



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture
and Water Resources**

SECRETARY

Ref: EC15-000708

The Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Suite R1.108
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Cardell

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 September 2015 about the department's response to Recommendation 2 of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) Report 447.

The report recommended that the department and the Australia Border Force (formerly Australian Customs and Border Protection Service) review international methods in mail screening to ensure Australia is adopting best practice. I note the JCPAA is seeking information on any international practices considered by the department.

Initial research conducted by the Australian Border Force indicated there is no readily identifiable best practice relating to the screening of mail. This is not surprising as countries target different risks and apply different screening models based on their own operating and logistical environments. Nor do all mail items pose the same risk and the level of risk can change depending on the time of the year and the season. This makes it difficult to benchmark activity and is compounded by other challenges within the mail environment including the lack of electronic data. However, we are aware that a best practice element used by some overseas jurisdictions is risk based targeting, which is enhanced by electronic reporting and in some cases the automation of mail processing systems.

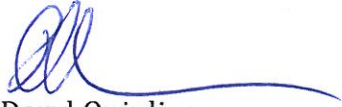
The department continues to work with the Australian Border Force and Australia Post to improve screening processes within Australia. We will also liaise with international counterparts to better understand their risk assessment methodologies and how we may learn from each other.

The JCPAA also requested an update on the work by the Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis (CEBRA) to analyse current biosecurity screening methods of international mail. The projects underway investigate applied statistical techniques for targeting inspection resources on a risk-return basis, and for monitoring the department's efforts to manage biosecurity risks across the mail pathway.

One project, relating to the department's leakage surveillance program, is central to this work and includes liaison with the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries on their practices. A copy of the project scope is attached and I would be happy to provide the Committee with a copy of the project report once it is finalised. I also understand that the Australian Border Force have engaged CEBRA to undertake similar work.

This response has been developed in consultation with the Australian Border Force.
If you require further information regarding this response please contact
Ms Tina Hutchison, Assistant Secretary, Pathway Compliance on 02 6272 3501.

Yours sincerely



Daryl Quinlivan
Secretary

27 October 2015



Analytical assessment of leakage surveys in airports and mail centres

The project will elicit information from operational staff about how leakage surveys are actually being constructed and performed. It will use simulations to investigate the mathematical steps currently used to determine and stratify sample sizes, and to determine the value of information from the leakage survey and the range of magnitudes of allowable bias.

The project will include a review of published literature relating to statistical techniques and survey methods that can address the issues in the existing leakage survey and associated calculations. It will also engage staff in the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries to learn from their experiences.

A report will be prepared on the findings of the staff elicitation and literature review, including and recommended changes to the leakage survey and/or mail volume calculation methods to improve the robustness of the data without compromising costs or operational feasibility. The report will be written so that its content may also be applied to other import pathways, such as cargo and vessels. This will support the Department's current focus on developing a whole-of-agency perspective on measuring risk.

By way of example, possible solutions to the issues investigated may include:

1. Changes to the existing leakage survey methodology
2. Replacement with an alternative survey approach
3. Data manipulation techniques to correct for bias
4. Automation of sample selection.

Pending approval of the report by the CEBRA Steering Committee, procedural documents will then be prepared that detail the amended methods for leakage survey and/or mail volume calculations.