about the risks of buying or importing noncompliant plants and seeds online, and what wider impacts this could have on our horticultural industries, as well as what it could cost you individually. We'll also learn what to look for when wanting to purchase seeds and plants online from a reputable source, and we will find out what the consequences might be for purchasing overseas plants and seeds from noncomplying operators.

Now to introduce our speakers for today. In this webinar you'll hear from four speakers who have extensive experience on the types of exotic pests and diseases that can enter Australia via imported noncompliant plants and seeds. Shortly we'll hear from Dr. Gabrielle Vivian-Smith, the very popular Chief Plant Protection Officer of Australia. Gabrielle will provide an overview of how government works to combat and mitigate the biosecurity risks posed by a variety of exotic plants and diseases, and how those risks are increasing as the volume of mail, cargo, and passengers to Australia also increases.

Following Gabrielle, we'll hear from Nick Medway, who is Director of Regulatory Enforcement, Biosecurity and Compliance with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Nick's team investigates cases of noncompliance detected at our borders, including online buyers who may mistakenly purchase illegal product, through to larger scale criminal activity and deliberate attempts to import noncompliant, high-risk goods. Nick's team works closely with the state government jurisdictions, the Federal Police, and Home Affairs to prosecute offenders.

Nick will be followed by Sam McKeon, a Senior Technical Officer with DAFF's Biosecurity Assurance Program. Sam will talk to you about how to differentiate between a noncomplying seed or plant trader, and a reputable online trader. And lastly, we'll hear from Rihannon Evans from Queensland's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Rihannon led the state response team in 2015 when Panama Disease Tropical Race 4, or TR4, was detected on a banana farm in far North Queensland. So, it's a fantastic line-up of speakers for us today.

Following the presentations, we will be hosting a question and answer session where you can put your questions to the panel. We also have a special guest joining us today, Adrian McIntosh. He will be part of the panellists providing answers to your questions. Adrian works at the frontline of our mail pathway, and he can share insights on what kinds of noncomplying seed and plant materials have been purchased online. To kick things off, we have a short video about the impacts of Xylella fastidiosa, and how easily it can reach our rural areas. Xylella is a plant disease that tops the list of Australia's national priority plant pests because of the devastation it causes in many different species of plants, including many of the crops that we rely on for food. In 2013, Xylella was detected in an olive grove in Southern Italy. It killed hundreds of olive trees; some were more than 1,000 years old. There is no cure for plants infected with Xylella. Let's have a look now at our video showing the devastation that this can cause.

[Video begins]

Voice-over: Xylella fastidiosa, you may not have heard of it, but it's one of the world's most destructive plant bacterial diseases. Australia is free of it right now, but it could change our whole way of life if it makes its way here. We need everyone's help to keep us safe from this disease. The most likely way that Xylella could make it to Australia is through people importing infected plant material. Xylella is Australia's number one national priority plant pest. This will have a devastating impact across many plants in our food supply, including wine grapes, olives, fruit and nut trees. There is no cure for Xylella, and the damage is irreversible.

Our everyday life, what we eat, drink, and enjoy, could be affected. More than 550 plant species, including native, commercial, and ornamental plants can be contaminated, and the number is increasing. The disease does not impact human health, but kills plants by damaging their water conducting system, which shows as leaf scorching. Xylella is spread by infected insects, human handling of contaminated plant material, and poor equipment hygiene. Xylella can hibernate for long periods and spreads quickly. Every year, our biosecurity measures prevent Xylella from entering the country. You can do your part by not bringing, sending, or purchasing plants from overseas without following Australia's import requirements. For more information, head to www.agriculture.gov.au/xylella.

[Video ends]

Steve Peios:

So, as we saw there, that's how easily an exotic disease such as Xylella could spread once it enters Australia, and the devastation would be terrible. To keep Australia safe and protect our crops and environment, we need everyone to be biosecurity aware at all times. We'll now hear from our first speaker, Dr. Gabrielle Vivian-Smith. Now unfortunately, Gabrielle is unable to join us in person today, but has pre-recorded her presentation for us. It is magnificent. Please enjoy our presentation from Dr. Gabrielle Vivian-Smith.

Gabrielle Vivian-Smith:

Hello everyone. Today I'm going to talk to you about risky business, how illegal plant and seed imports expose Australia to high-risk plant pests and diseases. So, our biosecurity system protects us against biosecurity threats like plant, animal, and human diseases. It also underpins trade and market access. That is how and where we can sell what we produce. So, Australia's good biosecurity status means our farmers can produce good quality food, but also, they can more easily export what they produce. Our biosecurity system faces multiple threats on multiple fronts, and traditional border and import controls remain critical, but other risk pathways are also growing in importance. Some of the factors that are contributing to this increased pressure are changing climate and environmental conditions, complex interconnected risk pathways, and limitations in the detection and diagnostic capability. We can't detect and diagnose everything right there at the border. There's also an increasing risk of illegal seeds entering on different pathways, and this can be on cargo, in mail, passengers, and also when seeds for consumption aren't used in the way that they're intended.

The challenge is pretty great because each year we have a huge amount of items coming across our border. For example, we have on average 2.5 million shipping containers, 90,000 international aircraft, 19,000 commercial vessels, and 144 million incoming mail items into Australia. So, the number of seed parcels that arrive in our country that fail to meet conditions varies from year to year, but it did really start to increase in the years proceeding and including 2020. In 2020 we had 56,000 seed parcels that... So that represents 73% of all detections through the mail pathway of biosecurity risk items. So, that's a lot. However, we've managed to reduce that in some ways in 2021 and 2022. You can see from this slide that that proportion of detections through the mail pathway that seeds represent has declined to around 34/35%, and the number of seed parcels that fail to meet our import conditions has also dropped back significantly.

Why are we worried about seeds? Well, seeds can introduce weed species. So, some of our worst weed species in the grains industry, for example, can really impact production and profitability. But seeds can also carry insect pests and there's a whole range of different seed-borne diseases, so viruses for example, that come with seeds if they're not imported meeting our import conditions, and they can be really damaging for crops as well as the environment.

So, another reason, one of the reasons why we've seen a bit of a drop-off has been fortuitous. The total volume of mail has not yet returned to the pre-pandemic levels that we were seeing earlier, but we've also imported some new policy and legislative changes to manage the risk of illegal seed imports. So, one of the most important of those has been that we are now able to undertake the immediate destruction of unidentified seeds that arrive by the mail, and that's been occurring since November 2021, and serves as a major disincentive for people to send non-permitted seeds through the mail. We're also working with e-Commerce platforms such as eBay to ensure that seeds don't arrive by mail. We are looking at how we can better incentivise and reach and communicate to gardeners to reduce the rate of noncompliant seeds arriving.

So, on this slide, there are a couple of examples here of some of the interceptions that we've made. You can see here on the left-hand side is some seeds that arrived as a small gift. They've been mislabelled and they are often mislabelled as toys, for example. And you can see here there's a little packet of seeds here and a plastic shovel that goes with it. So, in some cases these arrive because people order them, but often they're just unsolicited as well and they're used as a kind of what we call a brushing campaign to improve e-Commerce sales of particular items and profiles of particular companies, and seeds are potentially a cheap item to send as a free gift. And this is one reason why this has occurred. On the right-hand side, you can see that we've got a shirt here with a silica gel pack, and here we've got people trying to blatantly disguise the fact that they are illegally importing seeds. You can see some seeds in here. They're not silica gel crystals, they're seeds. And that's the sort of thing that we really don't like to see, but we pick those up on the mail pathway.

And I’ll just keep moving. We also really are concerned about planting material, other planting material other than seeds in the mail. And on occasion we do intercept live plants in the mail, which presents a really, really high biosecurity risk, as do seeds. So, the risks are not exactly the same as the seeds. The nature of the pest or pathogen can be different. And in this case we've got some rose stems, so hardwood cuttings, and some bare root rose plants there. And they can contain a number of different pathogens. But in this case, we've highlighted one pathogen that rose is a host of, which is Australia's number one plant pest, which is Xylella fastidiosa.

So, just to give you an example of the volumes of intercepted material that we encounter on an annual basis in terms of plant material coming through the mail. In 2020, we had 1,714 mail articles intercepted that contained live plant material, and of the 3,337 that contained plant products. In 2021, the number of interceptions of live plant material in the mail had risen to almost 3,000. So, it was 2,686, and in 2022 it had dropped back a bit to 1,362. So, you can see that while they do vary from year to year, they are still quite significant numbers and something that we really need to raise awareness of and ensure that people aren't inadvertently or deliberately bringing in live plant material into Australia, because we want to keep plant pests which are really damaging like Xylella fastidiosa, which is wiping out olive groves, wiping out a number of other types of horticultural production in different parts of the world, out of Australia.

So, here are some other key examples of threats, and there's quite a few different pests and diseases that could come in through the mail for Australia, but we're just highlighting a few here. So, I’ve mentioned Xylella fastidiosa, and Xylella fastidiosa is a bacterial disease. It impacts a huge number of different plant hosts, so more than 550 different plant hosts ranging from citrus, grapes, and olives, which I just mentioned. It's a bacterial disease that clogs up the plumbing system of the plant. It's spread through an insect vector. So, it's got a really good mechanism for spreading once it is present in a country, with the vector present, and essentially there's no cure for Xylella fastidiosa. So, things like live plant material present a really high-risk, so cuttings, budwood, rootstock, that kind of thing is quite concerning.

Huanglongbing or is also known as yellow dragon or citrus greening, is number six on our most unwanted national priority plant pest list, and it's one of the worst citrus diseases in the world. So, again, it's a bacterial disease. It may not arrive on seeds, but it would arrive in plant material, cutting material for example. And again, there's no cure for Huanglongbing.

Some seed-borne pests. I mentioned seeds can carry pests and diseases with them. A lot of viruses have emerged in recent years as being on the seed pathway, and exotic tobamoviruses are a particularly damaging group of plant viruses, and they are also on the list of top 40 national priority plant pests. We definitely don't want seeds carrying little viruses as hitchhikers. They present a particularly high-risk because not only can the seeds grow into a plant, but the virus is present, so it's got the perfect environment with which it can then spread and present an incursion. You've got the virus present together with its host, so it's a package for disaster really from a plant health perspective.

Citrus canker is another major plant pest, and again, may not come in on seeds, but it's one of those high priority plant pests, can spread quickly over long distances on infected citrus fruits and leaves. But what we really don't want is citrus material coming in as cuttings carrying citrus canker, and then essentially being planted and leading to another incursion. Again, there's no cure for citrus canker and the infected trees and plants need to be destroyed in order to get on top of it.

So, how can we mitigate these risks? So, there's a few different initiatives the department has been working on. One of those has been e-Commerce platforms, so working with e-Commerce platforms like eBay, for example, and really highlighting the problem and working with them to prevent the sale and illegal importation of exotic seeds and plants. So, we now have worked with eBay, so they've got some programming in place which prevents online shoppers from being able to view international items that don't comply with Australia's biosecurity regulations. And in 2021, eBay blocked over 30,000 postings relating to live plants and seeds which are not permitted entry into Australia. So, that is one approach, and we've been working with other countries as well who are concerned about this problem and collaborating with them to try and have a bit more of a connected global approach to this problem.

We're also working with detector dogs, so we train biosecurity detector dogs to detect viable seeds at the airport and the mail centre, and they do an amazing job. They intercepted 4,751 seed articles in the mail in 2021, for example. And the seeds represented about half of what they sniffed out in total. So, we really value what the dogs are doing at the airport.

We're also doing quite a lot of work with high-tech, so low-energy X-rays, and the emerging technology program is developing quite a lot of work on low-energy X-ray, which is an algorithm which can detect seeds in the mail. Seeds are a little bit tricky to detect because they're so small and they're a lot of little, small individual items, but we're well advanced in our work with X-ray technology and this is one approach that we're currently developing.

So, finally, getting to the end of my presentation here, we also have a bit of an awareness campaign. It's called Plate It, Don't Plant it, because biosecurity isn't just about bringing live plants and seeds into the country. We also want to make sure that the plants that once they're here, that we know what we can and can't do with them. So, generally, because items for planting, so that seeds and planting material are considered to be very high biosecurity risk, they're subject to much more strict biosecurity conditions than items for human consumption.

And if you use them for purposes other than human consumption, for example, if you try to propagate from those, you're not using them for the intended end use and therefore there can be risk associated with that. So, you can unknowingly help spread exotic pests and diseases, especially things like rust, blights, and viruses to new areas of the country if you plant food items in your garden such, as herbs and spice seeds for example, that were intended for your spice grinder and your curry. You really need to ensure that if they're intended for food, that's what we're using them for. And food scraps being put in the compost, or a worm farm is a much better option to safely recycle kitchen waste like this rather than planting it in your garden and hoping to grow a plant from it.

So, biosecurity is everyone's business, and the key to defending Australia is the depth of our biosecurity system. It works at multiple levels, as shown in the diagram here on the right. And as you can see, we try where possible to push the risk offshore and work pre-border. We also try to work on the pathway by gathering special intelligence, research and data analysis, and then at the border and immediately post-border, we're very active to ensure that we've got an agile and smart system that can cope with unexpected risks, and we've got strong government, community, and business engagement. When things do on occasion leak across the border, we really rely on rapid detection, a really strong and connected response, and recovery capability across the country.

Everyone really needs to play their part in biosecurity, and you can always be vigilant. Just your average citizen out there has... We've got examples where they've done a great job calling us when they've seen something unusual, something unexpected, and reporting a biosecurity risk that has then been able to be acted on effectively. So, Redline allows callers to report matters that may not be detected, reported, or acted on through other means. So, that's a really good way of reporting something, and you can also call 1800 803 006 to report a biosecurity risk. So, we ask people to see, secure, and report suspected plant pests. Thank you, I'll close there.

Steve Peios:

Magnificent, Gabrielle. Thank you very much for that. As we mentioned, unfortunately Gabrielle can't join us today, but I'll tell you what, that was a great pre-record and it felt like she was with us that whole time. So, some really key points to take out of that, talking about the new policy changes and also the work that is being done with the likes of eBay and Co. when it comes to managing that policy change, and how we monitor things coming in. Then we also saw some of those impacts where things get out to rural areas, and how important it is to ensure that we're monitoring. And it's a big thank you as well to the people of the public who have gone and called those Redlines, called the biosecurity hotlines, and made sure that anything that was suspicious has actually been monitored. So, thank you very much to everyone out there and thanks so much to Gabrielle.

Now it's your turn to get involved with us here today with our Mentimeter poll. The first question that we have today is, have you ever purchased plants or seeds online from overseas sellers? Yes or no is what we are looking at here. And just a note for everybody, this is also completely anonymous, which is very, very important. So, for everyone out there, you're not doing anything wrong by answering yes. It's completely anonymous, it's just for us to get an indication of those that are looking to buy things online. So, we can see they're up on the screen. It's averaging at around about... Yeah, there we go, 10% to 90[%]. We're looking at about one in every 10 people online today has purchased something online. Excellent stuff there. That's good to see.

I'll just give that a second. Fantastic. So, with that, you can see there now, for the people that have answered no to this question, I guess we could say you're off the hook and you can exit the Mentimeter process if you like, because the rest of the questions are going to dive into online plant and seed purchases. So, please stay with us though. We obviously want you to stay as part of our presentation while we go through the Mentimeter with the next couple of questions, but there's some good results there. We can see approximately one in every 10 have purchased online.

So, moving on to the next question, if you answered yes to that, were you aware that there are import conditions when purchasing from overseas sellers? We're just looking for a yes or no here. And again, this is anonymous, and it's really important for us because it helps us to gauge levels of awareness and it also guides us in terms of the communication products that we're putting out there to help people understand.

So, of those one in 10 attending the webinar that said yes, it looks like two in every three. So, here we see there, two-thirds of people have answered yes, which is really important for us. That's great to know that you know that there are import conditions when purchasing for overseas sellers, roughly two-thirds. Here we go, around seven-tenths is what we're looking at here. So, that's really, really good to see. Thank you very much everybody. A reminder, once again, this is anonymous so you can put down those questions. No one's getting in trouble. We're just trying to get that awareness. We're moving up towards 75% now, three-quarters. That's really, really good.

Okay, next question on our Mentimeter is, this one's an open-ended one, so what type of plants or seeds did you purchase? So, feel free to type those in and we'll get those answers up on the screen. So, you know, when it comes to this side of things, what type you are purchasing, perhaps it's a particular flower, some sort of seed or bulb that you're really interested in, something as a nice house plant, a gift for mom, a gift for a partner on a Valentine's Day, or pre that to put it in the ground and grow it, whatever the case may be.

We can see some of the answers coming through here, which are fantastic. Herbs for cooking perhaps; cactus, plumeria, roses, chilli plant seeds, they can certainly spice up a dish. Veggie, flower, and herb seeds. Grasses, rare indoor plant seeds. Okay, well I guess if they're rare, that might be as good a reason as any, and perennial flowers. So, nine answers have come through. Thanks very much to those that have purchased and have said, yes, they have purchased and put down what they are. We also see tomato, cucumber, pinus, capsicum, pumpkin, and also watermelon. Excellent. Vegetable, flower, herbs again. Okay, that's really good to see. So, thanks very much everybody for putting those in there.

We'll just jump now into our final question as part of the Mentimeter, and that is, why did you choose to purchase overseas plants or seeds online and not purchase them from a domestic trader? So, some of the reasons perhaps could be price. I guess that would certainly play a part in this day and age with what's happening out there with the economy perhaps. Cheaper, yep, thought so. We've just sent an answer coming out there, cheaper. What about availability? Yeah, I can see that as well. So, not available in Australia. That's quite a popular one. Is it easier to purchase online perhaps? Is it a gift? A gift that's just better to get perhaps from online and then that way it's easier to go ahead and pass it on.

I'm seeing the answers coming up. There's a bit of a theme here we can see looks like not being available in Australia is a key one. And also, the price. So, we can see availability, price, and also the sellers. No sellers here. Okay, so that's good to know that it comes back to that side of things as well. Very, very interesting.

Okay, fantastic. That's really good to hear and see with regards to what's happening for our Mentimeter side of things, and the responses that we've got. So, a big thank you to everyone for your responses. As I mentioned, the important part there is that what we do is we utilise this to see what's happening out there, real world answers, and also have that flow into our education pieces and the type of information that we're putting out there for people to get an understanding of what we're doing. So, thanks very much to everyone for participating.

Okay, next up we have Nick Medway joining us. Now Director of Regulatory Enforcement, Biosecurity, and Compliance with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Can't wait to hear this presentation, which is all about some of the work that we do regarding noncompliance, and also targeting importers who are in breach. But I'll let Nick do all of the explanation. Very much looking forward to this. Thanks so much for joining us today, Nick, and take it away.

Nick Medway:

Yeah, thanks all. Just a little bit about who I am. Nick Medway, Director of Regulatory Enforcement. Been with the department for about 10 years, and in that time, I've sort of predominantly looked after criminal investigations, and now looking after sort of mid-tier investigations. Prior to that was with the Federal Police, so that's how I ended up in the department. I'm here today to talk about the other side of things. So, we all want to not get things coming into this country because of the devastation that we just heard that can occur when pest/disease is established. But the other side of things hopefully, which isn't appropriate to most people is the disincentive from compliance actions. And that's the sort of space that my team operate in. I work within the investigations branch, and that looks at a whole range of noncompliance options that are available under the Act.

We are the government regulator for biosecurity, and we monitor compliance with all import and export legislation. We take action where appropriate to address noncompliance and enforce the law including the Biosecurity Act. The department's got a very broad remit but the Biosecurity Act, is what we're talking about today. My area looks after the noncompliance as I said, so we target alleged noncompliance and investigate it through to its logical conclusion. It's really important, and hopefully you get out of today that it's important to understand your legal obligations when you import things. There are requirements for you to do certain things, find out certain things, and work out if you can and can't import things, and then to abide by those rules for racing to protect us all.

We proactively target people across all pathways. You've seen a number of things today that's talked about the different ways things can get into the country. There's the mail pathway, the parcel pathway, there's passengers, both the returning Australian citizens and obviously visitors to the country, and cargo being air and sea. So, there's a huge variety of different ways things can get into the country. We're intelligence led, so we look through all of the data available to us and I think it's been spoken about that we do interact with all other border agencies. So, it's not just the intelligence that the department has to sort of work out where to deploy our resources. It's also from talking to other border agencies like the Federal Police, Border Force, state law enforcement agencies. We've done numerous investigations with State Police, and also the other regulators. So, the regulators that operate from a state level, but doing the same sort of work that the department does on a state-by-state basis.

Many people don't actually realise that you don't have to intentionally be importing something for committing an offence. The department has a whole bunch of legislation that enables us to have what we call strict liability offences. And strict liability offences are offences where that you've done it, you're on the hook for it. So, if you think about traffic legislation, you didn't know the speed limit was 40, you were travelling 50, it doesn't matter that you didn't know the speed limit was 40, but you doing that equals the offence is applicable. And we have a whole bunch of legislation with some pretty hefty fines for people that import things, even if they weren't aware of what the requirements were. We have a range of options to deal with noncompliance. So, if we investigate and find that someone has been noncompliant, there's a whole bunch of different tools in the department's kit bag to deal with that. We have things like infringement notices, and they vary in size from small to really quite substantial, enforceable undertakings, which if breached they're taken to the federal court and federal court imposes sanctions associated with those injunctions.

Civil litigation, which is effectively, that's the money penalty associated with committing an offence. Obviously at the top end you've also got criminal prosecutions, and the department does a whole bunch of those annually, get some really good results. Penalties associated with noncompliance, I spoke about the infringement notices can be the two penalty units are relatively small in comparison to other fines under the Act, or they can go up to penalty units as high as 20, which is a $5,500 fine, and it has a five multiplier for commercial entities that do the wrong thing.

I always look at offence provisions and look at the penalty associated with it to determine sort of how serious an offence is. And the legislators, when they impose penalties under this Act, had up to 10-year term of imprisonment. So, the headline act, illegal importations carry up to 10 years in prison. So, that indicates the serious nature of the offending, and the potential consequences for people that do the wrong thing knowingly in the criminal space. You can also get fines up to $1.357 million. That's an awful big fine, and that's not just a one-off fine. If you do 10 offences, there's a multiplier of 10 for that. The courts can issue that as well. So, there are pretty significant penalties for people that do the wrong thing under the Act.

Since 2018, the department's conducted 241 formal plant-based investigations. So, it is sort of a big chunk of what we do. As I said, it's a pretty broad remit the department has, but biosecurity is something that's front and foremost in our minds. So, an awful lot of our investigations are related with work in the biosecurity space and plants. We've secured numerous convictions and issued infringement notices. We've also got civil litigation coming up against entities. So, that's just another tool in the kit bag that we can use to deal with people that can’t or won't do the right thing with regards to biosecurity.

I've got a couple of examples to go through, and the examples I've got sort of look at two different sides, which is the lower-level noncompliance, and some of the tools that we can utilise in that space. Then I've got a second example which looks at the higher end of noncompliance, and what the department does when we detect the criminality associated with illegal importations of plant material. The first example I've got was an investigation into a plant enthusiast. They were importing live plants into Australia via parcels from Europe and Asia. Parcels were falsely declared. And that was in an intentional thing, to miss-declare things to attempt to avoid detection and interception. The entity involved in this had been previously warned, so they were well and truly aware of what they were doing. But it was an enthusiast. It was about getting things they couldn't get. And looking at the previous slides around the reasons why people import things, and that's associated with things you can't get here, and that's something that we hear quite regularly. And I get it. Look, I'm an avid gardener and so I understand the concept of wanting things that you can't get, but this person went around those processes. Post receiving a warning, was investigated. We executed search warrants on their property and found a pretty significant amount of evidence to indicate it was intentional behaviour. On this occasion, due to the circumstances surrounding, the department accepted an enforceable undertaking from this entity.

An enforceable undertaking usually carries around for about two years, and over that period of time they're heavily monitored and we make sure that we intercept things and look through things. We have some pretty incredible powers at the border to look through things that involves work from an assistance with Australia Post and Border Force. And if the person is noncompliant, then the matter can be escalated to the federal court and there's some pretty significant penalties associated with that. So, that's the first example. So, noncompliance ending in an enforceable undertaking are still a pretty significant response from the department.

But the next one obviously we'll look at the, you know, next level up, which is commercial enterprise. So, the next example I've got is associated with a garlic importer, and her garlic import business was quite well known and held positions within that industry, had previously applied for things like permits. So was well and truly aware of the processes around importation. Was actually on a property surrounded by other people that were actually lawfully growing garlic and allium from the allium family and decided that she wanted things that no one else could get. That's again, relates back to that questionnaire before, people wanting things they can't get.

The business was marketed towards selling goods that no one else can get. Most of the goods were imported from North America where Xylella is actually an issue. We intercepted goods bound for this person. Again, we executed search warrants on the property, found a pretty significant amount of evidence to indicate attempts to circumvent pathways and interceptions, and she was... A brief was prepared for the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecution. She was convicted and actually served a period of time, so was walked straight out of court and taken to prison where she served a chunk. But also obviously the costs involved in the business was no longer. Standing within the community, you know, in a farming-type community was pretty significantly changed. And so, her life changed because of this desire to get around processes and put us all at risk.

So, it's really important for people to remember that the onus is on the importer. If you're getting things, you got to know where it came from and what the requirements are associated with that. And there's some pretty significant penalties if you don't do the right thing. You can search BICON, which is the system that sort of tells people what they can and can't get into the country. But it's also important to know you can also just call the department. We're not here... Like my side of business is dealing with noncompliance and the outcomes of people that can't or won't get it, but the vast majority of the departments set up really to assist you to understand the requirements and help you get things into the country. So, I’m looking forward to any questions you've got at the end of this, and appreciate your time today.

Steve Peios:

Thanks very much for that, Nick. Fascinating stuff. Really interesting to hear about some of those prime examples that you've gone through there about previous noncompliances, how they've been dealt with. But more than anything, reiterating that what we're looking to do as a department is protect Australia's biosecurity and ensure that, you know, people are following the rules and that we're assisting people to do that. So, thank you so much for that. Looking forward to some questions coming through and facilitate some discussion in a little bit. One of the big points I took out of that as well is how seriously the department treats breaches of the Biosecurity Act as well, and that there will be severe penalties that can happen. As you said, people serving chunks of time.

Now the presentation hopefully raised a few questions. Don't forget to drop them into the Q&A box at the bottom of the screen. Look forward very much to reading them. Now it's time to introduce our third speaker of the day, a good friend of mine, Sam McKeon. He is a Senior Technical Officer within the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Biosecurity Assurance Program. Another fascinating presentation coming up, and I look forward to hearing all about it. Over to you Sam.

Sam McKeon:

Thanks, Steve. And thanks to everyone who's taken the time out of there day to join us. I want to go over a few things that you should be thinking about if you're looking to buy plants or seeds from overseas, online. Then we're going to look at a few things to guide you to find information on how you can make your decision safely in the context of biosecurity. How you can be sure that you're doing the right thing. So, the first thing is you may be buying an invasive species. So, there are plenty of exotic and very interesting looking plants that would look fantastic in an Australian garden, gives you bragging rights, gives you in some cases a commercial advantage. But you don't have to walk very far to see instances of where invasive species have been brought to Australia, either intentionally or not, and have made a break for freedom. It can happen very quickly, it can cause a lot of damage. And despite people's best interests, governments, community groups, it can be a devastating, devastating situation that we find ourselves in. So, not bringing in invasive species, willingly or not, is one thing you want to consider.

The second risk here is when you're buying online, you might be buying seeds from a dirty source. So, this is in contrast to when you are buying in Australia from large retailers, maybe large national hardware chain or reputable Australian companies. The stuff that they sell to you has been screened by us, if necessary. We've been involved in the biosecurity management of the material that they're bringing in, so you can be confident in your purchases if you're buying domestically. If you're buying something from someone online who you don't know, there's a good chance that they won't know or care about the disease status or the weediness of a particular plant. So, you could receive seeds, you know, that are covered in fungus, there are insects, or diseased seedlings that can and are sent to Australia, and that's where the problems start for you and for us.

So, the third thing to consider is whether you're actually going to get what you expect. Now up on this screen you'll see some examples that a number of you probably will have run across if you have been looking at popular auction sites online. Probably a lot of people can pick the problem here, but not everyone can. So, these are obviously photoshopped. The attraction of these kinds of sales is not just to enthusiastic gardeners. Part of the selling power of listings for plants and seeds that purport to look like that is the novelty factor. Some people buy these seeds as a joke, and when they do arrive, their temptation to plant them is really strong because how cool would it be if you came to work the next day or the next season with a punnet full of blue strawberries? Can assure you that they don't exist, but the drive for the laugh is pretty strong.

The next two examples I'm giving you are a little bit more subtle. The first one is listed as a live fake indoors plant. So, what does that mean? And then the second example below that is a mother of millions. So, this is a real succulent and it can produce really vibrant colours, and it can present symmetrically, but I would be impressed if you bought that and it arrived in such an amazing state and with such amazing vibrant colours. It's obviously been doctored. So, these are all red flags. And the point is, if the sellers overseas are willing to doctor or Photoshop images, they're essentially indicating that they're willing to trick you. They're willing to engage in fraudulent activity to make the sale. And so, if they're willing to do that, what are you actually going to get if you buy something from them? So, you got to ask yourself, "Do I plant these seeds and hope they turn into a giant watermelon that's purple and as big as a house? Or do I not buy the seeds, save myself five bucks, and potentially save Australia's agricultural industry billions of dollars?"

So, how do you know what's a reputable seller? Now this is the internet, so there's no silver bullet, but there are a few good signs you can look for. So, if the seller is mentioning our biosecurity requirements or mentions biosecurity requirements at all. If the listings explicitly say that they're not going to send a particular states within Australia, that's a good sign too. But at the end of the day, it is the internet and there are no guarantees and there's a whole industry that has been built up around paying for fake reviews. So, if it looks too good to be true, or if you have any doubts, feel free not to press buy. But if you do find something that you really, really want or really need in the context of business, the first thing is check BICON. You've heard this a few times this morning, check BICON. BICON is our import conditions database and it is the place that you go to find out what you need to do if you want to import plant material, or anything.

For plants and seeds, the key here is that BICON is largely based on a scientific name database. So, scientific names, also known as botanical names, these are the Latin names of the plant. Often if you're buying stuff online, they won't give you the scientific name, so it's worth googling it because you're most likely going to get the Latin name after you Google something like, you know, cucumber, or watermelon, or chilli. Just drop that into Google and it'll give you the scientific name. So, in this case here we are looking at, it's an Astrophytum for sale, so we've hidden some of the listing, but we've already got our scientific name. So BICON.agriculture.gov.au, or you can just Google it, it'll be the first result. And the main thing here is there are two options, you can use the quick search bar or you can use the scientific name search tab.

For plants, it's better to go with the scientific name search. We can search cactus here and we will get results, but it is better because we regulate down to the scientific name level, the species level. So, you'll take your scientific name. Then we will get a series of results, and it can be a bit confusing. BICON covers all things that are permitted, and many that are not, from all places around the world arriving by all modes. So, it could be a full shipload, it could be one little eBay package. So, there's a lot of stuff in there to unpack and it can be complicated, but I encourage you just to take your time. So, in this case you can actually see that there's a summary that says you're going to need an import permit if you want this Astrophytum. It also says that it's going to be inspected, it's going to be fumigated, and then it's going to be held in quarantine for at least three months for disease screening.

That means that your $5 cactus is all of a sudden much, much more expensive than what you are anticipating. So, your impulse purchase has gone from $5 to potentially hundreds of dollars and many months. So, check BICON first. Like Gabrielle said, we work with online platforms to remove listings, but just because you can see it doesn't mean you should buy it. It's the internet, we take hundreds of thousands off. We have filters that the companies have applied for us, but it's a never-ending journey, so check BICON first. If you're unsure, feel free to email us. Feel free to call us. Check first, ask for help if you need it, and always declare it when you arrive.

Steve Peios:

Fantastic, Sam. Thank you so much for that. We can see up on the screen there, you can ask for help, imports@agriculture.gov.au. Is that right, Sammy?

Sam McKeon:

Yeah.

Steve Peios:

Or you can ring the number, 1800 900 090, 1800 900 090. Thank you very much, Sam. Some great information there, especially on how to spot reputable online seed and plant sellers. You showed some great examples there of things which, you know, might be too good to be true, and then probably are as they say, and we can touch on that with regards to our Q&A coming up shortly, because there was some really interesting stuff in that one, Sam. Please don't forget to drop your questions into the Q&A box at the bottom of your screen.

Okay, now it's time for our next speaker, final speaker for today. It is Rihannon Evans from the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Rihannon is going to tell us about a devastating incursion of the banana plant disease, Panama TR4, and what the real impacts were for producers and our food suppliers. Now, this one's very, very important to note that this is what the outcome can be of an incursion of a deadly disease from planting seeds, for example. So, it's important to take note of this because it shows the devastation that can occur. Rihannon is unable to join us in person today, unfortunately, and has a pre-recorded video of her presentation as well, similarly to what we saw before with Dr. Gabrielle Vivian-Smith. So, another great presentation, and please enjoy this one.

Rhiannon Evans:

Hello everybody. I am Rihannon Evans with Biosecurity Queensland, and I am currently the leader of the Panama TR4 project here in far North Queensland. Today I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the impacts that an exotic pest can have on Australia's industries, and in particular I'm going to talk about the banana industry. I'd like to give you a bit of background around the banana industry to start with. So, Panama disease is a fungal disease and it was detected first in Australia in 1997. It was detected in Darwin, and then again in 2015 it has arrived on the Queensland coast. As you can see from this slide here, the Queensland coast in fact grows 95% of the bananas that are consumed in Australia. Australia doesn't import bananas at all, and this is a significant growing area for these bananas. We're talking a $564 million industry, and that in fact equates to about a 1.3 contribution to the Australian economy.

So, just to give you a bit of information around what this disease is and how it behaves on the plant and why it's a problem. So, you've got the disease in fact through these chlamydospores, which are right down the bottom of the picture, entering a banana root and then travelling, choking the vascular system and of course stopping the banana from drawing up nutrients from the ground. What then happens is of course the very slow death of the plant itself, and it's unable to produce... Where there's high levels of disease, it will be unable to produce the fruit. So, this disease is not about the fruit because the disease is not in the fruit. Fruit is still great to eat, but the problem with the disease is the fact that if it becomes in very high levels, the trees themselves just simply aren't able to produce that number one Aussie fruit favourite.

One of the big questions is how Panama TR4 in fact arrived in Queensland. And as I just explained to you, those long-lived chlamydospores, we've really got to think about this, they've arrived somehow in Australia. And they've managed to get transported to a banana plantation, and then from the banana plantation, they've actually managed to get into the banana roots. So, while you wouldn't think it was a very difficult thing to do, this is in fact quite a complex... The way nature behaves is really quite a complex thing, and before you know it, we've got problems that we never realised we had. So, it gets into the banana root. It then travels up through the banana, chokes the banana, it travels from banana plant to banana plant. And then for some reason, between 1997 and 2015, it has managed to perhaps hitchhike on machinery, or footwear, or clothing, or tools and arrive in Queensland. Once again, make its way onto a banana plantation, make its way into a banana root, and then again from banana root to banana root.

So, when it arrived in Queensland, everybody took action. We're very, very fortunate in Australia here to have strong biosecurity rules; an active, motivated, and consolidated industry; as well as world-class science and researchers available. With those three pillars, I would say with regards to this disease, we've been able to contain it to just seven farms in eight years, and so far keep the $564 million banana industry viable. What kind of actions did we take? The first one was movement controls. You need to understand at this point the first person lost their job. The person who was buying and selling banana planting material, he no longer had anybody willing to purchase banana bits from him. And now the industry in fact goes to laboratory clones at an additional cost to industry.

Then of course you've got the more immediate impact upon the affected grower himself. This was really quite significant, and it is every time you are the first person identified with an exotic disease. He ran a family business. We in fact had grandparents, parents, and children all enjoying being productive on that land. They had come from small beginnings and had developed quite a profitable business for their family, and it supported their family. They found themselves incredibly isolated from the community. What's really quite shocking is, even the children were bullied at school because they were the first farm detected with this disease. They had an uncertain future. There were no rules established for them. There was no ability to plan. They felt constantly watched, because their residence was also on the affected banana farm.

They had increased strangers entering their property, speaking a completely different language. If you're familiar with biosecurity language, you'll know that it's not layman's terms used. And we also had a very interested science and research focus. So, they were also welcoming a great deal of science and researchers onto their property. All of our properties that were not infested, or had no awareness of having the disease at all, then had to get into some capital investment implementing biosecurity practices on their property. That included separation, fencing, signage, often laying large areas of bitumen to get clean road access for people picking up their fruit or dropping off boxes. So, there was a significant capital investment required of our 271 banana farmers in this district. We also had much broader impacts such as the local council. They in fact had to really consider whether they were a potential vector for this disease. So, they had to reconsider how they maintained and managed roadsides, what kind of machinery they brought in and around the known infested property. And it really was an entire community question to be answered.

From a government perspective, biosecurity took control. We established restrictions that we placed on the infested properties. We also looked at what strategy is going to be best to ensure the longevity of the banana industry here in Queensland. So, we established a surveillance protocol. We have a very strong strategy around or belief in find the disease early and destroy it when we find it. In this way, that nature of the fungal disease and the increasing number of spores is limited. What was also a massive investment for us was the education of stakeholders, suppliers to the industry, even just the general community awareness, and certainly the tourism industry. We find here in the wet tropics that everyone wants a selfie of themselves with a backdrop of a banana farm. So, we really invested in education and awareness activities in order to get everybody... Get Panama on everybody's mind.

In addition to this, this disease has actually been present in its original format, it was Race 1, and it's been present since the '50s. Despite that, there is significant information gaps in our science and research that we've invested in to ensure that we can maintain a strong and viable industry into the future. We've got a number of research activities around identifying resistant varieties, and you'll note that I said resistant, not immune. That's all we've managed to achieve so far. And with resistance, if we get a resistant variety, we're also looking to get something that's easy to grow and produces a lot of fruit and transports well. That magic that we have in the Cavendish variety of bananas, we haven't managed to duplicate yet, and it may take some years before we get an alternative resistant variety.

So, that really sums up what you perhaps would not realise, the amount of work that goes on behind a new detection and protecting Australia's industries from exotic plant pests and diseases. It's hugely important that everybody is on the front foot and shares biosecurity responsibility because biosecurity benefits everyone. It ensures that you've got great bananas from far North Queensland at a really reasonable price, and we've got, you know, no additional chemical interference with all the food that you're eating, as an example. Thank you very much for your time today.

Steve Peios:

Thanks very much for that, Rihannon, and magnificent presentation again. And just like before, it felt like you were in the room there with us. So, thank you so much for providing that information. That's it for our presentations today. A big thank you to all of our speakers for sharing their knowledge and expertise with us. And one of the key messages I took out of all of those presentations is the impact that we saw of these incursions actually coming in and taking place, and how significant they are. So, it's very, very important that we all do the right thing. So, now for our first question, I might ask Adrian, if he doesn't mind, just to tell us a little bit about yourself and also your role here within the department. Thanks very much, Adrian.

Adrian McIntosh:

Yeah, thanks for that introduction. I work for the department's mail program, and I'm currently working in the Sydney Gateway Facility, which is the International Mail Centre in Sydney. Part of my role is to ensure that mail articles coming in through this pathway into Australia are compliant with our import conditions, and that they don't contain any biosecurity risks. So, to detect and capture these risks, we use a number of different screening techniques. We use our wonderful detector dogs, X-rays, our real-time tomography scanners, which are in essence a CT scanner; and we also use historical data to profile and target risk goods.

Steve Peios:

Thanks very much for that. It's good to know. What we'll do is come to you with some questions. I can see I do have one for you that's already come through, which is exciting. So, thanks for that. I think we'll get underway with our question and answer session, as I can see here, those that are coming through live on the system now, which is great. First one I've got here is for you, Sam. It's with regards to an import that's coming up. So, it says here, "I would like to import a rare asparagus seed from the US. I'm travelling to Australia soon. If I bring them back with me, what is the procedure? Should I declare when I arrive or do I need to apply prior to arrival?"

Sam McKeon:

Good question. And the short answer is, you want to check BICON before you leave. You want to search BICON for asparagus or asparagus seed, and that will tell you whether or not you'll require a permit. And it will describe the procedure that you will go through if you bring it back with you. Depending on how you bring it with you, in your backpack, in your carry on, or if it is, you mail it to yourself, the conditions can be different. And the conditions do change, so I won't say specifically what you need to do in relation to asparagus itself, but check BICON first. If you're still unsure, email us or call us. And if you're bringing it with you on your person or in your luggage, absolutely declare it when you reach Australian territory.

Steve Peios:

I think that's an important thing to note right, Sam, that we always want to declare, declare everything that you bring. And also, if you're unsure, please declare and please declare. Yes.

Sam McKeon:

Yeah, there's no harm in that. You won't get in trouble, declare. Even if you feel silly, if you think something really shouldn't be declared, just do it. Better to be safe than sorry. You won't get in trouble. It helps us. It'll help you.

Steve Peios:

Fantastic. Thank you very much, Sam. Adrian, we have a question that's come through for you, and I think this is a nice one for you to be able to expand on. It says, "What are some of the most common things that you see through the mail pathway?"

Adrian McIntosh:

So, seeds remain our highest detection, sort of article through the mail pathway. In last year, so in 2022, there was around 12,300 mail articles containing seeds that didn't meet the import conditions. These were destroyed. All seeds for sowing must meet import conditions in BICON. And seeds that don't meet the import conditions will be immediately destroyed. We also detect live plants that are detected regularly coming in through the mail, and the vast majority of these are undeclared and also unidentified. These pose an unacceptable risk and are destroyed. We rarely, rarely see live plants being imported with the correct documentation that is required for their import, as these plants often need to be grown for periods of when the post-quarantine entry facility down in Mickleham. These mostly enter through the cargo pathway, so not something we see a lot of through the mail.

Steve Peios:

Fantastic. Thank you very much for that great answer. Good to see that we're monitoring what's coming in as well, and we're quite aware of the most popular things that are coming through the mail. All right, Sam, I've got one here for you. It says, "Do CITES..." So, it's an acronym, for the benefit of our audience, C-I-T-E-S, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. "Do CITES conditions come up on the BICON import conditions?"

Sam McKeon:

They don't come up in BICON except for a link out to the people that administer those conditions. So, we manage biosecurity, CITES is about endangered species. But we do include references to CITES so that if you're importing something that is rare... A lot of people don't realise... Well, some people online probably do realise how rare and expensive and endangered some of these cacti species can be, for example. So, we don't administer the CITES convention and the rules there, but we do link to it where we think it's appropriate.

Steve Peios:

Fantastic, Sam. Thank you very much for that. Nick, a big thanks again for your presentation earlier, really fascinating stuff. I've got a question that's come through for you. Now that question is, "How much engagement around seed importation is going on with cultural communities for whom English is not their first language, including both awareness and enforcement, especially around culturally important food or plants?"

Nick Medway:

We do see, especially at certain times of year with different cultural groups, they will import certain types of seeds or plants. I think one that springs to mind is betel nut that comes in, but different cultures have different requirements around that sort of stuff, but there are still those requirements to meet import... Either your permits or the actual specific ones associated with each type of good. We do, where we find noncompliance and we think education is appropriate, we will engage not only individuals but community groups to assist.

Within the compliance investigation division, we have an area that looks after those sort of interactions. If we think there's a benefit to it... And sometimes individuals that have had stuff seized that don't realise that it is illegal to import them will request us to interact with those groups. There's an awful lot done on social media by the department, and you'll see stuff even as you're flying on planes. The department does a whole bunch of education. So, certainly we are very happy to educate. Education, you know, generally stops things escalating to that higher level noncompliance. But look, we still do see it. And where there's a will and a way and people want to get around things, there will always be unfortunately a need for the services of my branch and division.

Steve Peios:

Can I just facilitate some discussion really quickly, Nick, on that if you don't mind? Just the key points that we raised before and talked about with Sam, and we've also raised it in previous webinars about how important it is if you are unsure as well or something might not be clear, to just declare it and declare everything as well. So, if you've got multiple items, for example, on your passenger declaration card when you come in, and just reiterating to everybody that, you know, I mean, I know you guys can potentially seem a bit big and scary, but at the same time it's about what you talked about before which was ensuring and facilitating, you know, people's needs and requirements. But it's all about doing the right thing and declaring is the best thing you can do, and you won't get in trouble for that effectively.

Nick Medway:

Yeah, no, it's 100% correct. We're not here to administer any form of punitive measures, punishment, for people that are attempting to do the right thing. You'll never get in trouble if you declare things. In fact, the department is really keen to work with people. It gives us a better sense of what people want to import and how they import it, as per the webinar questions before. But for us, if you declare it, there'll never be an issue. Our issue is where people don't declare it, and where people intentionally sort of try to circumvent systems. And that's where my team comes in. But if you've ever in any doubt, as you've said it, and said it well, if you declare it, you won't have to have interactions with, as much as I love talking to people, people such as myself.

Steve Peios:

Excellent. Thank you so much, Nick. Really appreciate that. I've got one that's come through for you here, Sam, just with regards to the BICON website and perhaps it being a little bit confusing at times. "Is there a way to access the database of all permitted and non-permitted seeds, for example?" Is that possible or-

Sam McKeon:

It is possible, yes. And I appreciate that it can be complicated at times. Practice makes perfect. The thing you want to look for is, it's called the ‘permitted seed for sowing’ case. So, that is the case that houses all of the scientific names that we permit, under conditions. And like I showed in my presentation earlier, there is a scientific name search tab within BICON. Start with that. But on the quick search tab in BICON, if you just put permitted seed in, the first result should be the permitted seed for sowing case. And that's your first stop. But again, if you are unsure, feel free to email us or call us.

Steve Peios:

Fantastic. Thanks very much for that, Sam. Adrian, got one that's come through for you here with regards to import conditions, and "Why do import conditions keep changing?"

Adrian McIntosh:

Import conditions change regularly to meet the risks of the day. So, as the risks evolve, we need to act upon that and change our stance and what we require to meet that risk. So, it's really important that you check regularly. Don't sort of go off historically what you used to do last year or even last month. So, as those risks evolve and change, we need to change our response.

Steve Peios:

Excellent. Thanks very much for that, Adrian. I think that's a key thing to note is that things are regularly evolving and times change quite quickly, especially at the moment. We've seen a lot of that over the last few years. Another one for you here, Nick, which I think is an interesting question. It says, "I note the quite severe penalties for noncompliance and the large number of investigations as well." But it says here, "How often are the large penalties applied and is this rate high enough to provide disincentives for noncompliance?"

Nick Medway:

Look, it's a good question. It's something that the department grapples with. If you look at outcomes in the courts in general, it can come down to jurisdiction, it can come down to an individual judge or magistrate in terms of the highest level penalties. What the department is getting really good at though is looking at the different tools at our disposal to work as a disincentive for people to import. So, I mentioned before that there are things like enforceable undertakings, and now civil litigation. And they're new tools that the department is rolling out in an effort to have a multi-pronged attack towards noncompliant entities, those that just won't get it. We're using those not only in the space of dealing with individuals, but corporate entities that have signed up to enforceable undertakings. As I said, civil litigation. There'll be a matter that we're looking at progressing in that arena for someone who for business purposes attempted to import a significant volume of succulent plants, and succulents have multiple different sort of uses.

We're dealing with people that are using succulent plants because they're ornamental and look nice. We're also dealing with a matter in New South Wales where New South Wales Police and the clan lab area within their police force are looking at the psychedelic properties associated with some of these cacti, and people illegally importing them for those purposes. So, we look at penalties, we look at state legislation, look at Commonwealth legislation, and we look at what's the most appropriate tool. The department has also recently strengthened the penalties associated with a whole bunch of offence provisions in terms of the monetary fine. So, as I mentioned before, the 186A penalty has now increased to $5,500 for people who try to intentionally import things through the airport pathway in particular. That includes seeds and plant material.

Steve Peios:

Magnificent, Nick. Thank you very much for that and thanks for your great work as usual. Sam, one more here with regards to the rules, which is I guess very important with what we're talking about here. "I understand that biosecurity is important, but the rules seem to be suited to big importers. I only buy one or two plants at a time. Can't the government make a separate set of rules for the 'little guys?'"

Sam McKeon:

So, it's a fair question. In a lot of cases, whether it's one plant or 100,000, we've found the risk to be the same. And in the case of Xylella, for example, you saw at the beginning of this presentation, the video there, it doesn't take much. So, whether you're buying one little olive sapling or a grapevine or something like that versus 100,000, the risk... Our scientists have looked at it and said that, you know, "The risk here is so high that we're going to apply the same conditions for the small guys and the little guys." We don't discriminate in the context of finance or commerce. It is solely science-based, the way that we structure our approach to this. So, I understand that the impositions on smaller businesses is going to be higher than on very large businesses, but at the end of the day, if we could make them simpler, we would. And in some instances we do, but it's based on science. And what we put out there is the best way that we can manage the biosecurity risk together, and that's where it is.

Steve Peios:

Excellent, Sam. Thank you so much for that. Important to note there, as you say, it's about managing the risk. There was an important point from Adrian before about managing that based on what's happening today and where we're at in the current climate. Question here for Adrian, "Can the X-rays being used to scan mail damage seed?"

Adrian McIntosh:

The X-rays that are used are very low powered, so much lower power than what you would see in a medical field. The X-rays don't have any effect on any food products, seed products, or plants, or anything of that nature just because they're quite a low powered X-ray. So no, safe to pass through the X-rays.

Steve Peios:

Fantastic. Thanks so much for that, Adrian. Okay viewers, sadly our time is up. It's been a magnificent webinar though, and I'd like to thank everyone for joining us today. Your feedback is thoroughly appreciated and we really, really appreciate the engagement as a department to understand exactly what is happening. We'll also have some links for further information as well, which we'd like to encourage you to please use if possible. So, it's a big thank you to everyone that has attended. Thanks so much for your time. Thank you very much for your engagement as well. It's been great to see you with so many questions, the Mentimeter beforehand. Thank you so much everybody, and we'll see you at the next Australian Biosecurity Series Webinar. Goodbye for now.

[Webinar ends]

**Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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