



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry**

Senator Matt Canavan
Chair
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Canavan

On 15 November 2022, I appeared as a witness before the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee *Adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, in particular with respect to foot-and-mouth disease and varroa mite* inquiry.

During the hearing Senator Sterle said in relation to incoming passenger cards

"In terms of increasing, how do we let the travelling public know that? I didn't even know until the other day. I thought we'd got rid of that piece of paper where we all have to painstakingly put our glasses on and tick and cross and hope that everyone's telling the truth. We're still doing that, aren't we? I'm shocked to hear that we're still doing that, but we are."

In response I said

"There are 10 questions on the incoming passenger card that are specific to biosecurity."

A little further into the response I also said

"A substantial component of those were at the higher end of the penalties, so that's the \$2664 or the 12-point infringement notices that Ms Lane mentioned. There are about 1,085 of those"

I wish to correct these answers. There are 6 specific biosecurity questions on the incoming passenger card, and 10 questions on the card in total. There have been 1,085 infringement notices issued for higher penalty units, but this comprises 726 infringement notices for 12 penalty units and 359 infringements notices for 6 penalty units. The remainder of my answers to the questions, given at the Hearing, is correct.

During the hearing in relation to visa cancellations the following exchange occurred between Senator Sterle, Senator Colbeck and me.

Senator STERLE: *“And we have to put fear through the travelling public. Do we find most of our infringements are personnel coming in on aeroplanes, or is there a greater threat through mail centres, container yards and our wharfs and trucking areas?”*

Mr Hunter: *“Can I just add that an important component of the Infringement Notice Scheme was that there was a change made to the law in 2019-20 where international passengers who breach the Biosecurity Act by failing to declare high-risk biosecurity material when arriving can have their visas cancelled. Since the enactment of that law, 19 visas have been cancelled. So not only is it a \$2,664 fine for 2,400 people but, in 19 cases, the visas have been cancelled and the people returned home.”*

Senator COLBECK: *“From what date was that?”*

Mr Hunter: *“From December 2020.”*

Senator STERLE: *“So two years.”*

Mr Hunter: *“But bear in mind again the low passenger numbers during COVID.”*

I wish to correct these answers. Since April 2019, there have been 20 visas that have been cancelled for biosecurity related offences and 726 people that have been fined \$2,664. The ability for the department to refer a traveller for a biosecurity-related visa cancellation first commenced in April 2019, with amendments expanding the sub-classes of visas occurring in December 2020. The remainder of my answers to the questions, given at the Hearing, is correct.

I apologise for the errors in my answers and trust this further information will be of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Colin Hunter
First Assistant Secretary
Biosecurity Operations Division

22 November 2022