



BORDER WATCH AUSTRALIA

PROVIDING RESEARCH & POLICY ON
CUSTOMS • QUARANTINE • IMMIGRATION



Wednesday, May 29, 2002

Re: PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA - JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT
Review of Australia's quarantine function by The Joint Committee of
Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA), chaired by Mr Bob
Charles, MP,

jcpa@aph.gov.au

The Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

This document includes this introductory letter as a submission and also, the attachment of a substantial document in support of statements made herein.

Why this submission has been made?

Border Watch Australia consists of concerned Australians, businesses and individuals, committee members, expert advisors and subscribers to a regular newsletter.

For some considerable period of time, concern has been raised that Australia's proclaimed border protection arrangements have fundamentally and catastrophically failed the Australian people. The results do not match the rhetoric. In fact the problems suffered by many Australians are in fact merely symptoms of the flaws in our border protection arrangements, these are not of course limited to Australia's quarantine function, they are not limited to the administration of the department, they are not limited to the advice given to either the Minister or the government, and they are not limited to 'another' silly line called the Quarantine barrier.

There terms of reference of this inquiry include coordination between various border agencies and the quarantine function, and with no more than a little intelligent examination of the true predicament of Australia's current position on any view a reasonable person will find they are for all intents and purposes non-existent.

On the whole, there are so many examples of such a statement that it is difficult to know where to begin, and equally as puzzling as to know how to explain individual difficulties with the system that has caused such problems to occur without the opportunity to detail these matter to the inquiry in person, and we seek that opportunity.

It is for that reason that this submission is only complete when considered in its entirety.

PROMOTING BETTER PROTECTION & TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

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This introductory letter, the attached document, and the opportunity to more fully explain these matters and detail these fundamental issues before the committee are offered as a complete submission for the members of this committee to examine not just the terms of reference of this specific enquiry, but more importantly the terms of reference of the Joint Public Accounts and Audit Committee.

Overview

The approach of the administration of both Quarantine and in fact all of Australia's federal agencies responsible for border control matters requires a political response to concerns raised in this submission. Political parties must make a determined effort to change both the direction and focus of Australia's border protection arrangements in order to significantly improve the results and outcomes experienced by the Australian people.

The identification of risks, and in fact the identification of the arrival of exotic pests and diseases as for other quarantine risks, is an after the fact system. Our nation's quarantine arrangements by and large measure rely on identifying things after they arrive and 'infect' Australia's domestic environment.

One blatant example of this is the new National school children's education program.

The government is now undertaking education campaigns to teach our children how to identify fire ants and the like, would it not have been more effective to prevent them arriving? Are there no other people other than year 5 and year 8 children that we can spend money on to protect the country from quarantine risks? Why aren't we spending money educating some group of people in protecting the nation to identify the risks and dangers and prevent the border incursion in the first place.

This is clearly a white flag from Quarantine that they cannot quarantine the country, why spend anything? Why not just give school children a class in identifying these diseases, and just put a pen through Quarantine.

Protection of the Australian community and securing Australia's borders, on any view, has not occurred except for token seizures and simplistic grandstanding solutions at showcase places.

What the nation needs is an effective border protection agency to keep these things from entering here . . . and that is a political matter, significantly also a cost matter and we seek the opportunity to address our concerns with your committee.



The Customs service are the organisation that has the prime carriage of Quarantine matters because they are the officers that refer goods and people to quarantine in almost all practical senses of the matter. It is the system of administration that overrides and corrupts all and any quarantine measure by leaving more 'holes' in Australia's border protections than it fills.

It is Customs officers who refer people and goods to Quarantine.

And when the Australian quarantine officers haven't got any work to do because their Customs counterparts have NOT referred goods or people to them then they ask Customs to put people at goods at their disposal on a 'RANDOM' basis so that they have something to do particularly with their new found x-ray machines at *some* airports.

Flawed procedures

It is significant to note that if their new found x-ray machines happen to turn up something that quarantine officers believe are things that are matters for Customs even though Customs x-ray machines via their operators have shown no interest then Quarantine officers have Customs officers examine the bags. Wouldn't it be nice to have a single (and effective) border control officers and only one bureaucracy being paid for through the public purse to administer one function.

It's a pity nobody wants to recognise a myriad of inappropriate bureaucrats administering a myriad of bureaucracies which have a NET result of letting the dye into the bucket (see explanation in the attached document).

Wouldn't it be nice if we had within our five and year 8 students, someone who could develop and implement a way of getting the dye out of the bucket rather than identifying the dye once in, of course a child could understand this but the approach taken to Australia's border protection has moved further towards open borders, self regulation and post crisis management that we are no longer enjoying the benefits of effective preventive or control structures.

Of course it is also significant to note that the current Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry had once a stint in charge of the Customs service who has the only responsibility for keeping the nation protected i.e. the dye out of the bucket and failed miserably. Perhaps we would suggest the only success of his term was to remain there long enough to accept their excuses and take them on board to be implemented in future portfolios. (The barriers and other such nonsense concepts).



Now we see this same Minister, influenced inappropriately, spending taxpayers money identifying the difference between water and dye with no resolve to address the absolutely devastating results of the current failed structure which continues to allow the dye to cause.

Either fix Customs or get rid of all agencies and implement a single border protection agency, the savings would be in the billions per year and the benefits could well exceed that figure.

As far as the proclaimed prosecutions as a success measure:

Prosecutions – it will be interesting to see how many Quarantine prosecutions exist because on any view of informed people – prosecutions and fines that are referred to by Mr. Truss are in fact Customs prosecutions.

Any body interested to the contrary might ask for not just the figures, but also the specific details of the cases referred to.

In fact the whole (alleged) current spending arrangements on AQIS are at best a joke and at worst one of the most expensive PR campaign and nonsense this country is likely to ever see, not only when you calculated the actual cost but also add in the failures.

“*Quarantine*” do almost nothing primarily to protect us at Australia’s borders (those showcase places of Mascot / Kingsford Smith and Brisbane Airport are exactly that - quoted as the success, but offer no real protection for our nation on the whole being merely showcases).

And as far as ‘**Administrative arrangements**’ to share information are concerned there are none, but to support that statement requires presentation of verbal and documentary evidence from a number of persons we would like to have appear before the Inquiry.



Executive Summary

What is needed is a whole of border approach – a systematic solution.

NOTES

Attachment:

1. Please also see attached document. “Minding the gate” which forms a part of this submission.
2. For the purposes of sending this as an electronic document, this copy of “Minding The Gate” does not contain the original attachments which were included in the hard copy of “Minding the Gate” submitted to the previous JCPAA Inquiry into Coastwatch, those attachments are however important to the evidence presented and should be made available to this Inquiry also

Submitted on behalf of the committee and subscribers of

Border Watch Australia

Michael D. Robinson
(Secretariat and National Spokesman)

Mr. Robert G. Spanswick
(Chair Expert Advisory Panel)



Terms of reference

The JCPAA's review will focus on:

- * the coordination of AQIS with other border control agencies;
- * the identification of potential risks to Australia and the application of resources to meet those risks;
- * the impact of international agreements on quarantine activities, including any proposed free trade negotiations;
- * the operations of AQIS that are beyond Australia's borders;
- * AQIS border operations;
- * monitoring and surveillance within Australia for breaches of the quarantine barrier;
- * the development of import risk analyses;
- * opportunities to increase public awareness of, and involvement in quarantine issues; and
- * any other issues raised by Audit Report 47, 2000-01, Managing for Quarantine Effectiveness.

Send the Committee your submission by Friday, 24 May 2002. Persons who make submissions should not release them without the Committee's agreement. The Committee will consider all submissions and may invite individuals and organisations which make them to give oral evidence at a public hearing.

Submissions should be in a form which allows them to be released into the public domain. It is preferred that submissions be lodged electronically via e-mail to jcpa@aph.gov.au or provided on computer disk. This will allow placement on the Committee's web site. Written submissions should be directed to:

The Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Further information and notes to assist in the preparation of submissions may be obtained from the Committee Secretariat by phone (02) 6277 4615, facsimile (02) 6277 2220 or from the Committee's website at: