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Your reference  
Our reference

19 July 2002

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

### **Review of Australia's Quarantine Function**

I refer to your invitation for submissions from agencies within the Queensland Government.

The Auditor-General's *Audit Report 47, 2000-01 Managing for Quarantine Effectiveness – Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia* has been reviewed and the following comments are offered as addition to those previously provided to the Review by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

Generally, the findings of the review and recommendations are supported. However, there are a few additional issues that we wish to bring to your attention, particularly in relation to quarantine operations and introduction of exotic marine pests into Australia.

Details are in the attachment.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

Chris Pattearson  
**Executive Director**

**Managing for quarantine effectiveness – Audit Report 47  
Queensland Environmental Protection Agency**

**Specific comments in relation to terms of reference:**

- **Identification of potential risks and the application of resources to meet those risks**

Para 3.39 acknowledges that yachts are considered high risk and are always inspected. It is agreed that yachts are high risk. However, under current quarantine policy, inspection regimes do not include inspection of the vessel hull for fouling organisms or any other risk assessment related to the vessel biofouling. This has the potential to allow exotic marine pests to be introduced via hull fouling. It was an international yacht that brought the Black Striped Mussel into Darwin marinas in 1998 and cost millions of dollars to eradicate after it was discovered about six months later.

Seized foreign vessels such as foreign fishing vessels and suspected illegal immigrant vessels pose an even greater risk. These vessels are entering or being brought into northern Australia and are not being subjected to inspection by AQIS. One such vessel was the source of two recent outbreaks of exotic marine pests in Trinity Inlet in north Queensland – still in the process of eradication.

Northern Territory has an interim agreement with DIMA and AFMA to pay for inspection by NT officers before these vessels are brought into Darwin. Western Australia and Queensland are currently negotiating similar agreements.

This surely is a quarantine function and should be carried out by AQIS.

- **AQIS border operations**

Para 5.4 identifies that the number of pests and diseases intercepted as increased (Figure 11) however Para 2.7 notes that there has been a marked increase in reported incursions over recent years (Figure 5).

Para 5.8 notes that the number of shipping vessels and yachts failing quarantine inspection shows a general decline since 1999. Again, it is important to note that the inspection regime misses the huge potential to intercept pests entering via vessel biofouling because vessel hulls are not subject to quarantine inspection or risk assessment. This means that currently 100% of quarantinable pests arriving as vessel biofouling enter Australia undetected.

Para 5.56 and 5.57 note that the ANAO found evidence of inconsistent decision making for vessel and container inspections between states. It is noted that quarantine measures are implemented by AQIS in some states and state agencies in others. Perhaps this could give rise to some variation.

It would make for a much better quarantine system in Australia if this issue were addressed.

- **The quarantine continuum - Monitoring and surveillance within Australia for breaches of the quarantine barrier**

Para 6.1 notes that monitoring and surveillance for outbreaks of exotic pests and diseases are a key part of post-border quarantine. The quarantine continuum and post-border quarantine operations were a key recommendation of the Nairn Report (Nairn et al, 1996).

This issue of quarantine continuum has been a contentious issue in relation to ballast water management for a long time. When international ballast water containing quarantinable pests is discharged at a wharf, the water and the quarantinable pests are dispersed in the port area. The same occurs when exotic biofouling species spawn and the larvae are dispersed. All other vessels, including Australian coastal vessels, taking up ballast water in that area at that time have a high probability of taking up the quarantinable pests with the ballast water – and translocating them to the next port. Currently AQIS undertakes risk management for international vessels but there is no continued post-border quarantine management of ballast water in Australian waters to prevent the translocation of the quarantinable pests brought in via international vessels.

Currently there is not adequate monitoring and surveillance to provide early warning of a possible incursion or outbreak in relation to marine pests. While the QRC recommended that AFFA give high priority to wharf surveillance (Para 6.7), there needs to be better general surveillance of the port environs. For example, had this occurred fire ants may have been identified much sooner instead of ~5 years later – after they had spread to many other locations. It is noted that ANAO found delays in AFFA's implementation of this recommendation of the QRC, despite the high priority placed on it.

- Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS)

One of the highest risk groups of vessels is not listed in the specific quarantine risks ie seized foreign vessels, either foreign fishing vessels or suspected illegal immigrant vessels. These vessels should be included in the NAQS.

It is noted (Para 6.14) that progress has been made in implementing all recommendations accepted by AFFA. Were there some not accepted by AFFA? It is also noted that agreements have been reached with Northern Territory and Western Australia. Queensland should be included in such agreements.

## **Recommendations**

In addition to the recommendations in the ANAO report, it is recommended that:

1. risks associated with vessel biofouling be addressed as a matter of urgency;
2. consideration is given to the quarantine continuum in relation to ballast water management for all vessels translocating quarantinable pests around Australia;
3. seized foreign vessels, including foreign fishing vessels and suspected illegal immigrant vessels, are subjected to comprehensive quarantine inspection by AQIS as part of the NAQS;
4. that inconsistency of decision making for vessel and container inspections between states is addressed; and
5. that Queensland is included in NAQS agreements.