

# The import of apples from New Zealand

## Questions and answers

### What quarantine measures will apply to fresh apples from New Zealand?

Australia's import conditions for apples from New Zealand require:

- In-orchard controls for fire blight, European canker and apple leaf curling midge
- only mature and symptomless apples, free of leaf material and other contaminants will be exported
- high pressure water washing and brushing of fruit in the packing house
- maintenance of wash water sanitation
- two 600 fruit inspections - one in New Zealand and another by Australian quarantine officers. Detection of quarantine pests or trash will result in the rejection of that lot or consignment
- a supporting operational system to maintain and verify the phytosanitary status of consignments and supply chain assurance
- The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) will audit and verify that the recommended phytosanitary measures have occurred.

### Why was this analysis undertaken?

After a long dispute with the New Zealand government, the World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled that Australia's measures for New Zealand apples were not sufficiently supported by science.

In considering the WTO ruling, the Government decided the most appropriate response would be to review the existing quarantine policy for the three pests that were the subject of the WTO dispute; fire blight, European canker and apple leaf curling midge.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry announced the commencement of the review on 7 December 2010.

Australia negotiated with New Zealand a period of eight months to implement the WTO decision that concludes on 17 August 2011.

### How did this review work?

This review has been conducted as a 'non-regulated analysis of existing policy'.

Like an import risk analysis (IRA), the review assesses the risks posed by pests and diseases and, if those risks exceed Australia's appropriate level of protection, specifies what measures should be taken to reduce those risks to an acceptable level.

Although this process is a non-regulated analysis of an existing policy, it has the same level of scientific rigour and technical assessment as would be applied in an import risk analysis (IRA) as described in the *Import Risk Analysis Handbook 2011* (available on the Biosecurity Australia website).

This review was released on 4 May 2011 for a 60-day stakeholder comment period, which closed on 4 July 2011. All stakeholder comments have been considered in preparing the final report.

### What does the review consider?

The review considered the three pests that were the subject of the WTO dispute; fire blight, European canker and apple leaf curling midge.

In light of the WTO ruling, the review re-examined existing science taking account of expert testimony during the dispute. It has also considered evidence that was not available when the 2006 IRA was completed.

The review has closely considered New Zealand's commercial practice for production of apple fruit for export that manages pests.

### **What other pests were identified in the 2006 IRA that require risk management measures?**

In addition to the recommended measures contained in the final report, risk management measures are required for five species of leafrollers, two species of mealybug, and codling moth.

### **Are there any regional differences for Australian states?**

Codling moth and two species of mealybugs are quarantine pests for Western Australia only. These pests are present in the eastern states.

The recommended quarantine measures take account of this regional difference.

During 2009, Western Australia confirmed that apple scab was present in the state so risk management measures for this disease are no longer justified.

### **What measures are recommended for leafrollers, mealybugs and codling moth?**

The 2006 final IRA report recommended that a sample of 600 fruit per export lot be inspected and must be found free of leafrollers. Detection of quarantinable leafrollers will result in the rejection of that lot for export to Australia.

For mealybugs, it was also recommended that a sample of 600 fruit per export lot be inspected and found free of mealybugs.

A range of options were proposed to manage the risk posed by codling moth, including area freedom or fumigation with methyl bromide. However, before access to Western Australia can be considered under area freedom arrangements, New Zealand will be required to provide a submission detailing how codling moth will be managed.

### **Will Australia be adequately protected from fire blight?**

New evidence has confirmed fire blight bacteria can only survive, if at all, in very low numbers in a poor state of health on mature apple fruit. Mature apple fruit is an adverse environment for fire blight and the evidence demonstrates that bacteria die quickly.

If fire blight bacteria survived long-enough to enter Australia they would then need to survive on apple waste (rotting fruit or discarded apple cores) to be of concern. The review considered new evidence which indicates that in wet conditions, bacteria known to compete with fire blight bacteria had excellent survival and growth rates while in dry conditions, the lack of water prevented fire blight growth.

If fire blight were to survive in apple waste, it would then need to be moved to a new host; it cannot move independently.

Australian import conditions require that New Zealand growers adopt an integrated approach to manage fire blight including targeted measures to prevent blossom infection (that may result in fruit being contaminated with fire blight bacteria). This integrated approach effectively manages fire blight. There have been no outbreaks of fire blight in New Zealand since 1998.

The review has concluded that there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that fire blight can be transferred from mature apples or from apple waste from mature fruit to a host in Australia.

### **Does this give the go-ahead for the import of apples from New Zealand? What happens next?**

Yes, the Director of Quarantine has made a policy determination that establishes the conditions for the import of apples from New Zealand.

Import permits can now be issued and trade can commence.

### **Does Australia import apples from any other country?**

Australia received the first shipments of apples from China in early 2011. Australia also allows imports of Fuji apples from Japan. However, to date, trade has not commenced.

Biosecurity Australia is also conducting an IRA for fresh apple fruit from the United States of America, Pacific Northwest States. The IRA is currently on hold under the 'stop the clock' provision in the *Import Risk Analysis Handbook 2011*. Biosecurity

Australia is waiting on information from the USA essential to complete the IRA. More information is on the Biosecurity Australia website.

The CTD Act is enforced by the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

## **Consultation**

### **Has industry been consulted in developing the review?**

Biosecurity Australia met with representatives of Apple and Pear Australia Limited (APAL) several times face-to-face and via teleconferences. The communication between APAL and Biosecurity Australia is ongoing during the early stages of trade commencing.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Attorney-General's Department have also briefed APAL on the implications of the WTO ruling.

## **Background information**

### **Does Australia export apples?**

Australia can export apples to a number of countries, including China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and Western Samoa.

### **How can Australia ensure apples imported from New Zealand are safe to eat?**

The review has considered the plant biosecurity risks associated with the importation of apples from New Zealand.

Human health risks are considered by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) who develop and maintain the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

FSANZ released a risk assessment on 16 May 2011 that concludes the use of streptomycin during apple flowering presents a negligible risk to consumers.

### **Do New Zealand apples require country of origin labelling?**

All food imported to Australia requires country of origin labelling under provisions of the *Commerce (Trade Descriptions) Act 1905* (the CTD Act) and the subordinate *Commerce (Imports) Regulations 1940*.