



Customs and Agriculture post disappointing result on international mail screening

Parliament's Public Accounts Committee is conducting public hearings as part of its role of examining Australian National Audit Office reports.

On 30 October, the Department of Agriculture, as well as the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, will appear in front of the Committee to answer questions about ANAO Report 42: 'Screening of International Mail'.

In 2012–13, around 180 million international mail items arrived in Australia in the form of letters, express mail service and parcels. While all incoming international mail is subject to border controls, Agriculture and Customs cannot and do not screen all mail received. Rather, the border agencies seek to take a targeted approach that identifies the mail considered to be at higher risk of containing quarantine risks or prohibited imports.

"The findings of this report are disappointing to the Committee", Committee Chair, Dr Andrew Southcott MP, said. "The report noted that prior to 2008–09, the border agencies screened all incoming international mail. The report concluded that since that time, each agency has sought to develop risk-based strategies for targeting and screening higher risk cohorts of mail on arrival. However, neither agency is able to demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies."

While the agencies are looking to increase cooperation, at the time of the ANAO audit both agencies advised that collaboration currently refers only to one agency referring items of interest to the other if identified during their own independent screening activities. "The Committee looks forward to hearing how the agencies are developing strategies to further enhance cooperation, and improve the effectiveness of international mail screening", Dr Southcott said.

Further information about the inquiry, including the public hearing program, can be found on the Committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa. **The hearing will be broadcast live at: www.aph.gov.au/live.**

Details for the hearings are as follows:

Date and time Thursday, 30 October 2014, 10.45am-12.00 noon

Venue: Committee Room 2R1, Parliament House, Canberra

For media comment: please contact Committee Chair, Dr Andrew Southcott MP, on 0402579674 (Matthew Hee).

For information about the inquiry and public hearing: please contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4615, email jcpaa@aph.gov.au, or visit the Committee website <http://www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa>.