

24 May 2002

Dr John Carter
The Committee Secretary
Joint Statutory Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Carter

JCPAA Enquiry into Quarantine Effectiveness

I am writing on behalf of the Quarantine and Exports Advisory Council (QEAC) in response to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit Review of Australia's Quarantine function.

QEAC notes and supports the objective of the enquiry to examine possible ways to ensure that Australia's quarantine barrier is effectively maintained.

This objective is essential taking into account Australia's unique position as a relatively pest and disease free nation and a supplier of the highest quality agricultural commodities and processed foods to an increasingly competitive global market. Thus QEAC is appreciative of the opportunity to lodge the attached submission for review by your Committee.

Please be advised that we would like to receive any additional reports or publications that may be produced by the enquiry.

QEAC wishes the JCPAA well with this important piece of work.

Yours sincerely

W. Murray Rogers
Chairman

**Submission by the Quarantine and Exports Advisory Council
to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
on the Review of Australia's Quarantine Function**

May 2002

INTRODUCTION

The Quarantine and Exports Advisory Council (QEAC) was established by the Federal Government in 1997 as part of its response to the report "Australian Quarantine – A Shared Responsibility" from the Nairn review of quarantine conducted in 1996. The terms of reference and current membership of QEAC are shown in Appendix 1.

QEAC meets five or six times per year, and at least one of these Council meetings takes place in a capital city outside of Canberra. QEAC members undertake familiarisation visits to locations throughout Australia which are concerned with quarantine and export inspection. These may include international airports, seaports, international mail exchanges, detector dog training centres, plant and animal quarantine stations, exotic pest surveillance sites and high-risk entry areas such as the Torres Strait.

Although QEAC was established as an independent advisory body to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Secretary of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA), and the Executive Director of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) are both full members of QEAC, which provides members with very direct contact with the agency responsible for monitoring the integrity of Australia's quarantine barrier. This allows QEAC to have the opportunity to influence quarantine and export inspection policy and procedures relevant to QEAC terms of reference, and to discuss and review areas of concern directly with the Director of Animal and Plant Quarantine, including the issues raised in this submission.

The Chairman of QEAC meets with Minister's Office staff following each meeting of QEAC and also submits a written report on each QEAC meeting. This enables highlighting of any major issues and recommendations which may have been discussed. A member of QEAC attends each of the AQIS/Industry Consultative Committee meetings as an observer, and meetings are held as required with groups such as the Quarantine Sub-committee of the National Farmers' Federation and the Executive Director of the Australian Food and Grocery Council.

This submission has been structured under the major areas of focus within the terms of reference for the JCPAA review of Australia's quarantine function, and has been compiled by members of QEAC other than the Secretary of AFFA, who is also the Director of Animal and Plant Quarantine, and the Executive Director of AQIS.

QEAC understands that AFFA will be lodging a separate submission to the JCPAA.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Importance of Quarantine**

- Australia's situation is unique in several aspects, particularly its position as a major food exporter combined with a low pest and disease status, providing significant market advantage.
- There is a need to reinforce messages from the Nairn Review
 - "Managed Risk"
 - "Shared Responsibility"
 - "Continuum of Quarantine"

- **Need to Recognise Developments in WTO / SPS etc**

- In particular, in the international environment, there is a need to emphasise transparency and scientific objectivity as a counter to any move to a more subjective basis for quarantine measures.
- Recognise difficulty to precisely define Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP)
- Establish a Centre of Excellence for quarantine risk management

- **Endorse Government Recognition of Importance of Quarantine**

- Need to ensure Australia assesses real risk (Scientifically based)
- Need to reiterate continuum (pre and post-border).

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

- Government support for the outcome of audits of animal and plant health skills and resources.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE COORDINATION OF AQIS WITH OTHER BORDER CONTROL AGENCIES

- 1.1 QEAC acknowledges the hard work and effort that both AQIS and the Australian Customs Service (ACS) have jointly put into working more closely and more cooperatively together in recent years, and QEAC supports the border agencies continuing to work in close co-operation. This especially applies to AQIS and the ACS, but could possibly include the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). (QEAC is aware that the Secretaries of both AFFA and DIMIA have an excellent working relationship with regular – sometimes daily – contact involved.)
- 1.2 Considerable progress has been made over the last one to two years with AQIS/ACS co-operation. This was especially evident during the Olympic Games in Sydney, and also with the increased border scrutiny following the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in the UK last year. AFFA also continues to develop closer working relationships with the State Quarantine Authorities, especially in the post-border areas, and QEAC supports further work in this important area.
- 1.3 Many of the recently appointed AQIS staff are graduates who may be capable of handling the border functions of AQIS and ACS, at some international entry points, with appropriate training. At airports and other process driven areas, with adequate training, either an ACS or AQIS barrier process worker could carry out the initial and basic screening. There appears to be scope in these areas to evaluate training people to deal with the concerns of both agencies, while clearly bearing in mind that the ACS aim is to detect wilful barrier incursions such as smuggling and narcotics trafficking, whereas AQIS deals primarily with unintentional incursions or inherent quarantine threats.
- 1.4 It should be noted that there is little that AQIS and ACS have in common when it comes to the pre and post-barrier issues, so the scope for added collaboration is greatest at the border (barrier).

Recommendation

- That AQIS, ACS, DIMIA and State Quarantine agencies be encouraged to continue to explore ways in which they can work co-operatively to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of border control. Having made this recommendation, QEAC is not advocating the amalgamation of AQIS and ACS into a “one badge agency”.
2. **THE IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL RISKS TO AUSTRALIA AND THE APPLICATION OF RESOURCES TO MEET THOSE RISKS**

- 2.1 QEAC has long been an advocate of applying identification, management and communication of risks to all aspects of quarantine. While this concept has been the basis of Import Risk Analysis (IRA), until recently it has not always been widely applied to some other areas of quarantine, especially at the border. (AQIS has had in place profiling processes based on risk analysis for many years but with a layer of judgement/experience above that, at border entry level). The reaction to the 2001 UK outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease saw new quarantine policy being introduced to satisfy public and political concerns. However, QEAC supports the view that the introduction of more appropriate risk management processes should be pursued at every opportunity.
- 2.2 AQIS has increased the number of staff well-trained in risk identification and management and QEAC's expectation is that these skills will be increasingly reflected in policies and procedures. QEAC was invited to join AFFA working groups to produce a major discussion paper on risk management which was subsequently presented at a QEAC Council meeting by AQIS senior staff.
- 2.3 It should be noted that a Departmental restructure in the year 2000 resulted in the IRA policy area being separated from AQIS and placed in a distinct group in AFFA known as Biosecurity Australia.

- 2.4 Risk identification and assessment measures should be applied consistently across all AFFA areas, including profiling and IRAs, wherever possible. However, it is understandable that the methods used for the latter appear to be more stringent and scientifically based than for other areas, given the importance and sensitivity of the issues involved. Thus it is not surprising that some misunderstanding and criticism surrounding the processes has been apparent. Integral to establishing routine risk protocols is the gathering and use of meaningful data on potential risks. QEAC considers this an area of high priority in order to apply resources in the most cost effective manner.
- 2.5 QEAC has observed the current initiative by AQIS to develop some quantitative measure of comparing risks across different pathways in order to apply resources appropriately. The collection and standardisation of data that this entails is supported, along with some meaningful basis for comparison. The latter is still under development and needs to include up-to-date risk comparison methodology.
- 2.6 Risk determinations done by Biosecurity Australia, whilst utilizing the growing expertise, could, due to a lack of full understanding of the process, be misinterpreted as a 'closed shop' approach. It is thus important that an appropriate amount of awareness and publicity is disseminated by Biosecurity Australia to ensure that it is seen as being independent, and professionally able to integrate the skills of risk analysis and management and science to ensure the comprehensive development of policies and protocols. QEAC is aware that a group of independent expert scientific advisors has been established which will further reinforce the independence and profile of Biosecurity Australia.
- 2.7 In addition, the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for quarantine risk management is proposed. This must be an independent centre to integrate the skills of risk analysis and management, economics and science to ensure comprehensive development of policies and protocols. It would further ensure establishment and continuation of the necessary intellectual capacity in risk management. QEAC believes the establishment of such a centre would be viewed positively internationally. Such a centre was also recommended at a recent Biosecurity seminar sponsored by the WA State division of the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering.
- 2.8 Optimal allocation of funds cannot be accomplished without the principles of cost-benefit analysis being applied. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) estimated in 2001 that large amounts of quarantinable material carried by international passengers and quarantinable mail items enter Australia each year. Lack of data precluded estimates for shipping and cargo. This raises the question, that with the known quantities alone, why are there not significant numbers of pest and disease incursions? The data on and/or classification of quarantinable material may be inaccurate and may not reflect quarantine risk. Continued attention must be given to the collection of such data before scarce resources can be directed to reduce risk, based on comprehensive benefit-risk analyses.

2.9 QEAC has actively promoted the need to balance resources between pre-border, border and post-border quarantine activities to get the best possible value for risk management. Whilst the extra allocation of funds in 2001 to border control is most welcome, it is felt that insufficient attention (and resources) has been given to the pre- and post-border areas. Whilst it is recognised that in addition to AFFA's role in pre-border, other agencies such as AusAID and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) have a role in education and capacity building offshore, and State Government and Animal and Plant Health Councils have responsibilities for biosecurity post-border, QEAC would like to see the Federal Government evaluate possible opportunities to become even more involved than is currently the case.

Recommendations

- That AFFA be encouraged to continue to apply identification, management and communication of risk principles to all aspects of quarantine control. QEAC strongly recommends that urgent attention be given to, and action taken, on processes and mechanisms to ensure better risk assessment. This is a fundamental and urgent priority.
- That an independent Centre of Excellence for quarantine risk management should be established. This Centre of Excellence would integrate the skills of risk analysis and management, economics and science, and would be given international credence.
- That Biosecurity Australia continue to expand its publicity efforts and programs to ensure that all its stakeholders are fully aware of its independence.

3. IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS ON QUARANTINE ACTIVITIES

- 3.1 AFFA has played a very important role in ensuring that Australia conforms with its obligations under the SPS Agreement. This is especially evident in the way in which Biosecurity Australia has produced a handbook outlining the IRA process. This has improved transparency and has gained international respect. The current update affords even greater transparency and accountability.
- 3.2 The transparency of the actual risk analyses will be enhanced by the publication of *Guidelines for Import Risk Analysis*, currently being revised by Biosecurity Australia. The *Guidelines* set out the technical detail underpinning Australia's approach to animal and plant IRAs, based on the OIE and IPPC international standards and guidelines and consistent with the SPS Agreement.
- 3.3 Australia, through Biosecurity Australia and AQIS, currently leads the world in using science as the basis for its determination of Import Risk Analysis, and therefore the determination of whether an import is allowable. However, an obstacle to transparency is clearly the extreme difficulty concerning the development of any definition of Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP) or indeed how it can be applied consistently across assessments. QEAC

understands that it is extremely difficult to develop, specifically for all applications, a definition for ALOP. However, some understanding appears to be required by stakeholders/ interested parties, as it is unclear how it is used within the IRA process, which in turn appears to decrease the overall transparency of the process. Communication of 'Managed Risk' would also seem to need additional emphasis.

- 3.4 Australia needs to maintain its emphasis on, and lead position in, the use of scientific assessment of quarantine risks for imports. This is particularly so in the face of movements elsewhere to raise the status of the Cartagena Protocol of the Convention on Biological Diversity as an alternative, more subjective approach.
- 3.5 Experience with the new IRA process suggests that the majority of IRAs — particularly those involving products that do not compete directly with Australian industry or provide new genetic material — are not controversial. Criticism of AFFA and the new IRA process has often come from industries that perceive their economic interests are threatened by entry of competing products from overseas if quarantine restrictions were lessened or removed. However, publicity generated by such industries has led to misinformed debate and some resentment towards the WTO and SPS Agreements by some sections of the media (and industries). It is important that the very positive role of the SPS Agreement in opening up new market access and maintaining market access for Australia's agricultural and food exports is better understood and more widely publicised. The overall impact of the SPS Agreement has been fairer and better market access for Australian exports with less prolonged market access negotiations.
- 3.6 AFFA has also been a world leader in the development of protocols for handling ballast water, which reduces the chances of exotic marine pest incursions. As an exporter of bulk minerals and bulk agricultural commodities, Australia is particularly vulnerable to marine pest incursions from the 150 million tonnes of ballast water being discharged in Australian waters each year. On 1 July 2001 Australia moved from voluntary to mandatory ballast water requirements, including the use of the Decision Support System (DSS) — a risk management tool designed to categorise ships as having high risk or low risk ballast water. The DSS assists with biological or scientific risk assessment on vessels intending to discharge ballast water in Australian waters or ports. Such vessels must undertake approved treatments/exchange on all tanks or those tanks assessed as high risk by the DSS. AQIS regulates compliance with the new arrangements. In implementing the mandatory ballast water management requirements, Australia is ahead of the International Maritime Organisation, which expects to finalise the International Convention for Ballast Water in 2003.

- 3.7 QEAC, in collaboration with AFFA, instigated a WTO related Forum in 2000 designed to increase the level of understanding within Australia of our obligations under the WTO agreements and their impact on both quarantine and export activities. A second Forum with similar objectives was held in October 2001. QEAC is committed to ongoing conferences to update and discuss WTO matters, quarantine and market access issues and Australia's international obligations, and the next is scheduled for September 2003.

Recommendations

- That strong support be given to using every available scientific avenue to develop a better understanding of ALOP.
- The benefits to Australia in being signatory to the WTO and SPS Agreement should be more widely publicised and promoted.
- Australia should continue to play an international role in the development of protocols for ballast water management.

4. THE OPERATIONS OF AFFA THAT ARE BEYOND AUSTRALIA'S BORDERS

- 4.1 There are several AFFA/AQIS activities which have relevance to the area QEAC describes as pre-border:

4.1.1 The IRA process is designed to ensure animal and plant products of high risk are either prevented from entering Australia or treated offshore to greatly reduce the threat prior to entry. Generally speaking QEAC regards the IRA process as being effective for offshore or pre-border risk management but wishes to emphasise that this merely marks the beginning of any ongoing process.

- 4.1.2 Third party inspection and co-regulation should continue to be encouraged. While much of this is undertaken within Australia, it is also done offshore eg, fumigation of plant material. QEAC favours as many as possible quarantine mitigation measures being done offshore and strongly believes more can be achieved, provided assurance can be given on the integrity and competence of the offshore third party providers. This could require more extensive overseas auditing by AQIS officers in some cases. It may be more appropriate and better accepted to assist in development of protocols for third party providers located offshore, and gain assurance these are being followed through commercial auditing arrangements and oversight of this activity. Regardless, ongoing commitment to continued auditing and quality control measures is required.
- 4.1.3 Many exotic pests and diseases that enter Australia do so via our close neighbours to the north, ie Eastern Indonesia, East Timor and PNG. AFFA/AQIS have a very good working relationship with these countries, and have done some excellent work, particularly in East Timor, PNG and Indonesia, through AusAID funding. QEAC believes AFFA should evaluate the opportunity to shift some resources from border control to pre-border activities. It is in our national interest to assist these countries with their capacity to diagnose, control and, where appropriate, eradicate significant plant and animal pests and diseases. Some assistance in this regard already takes place via the NAQS program and special projects involving AFFA staff funded by ACIAR for AusAID. QEAC would like to see AusAID even more active in this area. AusAID applications and assessments could possibly include a mandatory consideration of quarantine issues and risk mitigation. Special attention should be given to identifying major risks using thorough risk assessment methodology that will allow resources to be directed for maximum impact. Australia should assume a major role in teaching/advocating risk-based priority setting within foreign projects. Pre-border activities provide fundamental minimisation of risk with the flow-on effects of reduced incidents at the Australian border and post-border stages. It is further recommended that benefit-cost analyses be undertaken to determine the quantum of the flow-on effects.
- 4.1.4 A targeted communication program for airline passengers entering Australia, to encourage them not to bring prohibited goods, is consistent with the philosophy of leaving high risk products offshore. AQIS continues to pursue this direction with ongoing programs and publicity as there are still a large number of prohibited products entering Australia, highlighting the need to continue and enhance the awareness program. Additional and continued attention must also be given to communication of Australia's import protocols and compliance obligations to overseas exporters and cargo management entities. Focussed direction of quarantine awareness, advocating compliance with Australia's import conditions, must remain a priority. Data currently collected as a result of the recent increased

quarantine initiatives should assist AQIS in determining the origins of major risks.

Recommendations

- That AFFA has a greater role in pre-border quarantine areas, and the Australian Government evaluate the concept of directing a greater proportion of AusAID funds, to assisting near neighbours to strengthen their capacity to diagnose, control and eradicate plant and animal pests and diseases.
- That AQIS continue to increase the effectiveness of its educational awareness programs for international travellers, visitors and traders to reduce the risk of prohibited plant and animal-based products from entering Australia.

5. AQIS BORDER OPERATIONS

- 5.1 The Government via AQIS invests a large amount of its resources into the border operation and, it is to their credit that the green channel leakage surveys carried out at airports after quarantine assessment indicate that incursions of risk materials have halved over the last three years. However, the ANAO estimates that there is still a large number of prohibited goods entering Australia undetected. Data is needed on the leakage rate at other barrier points such as sea and air cargo. This is now being addressed by AQIS.
- 5.2 QEAC is encouraged that the Government via AQIS is putting more resources into processes that reduce the leakage rate of prohibited items entering Australia.
- 5.3 Many of the prohibited animal and plant products may in fact be of very low risk. Until better data is available on the extent of this risk it is difficult to be sure that the recent massive injection of additional resources is aimed at the area of highest risk. QEAC would like to recommend strongly that urgent attention be given to, and action taken, on risk assessment as outlined under the heading “Identification of potential risks to Australia”.
- 5.4 The increased use of detector dogs and sophisticated screening technology to check mail and incoming passenger luggage, in addition to passenger profiling, are all commendable Government initiatives. Ongoing commitment to these initiatives, but with a continually improving targeted approach, is required. It is recommended that profiling/risk assessment procedures be used on sea and air cargo entering Australia as these may pose high risks of pest and/or disease entry. Resources must be committed to intelligence gathering for effective profiling. QEAC firmly believes that the addition of funds committed to border operations marks a unique opportunity to gather the necessary data to enable thorough risk assessments and appropriate action at all points of the quarantine continuum.
- 5.5 The current high intervention levels for High Volume / Low Value (HVLV) consignments, air and sea container and other commodities provide a good

opportunity to gather and analyse data to target risks and better allocate resources. The introduction of quarantine risk profiling engines in commercial IT systems used in the conveyance of goods to Australia should be encouraged.

- 5.6 The current initiatives aimed at the Government's target of external inspections of 100% of sea and air cargo containers, whilst addressing some concerns, do not appear to address quarantine risks in a fully cohesive, scientific and comprehensive manner.

Recommendation

- That action being taken by AQIS to identify areas and items of greater risk at the border (sea and air) must continue to be encouraged so that inspection resources could be deployed with greater effectiveness and efficiency.

6. MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE WITHIN AUSTRALIA FOR BREACHES OF THE QUARANTINE BARRIER

- 6.1 One of the central themes of the 1996 Quarantine Review was the concept of the continuum of quarantine which emphasised the need for an effective and nationally co-ordinated post-border activity. QEAC has long been a strong advocate of the value of monitoring and surveillance at the post-border level.
- 6.2 No matter how many resources are applied to border (barrier) inspection, it is not possible to eliminate the entry of some quarantinable plant or animal material into Australia via passengers, luggage, cargo, or vessels, in addition to air or water borne routes. It is therefore critically important for Australia to have the capacity to rapidly and accurately detect and manage the presence of any exotic plant or animal pest or disease incursion.
- 6.3 Currently AFFA is involved in monitoring and surveillance mainly through the activities of its Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health group (led by the Chief Veterinary Officer) and through the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) section of AQIS. There is also restricted monitoring around major points of entry by sea and air. States have the major responsibility for plant and animal pest and disease monitoring and some degree of national coordination is conducted by the Animal and Plant Health Councils.
- 6.4 QEAC supports AFFA having a greater involvement in the conduct and co-ordination of monitoring and surveillance at a national level, in collaboration with the States and Territories, especially around designated risk areas of entry. This would be an extension of the role currently played by NAQS in post-border surveillance.

- 6.5 There is mounting evidence that Australia is starting to encounter a skills and resource shortage in some key areas which are relevant to our national capacity to detect, control and/or eliminate exotic plant and animal pests and diseases. (Work undertaken during a review of Australia's capacity to handle outbreaks of either FMD or BSE confirmed this situation.)
- 6.6 The gaps that are starting to emerge in the detection and diagnosis of plant and animal pests and diseases appear to be the result of a reduction in State and Territory Government support and the trend towards privatisation of diagnostic and field services.
- 6.7 There is a definite need for a nationally coordinated audit to be conducted on the status of animal and plant health skills and resources, especially as they relate to our monitoring, surveillance and diagnostic capabilities. Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia have commenced skills reviews with Commonwealth assistance but their resources are limited and greater support for this activity is required from Commonwealth agencies such as AFFA.
- 6.8 There is strong opinion that greater scrutiny is required on many of the imported exotic plants because of the capacity for some to develop into weeds of economic importance.
- 6.9 There are some pest and disease incursions, eg fire ants, which do not always fall within the province of primary industry responsibilities at the State level, yet they have the potential to be important community problems. The current State, Territory and Federal Government surveillance responsibilities do not cater for such incursions and some innovative solutions for funding are required as it is difficult to apply on a "user pays" principle for this activity.

Recommendations

- **Subject to Constitutional and Legislative limitations, AFFA should play an even greater role in the post-border area of quarantine, with monitoring and surveillance for animal and plant pest and diseases.**
- **A nationally co-ordinated audit should be conducted to determine the status of both animal and plant health resources needed for the effective and efficient conduct of monitoring, surveillance and diagnostic capabilities.**
- **That the Government should give assistance identified as required in audits of the status of animal and plant health skills, and resources for monitoring, surveillance and diagnostic capabilities.**

7. THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMPORT RISKS ANALYSIS

- 7.1 QEAC believes that the current improvements in the IRA communication and consultation process with earlier involvement of industry and States/Territories should lead to better acceptance of the outcomes. It should also be recognised that the Government carries out independent economic assessments of potential market impact. The social and economic impact of IRA decisions on specific Australian industries and Regional economics and communities, needs to be given greater attention by Government.
- 7.2 One of the contentious issues with the revision of the IRA process is how the proposed Science Expert Advisory Panel will operate and what impact this will have on appeals to the Import Risk Analysis Appeal Panel (IRAAP). These points must be clarified and communicated to stakeholders and interested parties as a matter of priority.
- 7.3 Due to a perceived lack of resources and the increasing complexity of IRAs, a serious backlog of IRAs is already apparent thus resulting in a backlog of work in this important area. In turn, the efficiency of the process and Australia's commitment to undertaking timely IRAs would/will be jeopardised. AFFA is urged to consult with other countries which are attempting to manage similar workloads and avoid exacerbating the situation.
- 7.4 The IRA process must not be undermined or constrained by lack of resources to employ expertise relevant to a particular IRA. AFFA must effectively utilise in-house and outside, national and international, experts in the conduct of IRAs. Adequate resources must be made available to expedite this.
- 7.5 To harmonise with international standards, the WTO dispute settlement process should be used as the basis of the Australian IRA process with any deviation clearly explained.

Recommendation

- That AFFA be asked to address the means by which the IRA procedures could be made more efficient, realising this may involve additional resources.
- That Biosecurity Australia take note of the suggestions made by QEAC regarding the IRA process, particularly the need to clarify the role of the proposed Science Expert Advisory Panel, and early and effective consultation with States, Territories and industry.

8. OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS OF, AND INVOLVEMENT IN, QUARANTINE ISSUES

- 8.1 QEAC has constantly stressed the importance of increasing public awareness. The initiatives that QEAC has promoted include:
- National Quarantine Awards;

- WTO/Trade Forums;
- QEAC web page;
- Extension of and commitment to Industry/AQIS Consultative Committees;
- QEAC meetings outside of Canberra to provide greater industry contact;
- Participation in conferences, seminars, etc and publication of quarantine-related papers in refereed and popular press;
- Emphasising the importance of quarantine for protecting Australia's environment; and
- Total encouragement and support for involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in quarantine.

8.2 AQIS has an ongoing program that seeks media exposure. Good examples of such work are the recent "Island Life" feature that was aired on national television and the "new look" AQIS Bulletin that is distributed widely throughout Australia. There are many other examples of media and public relations work carried out by AQIS staff on targeted areas on a regular basis.

8.3 All of these activities have been supported by AFFA, but QEAC is of the opinion that public awareness can continually be improved or emphasised, and that community acceptance of the "shared responsibility" and "partnership" concept is still at an unacceptably low level.

8.4 The unfortunate potential of bioterrorism, that could affect any person or industry, will rapidly increase public awareness levels. Additionally, the horrific outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in the UK had the effect of creating a great deal of public awareness on the need for effective national quarantine practices.

8.5 Australia's international leadership role in IRA's should be publicised more forcefully at every opportunity.

Recommendation

- Industry, environment agencies and the media should be strongly encouraged to stimulate public awareness on the importance of efficient and effective quarantine practices at every possible opportunity.

QEAC SUPPORT FOR THE JCPAA REVIEW PROCESS

Members of QEAC stand ready to assist the JCPAA review process beyond the submission of this paper, and are available to meet with members of the JCPAA should any additional information be required.