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Prawn imports to Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands suspended

Biosecurity



The importation of uncooked prawns into Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands is currently suspended. This is due to the outbreak of white spot disease in south east Queensland, and the risk of imported uncooked prawns containing an unacceptable level of the white spot syndrome virus.

White spot disease is a highly contagious viral disease of crustaceans, including prawns, crabs and lobsters. It can cause mass mortality in crustaceans and is easily spread, but it does not present a human health risk.

The suspension applies to:

- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat
- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat that have been marinated for human consumption.

The risk to Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands

The department is reviewing products that have been included in the suspension to determine whether they meet Australia's appropriate level of protection for white spot syndrome virus. This is part of the department's ongoing work to resume the safe trade in uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat as soon as possible.

The review has identified that the importation of uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat from all countries, except New Caledonia, into Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands presents an unacceptable level of biosecurity risk.

Key facts

- Bringing uncooked prawns into Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands is currently suspended, due to the risk of white spot disease infecting the island's crustaceans (some exemptions apply).
- White spot disease is a highly contagious viral disease of prawns, crabs and lobsters that can cause mass mortality and is easily spread. It does not present a risk to human health.
- Uncooked prawns brought by travellers or imported into Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from Australia must now be accompanied by documentation outlining the source of the prawns, or they will be forfeited and destroyed.
- Prawns infected with white spot and subsequently sold in supermarkets and retail outlets could spread the virus.
- Fishers are reminded not to use prawns meant for human consumption as bait.

Products exempt from the import suspension

In relation to Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, the Director of Biosecurity has agreed to exempt the following goods from the suspension:

- Uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat harvested within Australia (other than the area to which the white spot syndrome virus Movement Control Order relates), and sent to Christmas Island and/or the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.
- Uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat harvested from Christmas Island or the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and imported into mainland Australia; or moved between Christmas Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Norfolk Island.

The following prawn products are also **exempt** from the suspension:

- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat sourced from New Caledonia
- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat processed into dumplings, spring rolls, samosas, other dim sum-type products and other similar products
- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat which have been breaded, crumbed or battered
- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat sourced from Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone
- imported bait for aquaculture use, pet fish food and aquaculture feeds which contain uncooked prawns and prawn meat
- dried prawns and shelf-stable prawn-based food products
- uncooked Australian wild-caught prawns exported to Thailand for processing in a facility approved by Thailand's Department of Fisheries, and re-exported to Australian Territory
- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat (1) as transhipped goods for outgoing passenger vessels engaged in international travels; (2) as laboratory or food samples for analysis, and
- uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat sourced from parts of Australia that are not infected with white spot disease.

Prawns infected with white spot syndrome virus and subsequently sold in supermarkets and retail outlets could increase the risk of the virus spreading. Uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat imported into Christmas Island and/or the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from Australia must now be accompanied by documentation from the manufacturer or packaging information (such as labelling) outlining the source of the prawns (for example wild caught in Western Australia). Uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat that are imported into Christmas Island and/or the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from Australia without sufficient source evidence, or imported uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat that are sourced from white spot disease infected areas, will need to be forfeited and destroyed.

Imports of uncooked prawns into Australia from Christmas Island or the Cocos (Keeling) Islands that were not harvested from Christmas Island or the Cocos (Keeling) Islands respectively are also suspended.

The department would like to remind recreational fishers that prawns purchased from the supermarket for human consumption should never be used as bait or berley. Unused prawns, or parts of prawns, should never be disposed of into waterways.

For further information, please contact ExternalTerritories@agriculture.gov.au



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