

Inquiry into Biosecurity and Quarantine Arrangements

August 5, 2010

Importation of Parrots – live birds and hatching eggs

This submission, from **Priam Australia Pty Ltd**, presents a few historical notes and some current issues surrounding native and exotic parrots in Australia, with the aim being to -

Encourage finalisation of the *IRA:Live birds and eggs:Psittacine* by Biosecurity Australia

INTRODUCTION

The parrot and cockatoo families (*Psittacidae* and *Cacatuidae*) are two of the most threatened families of birds, with 95 of the approximately 330 known species listed in the IUCN 2000-2004 Parrot Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan. For 78 species of this Action Plan, habitat destruction and fragmentation are the principal causes of endangerment. Parrots also face the considerable extra pressures of the bird trade through unsustainable harvest from the wild, with local demand and international trade (especially the illegal trade) playing a significant role. Between 1990 and 1994 nearly two million parrots were traded on the world market (TRAFFIC 1999) (www.iucn.org).

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) was founded to monitor the exploitation of endangered species through international trade. The system employed by CITES lists species as Appendix I (includes species threatened with extinction – trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances), Appendix II (includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival) or Appendix III (contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade – changes to Appendix III follow a distinct procedure from changes to Appendices I and II, as each Party is entitled to make unilateral amendments to it).

Currently, all of the 330 Psittaciformes except four species are listed on the CITES Appendix I or II (53 listed as Appendix I). The Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) is listed on Appendix III, and there are three Psittacidae species which are not listed on the appendices, Peach-faced Lovebirds (*Agapornis roseicollis*), Cockatiels (*Melopsittacus undulates*) and Budgerigars (*Nymphicus hollandicus*) (www.cites.org).

LEGAL PARROT IMPORTATION

Much of the parrot importation debate revolves around...

whether quarantine, notification and control of disease via legal importation is more desirable than the risks of disease and pest introduction associated with smuggling; and

if allowing the importation of psittacine birds decreases the incentive for smuggling

Translocation of birds by man has led to the spread of serious diseases particularly those of non-migratory species, but also of the common epizootic diseases such as Newcastle disease. Legal and supervised imports appear more effective than total bans for disease exclusion (Doyle, 1997).

In 1996, AQIS reported that there was "*anecdotal evidence to suggest that smuggling, particularly of species approved for importation by the (then) Australian Nature Conservation Agency, decreased while imports were permitted.*" (Animal Biosecurity Policy Memorandum 99/090a).

Introduction of exotic disease by smuggled birds potentially has wide ranging effects on the avicultural industry (loss of birds from disease, loss of business from illegal trade); commercial poultry industry; human health (especially from Avian Influenza H5N1); and Australia's native wildlife.

The presence of illegal 'routes' also facilitates the reverse illegal movement of native wildlife (live birds and eggs, plus reptiles and invertebrates) out of Australia.

In addition, uncontrolled movement of CITES listed species results in the Australian Government failing in its international obligations under the CITES (administered under the EPBC Act, Part 13A), including that movement/trade of CITES Appendix I and II species must be regulated.

On the other hand, regulated legal importation:

- allows importation of genetic material to help maximize the genetic diversity of populations in Australia, especially important for conservation breeding programs, and allowing longevity of *ex situ* collections

- ensures the focus on captive breeding of psittacine birds is towards sustainable populations of species by reducing or eliminating pressure on wild animals from trade (both legal and illegal), by maintaining genetically diverse populations, and by maintaining appropriate numbers of animals for re-release programs in case of *in situ* population collapse.

- of hatching eggs represent a lower risk of disease. Considerable advances in avicultural management, including incubation and hand rearing techniques, mean that most parrot species can be fully hand reared (with socialisation with other parrots as they mature).

- combined with methods to 'track' legal birds by registration and identification, makes it more difficult for illegal birds to enter the market.

Australia has a unique quarantine position, and, along with commercial trade incentives to maintain this position comes the stimulus to preserve its natural environment and stunning biodiversity. Regulated legal importation (along with Movement Transfer Records) provides a means to monitor and trace individuals if necessary. One of the highest rates of enquiries to Biosecurity Australia relates to the importation of pet birds (some parrots have a life span similar to humans).

There is evidence that species not on the 'Commonwealth Inventory of exotic species known to be in Australia' are present and being advertised and traded in Australia. For example the Brown-throated Conure *Aratinga pertinax*.

In summary: Legal parrot importation, in conjunction with record keeping for exotic parrots, can together help to reduce smuggling. A reduction in smuggling as legal birds become more readily available, as well as lessening the risk of exotic disease incursions, may result in less costs for the government associated with seizures of illegal parrots (plus the problem of what to do with seized birds), and prosecutions.

CURRENT STATUS OF TWO DISEASES OF PARROTS, LISTED AS 'EXOTIC' IN 1996: PDD AND PSHV

There are five diseases of parrots that were considered as effectively exotic to Australia in 1996, "and as such action to prevent their introduction is justified" (Doyle, 1997).

Psittacine herpesvirus (PsHV) – includes Pacheco's disease and Internal Papillomatous disease (IPD)
Proventricular dilatation disease (PDD)
Poxvirus infections
Reovirus infections

PDD (Proventricular Dilatation Disease, Macaw wasting disease or Neuropathic Gastric Dilation) and Psittacine Herpesvirus (PsHV) are no longer declared exotic to Australia as there have been sporadic cases reported in the literature in Australia since 1997.

Psittacine Herpes Virus (PsHV)

This is a devastating, previously exotic disease affecting both introduced and native Australian psittacine birds.

PsHV has only recently arrived in Australia, having been exotic until 1996, when 2 cases of IPD were found in birds that had come through the legal importation scheme and been in a collection for 6 months. Since then there have been sporadic diagnoses. It is unknown how widespread the infection is, however anecdotal evidence suggests that the disease is confined to aviculture.

Proventricular Dilatation Disease (PDD)

PDD is a disease affecting peripheral and central nervous tissue, with clinical signs depending on the organs affected. The classical syndrome is of weight loss associated with gastrointestinal abnormalities. The first reported case in Australia was in a legally imported macaw in 1993. A cluster of cases has been reported in South-east Queensland in 2005-2006 (Doneley *et al*, 2007). Recent studies indicate that the aetiological agent is Avian Bornavirus (ABV) (Staeheli *et al*, 2010), and a PCR protocol has been developed for diagnostic testing.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PARROT IMPORTATION INTO AUSTRALIA

I: 1949 to 1989 (Psittacine Import Ban – concerns for the level of bird smuggling and the potential for introduction of exotic avian disease)

Importation of birds and hatching eggs from all countries except New Zealand was banned in 1949, with New Zealand included in 1972.

A Government review in 1979 considered that overseas poultry genetic material was superior to Australian in many production categories and species. The need to broaden the gene pools of many aviary and zoological species was also recognised. An additional incentive for legal importation of avian genetic material was hope that illegal importations could be reduced.

The risk of importation of serious diseases and new species through illegal imports was addressed in an internal Department of Health review in 1983. The review found that of the order of 50 new species and 10 or more new diseases (depending on definition) had been introduced despite the total import ban.

While the level of illegal importation is impossible to measure, the report estimated that interceptions recorded by Customs represented a small (and unpublicised) proportion of the incursions (Doyle, 1997).

The Animal Quarantine Service (part of the Department of Health until the end of 1984), consulted State Governments, the poultry and related industries, aviculturists and others while assessing the risks and benefits of recommencing the importation of birds. The critical question was whether legal imports present lesser risk than bans which encourage illegal imports. A major issue was and remains the required level of security. Australia perceived a responsibility to its native bird life, commercial poultry, and to its avicultural and zoological collections for a wide range of diseases. The government recognised the community demand for secure avian quarantine facilities.

Snowdon reviewed these issues in 1985 for the then Agricultural Health and Quarantine Service. He demonstrated the benefit of importations and the importance of risk analysis, management and communication. The Service accepted Snowdon's finding that there was an ever-present disease risk from the illegal uncontrolled entry of birds. These consultations covered a period of about 15 years (1974 –1989) before conditions for the import of live birds were finalized and avian quarantine facilities opened in 1989. Import of live birds under these protocols commenced in 1990.

II: 1989 to 1997 (Live importation 1990-1995)

A routine review of the live bird importation program was initiated in 1992, and completed in 1993. The review raised some concerns that the importation of live birds presented an unacceptable risk of introduction of particular exotic diseases of parrots and related species, and BRS was commissioned to undertake a review of relevant literature in 1994. There were two outbreaks of disease in imported birds that had come through the scheme. Proventricular Dilatation Disease (PDD) was found in one Macaw and Internal Papillomatous Disease (IPD) was diagnosed in two other macaws, well after they had been released from quarantine.

In light of incomplete scientific knowledge on certain diseases of psittacine birds, and with a lack of sensitive diagnostic tests for the presence of these diseases, AQIS suspended importation of live psittacine birds in 1995.

Customs and Quarantine officers at the Barrier continue to detect attempts to illegally import psittacine birds or their eggs, indicating that the incentive for smuggling still exists. This illegal trade poses a very real threat of the introduction of exotic diseases into Australia. (Again) it has been suggested that allowing the importation of psittacine birds will decrease the incentive for smuggling (Animal Biosecurity Policy Memorandum 99/090a).

National Exotic Bird Registration Scheme (NEBRS) 1996-2002, and Exotic Bird Record Keeping Scheme 2007-

During the same period, the concept of a National Exotic Bird Registration Scheme (NEBRS) was also being developed, the aim being to create an accurate inventory of exotic species and make it difficult to smuggle birds and "launder" them through existing collections. It was first proposed in 1985 at a national Wildlife Law Enforcement meeting, as a response to widespread evidence of the smuggling of exotic birds into Australia. The initial proposal was to take a census of all avian species present in Australia, starting with the exotics. In 1991, John Ley produced a report looking at improving the Wildlife Protection Act, recommending the introduction of the NEBRS as a key measure.

Evidence based on seizure records and anecdotes from within the avicultural industry indicates that the scheme was very successful in decreasing smuggling to its lowest levels in years. In Jan 2002 the Minister for the Environment, Robert Hill repealed the scheme.

When NEBRS was abandoned it was apparent that a massive amount of smuggling recurred. An estimated twenty species of exotic psittacine birds that were not in Australia at the end of the NEBRS scheme are now here and have been openly advertised for sale in avicultural magazines and on the internet.

Since the closure of NEBRS, bird keepers have been responsible for ensuring any birds or eggs they keep or trade have records to show that the specimens have been legally imported or were derived from legally imported specimens or specimens held under NEBRS. As a guide to finding out whether an exotic species is legally in Australia refer to the *Exotic Animal Guide* and the *2007 Inventory of Exotic (non-native) Bird Species known to be in Australia*. Specimens being held of species that are not on this inventory may be seized.

The Exotic Bird Record Keeping Scheme (developed in conjunction with the Exotic Birdkeepers Advisory Group) will
"help bird keepers to prove where birds or eggs came from if asked by authorities; reduce illegal trade in exotic birds; protect aviculture from diseases spread through illegally traded birds; protect the Australian environment from pests and diseases; and ensure market values of exotic birds are not eroded by illegal trade."

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/exoticbirds/buyer.html>

III: 1998-2010: twelve years of IRA:Psittacine:Live Birds/eggs

Animal Quarantine Policy Memorandum (AQPM) 98-79 advised stakeholders that AQIS intended to undertake an import risk analysis (IRA) of the import of live psittacine birds and their eggs. The IRA will consider any new scientific information available and consider the development of conditions under which importation could be permitted (AQPM 1998-79). A technical issues paper for this IRA (psittacine birds and eggs) was released for public comment in December 1999. Eight stakeholders commented on the paper. Since that time the Risk Analysis Panel has met formally on a number of occasions: 10 April 2000, 22 June 2001, 20 July 2001, 22 February 2002, 28 March 2002, 1 and 2 May 2002, and April 20, 2005.

"It was originally anticipated that the draft IRA report would have been released some time ago. However, the panel has devoted considerable time to carefully considering the methods for evaluating

the pest and disease risks, including the release and exposure pathways. The panel has also focussed on making sure the analysis is soundly based and well documented.

The last panel meeting was held in Canberra on 1 and 2 May 2002 and the panel took the opportunity to visit a major breeding aviary outside Canberra to ensure that it is fully conversant with current biosecurity practice within industry, as well as to make sure that the consequences of a disease outbreak are considered in full in the IRA. The panel also made good progress on the draft IRA report and resolved a number of outstanding issues.

It is expected the panel will need to meet formally on at least one more occasion to finalise the draft IRA report. The next meeting is planned for 4-5 July 2002' (Animal Biosecurity Policy Memorandum 2002/25).

The AFFA Exotic Animal Diseases Bulletin, No. 83, reported that "*an import risk analysis is nearing completion for live psittacine birds... the draft IRA should be completed by March 2003*".

The Biosecurity Australia website for the IRA:Psittacines (last updated 16.4.07), indicates that a draft IRA is being prepared, though lists no further meetings nor policy memoranda.

<http://www.daff.gov.au/ba/ira/current-animal/psittacines>

The IMAAG (Import Market Access Advisory Group) publishes its recommendations for Biosecurity Australia regarding priorities for import proposals. 'Psittacine birds' are on the A list of the work list for September 2009 and July 2010.

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