



Australian Government
Biosecurity Australia

18 October 2006

BIOSECURITY AUSTRALIA POLICY MEMORANDUM 2006/29

IMPROVING AUSTRALIA'S QUARANTINE PROCESS

This Biosecurity Australia Policy Memorandum is to inform stakeholders that the Australian Government has announced changes to the import risk analysis process to make it more timely and transparent, provide greater scope for scientific review, and provide early and regular engagement with stakeholders. Further information is available on the Biosecurity Australia website www.biosecurityaustralia.gov.au.

The Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran, has announced improvements to the import risk analysis process. The Minister stressed that the improvements will not change Australia's conservative, science-based approach to quarantine.

The new import risk analysis (IRA) process, scheduled to take effect in early 2007, will include improved consultation, fewer steps, greater scope for scientific scrutiny and timeframes that are imposed through legislation.

Key features of new process

- Consultation with stakeholders will be improved, with an emphasis on early and regular engagement throughout the IRA process: Biosecurity Australia will consult with the applicant, relevant industry bodies, states and territories, other government departments, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Timeframes for the completion of IRAs will be prescribed through regulations, improving timeliness and predictability for stakeholders. The regulations will provide for a standard or expanded IRA process, depending on the complexity of the science and nature of the biosecurity risks. A standard IRA will be completed within 24 months and an expanded IRA within 30 months.
- The new process will have the flexibility for timeframes to be suspended in certain circumstances, such as when Biosecurity Australia is waiting for scientific information considered essential to complete the IRA.
- The role of the Eminent Scientists Group (ESG) will be strengthened. The ESG's role will include assessing conflicting scientific views provided to it and reviewing the conclusions of draft final IRA reports to ensure they are scientifically reasonable, based on the material presented. The ESG will be able to co-opt additional expertise, for example in economics or statistics, to assist it in reviewing draft IRAs.
- The IRA process will be expanded to include some analyses currently undertaken as 'policy reviews' (that is, some analyses where relevant import policy exists). This will provide greater opportunity for stakeholder input and public scrutiny.
- Processes for receiving and prioritising import requests will be clarified and the criteria will be publicly available.

Protecting Australia's high quarantine standards

- Australia's high quarantine standards will be maintained.
- The thoroughness of the scientific analysis of import proposals will not be compromised.
- Australia's rigorous, science-based quarantine regime will continue to have a very low risk setting.
- Opportunities for formal and informal consultation with all stakeholders will remain a key feature of the IRA process.
- The opportunity to appeal on process grounds to the IRA Appeal Panel will remain.

Four major import risk analyses, on apples, bananas, chicken meat and prawns, that are well underway or nearly complete will be finished under the existing process. This reflects the fact that these IRAs are already significantly advanced and many stakeholders have made substantial contributions to the existing analyses. These IRAs therefore already involve extensive consultation, scientific analysis and review, including the reissuing of draft reports in some cases.

The improvements to the IRA process respond to issues raised by stakeholders about the current process, including at a recent industry–government biosecurity forum.

A copy of the Minister's media release is attached. A link to further information is available via www.biosecurityaustralia.gov.au.

Further information about implementation of the IRA reforms will be posted on Biosecurity Australia's website towards the end of 2006.

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