



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture**

**SECRETARY**

Ref: EC15-000174

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

Dear Ms Cardell

I am writing in relation to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit *Report 447 EPBC Act, Cyber Security, Mail Screening, ABR and Helicopter Program: Review of Auditor-General Reports Nos 32-54 (2013-14)*. The report contained the following recommendation directed to the Department of Agriculture:

**Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service review international methods in screening international mail to ensure Australia conforms to international best practice and report results of that analysis to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit.

The department's response to the recommendation is attached.

If you require further information regarding the response please contact Ms Raelene Vivian, First Assistant Secretary, Compliance on 02 6272 5445.

Yours sincerely

Daryl Quinlivan

28 August 2015



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture**

**EXECUTIVE MINUTE**

**on**  
**JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT**  
**REPORT 447**  
**Review of Auditor-General Reports Nos. 32-54 (2013-14)**

**Response to the recommendation**

**Recommendation No. 2**

*The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service review international methods in screening international mail to ensure Australia conforms to international best practice and report results of that analysis to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit.*

The Department of Agriculture (the department) notes the value of best practice to ensure screening methods are effective and efficient. There is no readily identifiable or specific international best practice methodology in relation to screening international mail.

We do know from our work on a number of import pathways that sound risk assessment methodologies underpin good practice in screening. While the international mail pathway presents particular challenges, compounded by the lack of electronic data, the department applies a well developed risk-based approach to mail screening that considers multiple factors to target high risk items.

The department assesses the effectiveness of its targeting approach using a random sampling program, the results of which are used to update screening targets. The Australian Border Force is working with the department to adopt a similar sampling program.

The department has engaged the Centre of Excellence in Biosecurity Risk Analysis to undertake analytical assessments of and recommend further improvements to current practices. This will complement further modeling work being undertaken in the department to assess the impact of varying levels of investment in managing biosecurity risk, such as levels of intervention.

The department will continue to work closely with the Australian Border Force and others, including Australia Post, to refine the screening of international mail and identify improvement opportunities.

This response has been developed in consultation with the Australian Border Force.

Signed by

Daryl Quinlivan  
Secretary

28 August 2015