



Mr Stephen Palethorpe
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Palethorpe

I write in response to the request by the Committee that DAFF review the report *Advice on the risk estimation matrix used by DAFF Biosecurity as part of the Import Risk Analysis process* prepared by Mr Chris Peace as part of the Committee's inquiry into *The effect on Australian pineapple growers of importing fresh pineapple from Malaysia*. I note that Dr Radcliffe, Chair of the Eminent Scientists Group (ESG) was also asked to review Mr Peace's report and provided written comment to the Committee on 28 February 2013.

Mr Peace's report identifies two broad areas of risk assessment: the scientific and technical areas applicable to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement); and those organisations such as exporters and corporate entities that would apply risk management frameworks such as ISO:31000. It has been the policy of successive Australian Governments that Australia's risk assessments used to establish phytosanitary measures be consistent with the SPS Agreement. This is consistent with Australia's obligations as a signatory to the WTO. In conducting import risk analyses for plant products, specific guidance is provided by the internationally agreed International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) which are developed under the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). Other methods may be informative, but it is the SPS Agreement and the ISPMs that establish the basis for import risk analysis. In the case of animals and animal products, guidance similar to the IPPC is provided by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE). I note Australia's lead role throughout the development of the SPS Agreement.

The department notes that Mr Peace, while referring to the IPPC and some of its training materials, did not reference ISPM 2: *Framework for pest risk analysis* or ISPM 11: *Pest risk analysis for quarantine pests, including analysis of environmental risk and living modified organisms*, which provide substantial guidance on pest risk analysis for quarantine pests of plants. DAFF also notes that Mr Peace stated that chapter two of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code, published by OIE, does not define hazard, risk, risk analysis and risk assessment. Each of these terms is clearly defined in the Glossary of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code. The equivalent terms for the IPPC are defined in ISPM 5: *Glossary of phytosanitary terms*.

The purpose of the import risk analysis process is to assess pests of potential quarantine concern to Australia and to determine which require risk management measures. The process ensures that risk management measures are imposed on pests that pose an unacceptable risk, thereby mitigating against their entry, establishment and spread within Australia.

The matrix based approach to combining the likelihood of entry, establishment and spread of a pest or disease with the consequences if that were to occur first appeared in the draft import risk analysis report for non-domestic Felidae in February 2001. The current form and labelling of the matrix subsequently appeared in the Issues Paper for the generic import risk analysis for fresh pineapple fruit in August 2001. The current DAFF methodology for assessing biosecurity risks was the subject of substantial discussion between the Commonwealth Government and the states and territories. These discussions led to the formal endorsement of the current methodology through the Primary Industries Ministerial Council in 2002.

In his report, Mr Peace did not dismiss the DAFF risk analysis matrix, only suggested that it might be possible to simplify it from the current 6x6 format to a 5x5 format and that the terms used might be amended to minimise the potential for confusion or misinterpretation. However, he recognised that the range of likelihoods and consequences in a biosecurity risk analysis might justify the larger format of a 6x6 matrix. I note that Dr Radcliffe stated that the ESG, which has substantial experience with DAFF's risk assessments, was unconvinced that a five point scale had any great advantage or that the changes suggested by Mr Peace would result in a substantially different outcome.

Mr Peace commented that the DAFF matrix is not a true consequence/likelihood. DAFF's risk analysis process aligns with the relevant international standard for plant pest risk analysis, in this case ISPM 11, by considering the probability of introduction and spread, and the potential economic consequences. These are then combined using a matrix based approach as demonstrated in the IPPC training materials, and as endorsed in the annex to ISO:31010 as being 'strongly applicable' for assessing the level of risk. DAFF's matrix combines the probability (or likelihood) of entry, establishment and spread with the consequences if that sequence of events were to occur. This results in an assessment of unrestricted risk. If the unrestricted risk is 'low' or greater, specific risk management measures are necessary.

In recommending that the *Import Risk Analysis Handbook* (IRA Handbook) be revised to include details of techniques available to DAFF and a description of the risk estimation matrix, we believe that Mr Peace does not have a correct understanding of the purpose of the IRA Handbook. The IRA Handbook describes the administrative process for conducting import risk analyses, regulated steps under the *Quarantine Regulations 2000*, and relevant background information on domestic and international policies. To inform stakeholders and readers of import risk analysis reports, each report contains a detailed description of the methodology being employed and worked examples for combining likelihoods. Mr Peace acknowledges that a limitation to his advice is that '*we have not interviewed any DAFF risk analysts or other stakeholders*'. Such contact could have limited possible misunderstandings about the purpose of the IRA Handbook or the conduct of import risk analyses.

We note that Mr Peace also misquotes the department's recent import risk analysis for fresh decrowned pineapples from Malaysia as considering the probability of entry, establishment **or** spread. Instead the assessment considers the likelihood of entry, establishment **and** spread, as there is a sequence of events that must occur before a pest could become present in Australia and result in any consequences. This is the language that is used in the import risk analysis for fresh decrowned pineapples from Malaysia and in all contemporary risk analyses.

It is encouraging that Mr Peace expresses a positive view of the scientific information and the narrative describing the nature of each risk. Dr Radcliffe, on behalf of the ESG, also states that there have '*been very few occasions where we have been able to criticise the science or identify omissions of science*'.

As part of the continual efforts to develop and refine the methodology and practice of risk analysis, DAFF established the Australian Centre for Excellence in Risk Analysis (ACERA) in 2006. DAFF's work with ACERA has resulted in review and improvement in policies and operational programs, such as enhanced risk profiling, improved inspection techniques and performance measurement of passenger and mail interventions. As the committee would be aware, DAFF is also developing and seeking

stakeholder feedback on new biosecurity regulations and guidelines including the consideration of issues such as addressing regional differences in biosecurity status, independent scientific review of import risk analyses, the rights of appeal on the outcome of an import risk analysis and application of Australia's appropriate level of protection.

As the Australian Government department responsible for developing, implementing and enforcing the policies that protect Australia's favourable biosecurity status while facilitating the movement of people and goods across the border, DAFF is committed to the development of scientifically robust analyses through a transparent process. There is no substantive evidence that DAFF's risk analysis processes have not been effective in protecting Australia's favourable pest and disease status.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rona Mellor', written in a cursive style.

Rona Mellor
Deputy Secretary

8 March 2013