

AFFA RESPONSE TO JCPAA QUESTION ON NOTICE TAKEN ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2002

ISSUE

The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry was asked (Hansard, p320) to examine the transcripts of the JCPAA hearing in Melbourne on 3 September 2002 and provide a written response on the Tasmanian salmon growers' concerns of apparent inconsistency in the level of quarantine protection and with international standards of a particular fish disease.

BACKGROUND

From the Hansard transcripts, Mr Owen Carrington-Smith, Chairman, Tasmanian Salmonid Growers Association (TSGA) stated, in the context of pilchards used as bait, that 'IHN has been discovered in a population off California'. Infectious haematopoietic necrosis virus (IHNV) is a quarantine concern for salmonids and risk management measures are in place. It has not been reported in pilchards or mackerel and therefore there are no quarantine restrictions.

It appears Mr Carrington-Smith was referring to viral haemorrhagic septicaemia virus (VHSV)

- . in 2001 there were reports of VHSV detected in pilchards caught off the coast of southern California
- . the TSGA has previously raised its concerns with Biosecurity Australia regarding VHSV
- . interim measures for pilchards relating to VHSV were announced in May 2002.

Current import controls on VHSV are based on the 1999 import risk analyses (IRAs) of non-viable salmonids and non-salmonid marine finfish, which included an evaluation of the quarantine risk associated with VHSV. At that time, pilchards were not considered to pose a significant VHSV risk and no measures were applied.

Following the discovery of VHSV in pilchards and mackerel from Californian waters, interim import controls on pilchards and mackerel (all species belonging to the genera *Sardinops* and *Scomber*) were introduced in May 2002, pending completion of a more detailed policy review by Biosecurity Australia.

The interim policy for whole (head-on), round (not eviscerated) fish, is consistent with the 1999 IRAs. It allows importers to propose arrangements that would allow safe importation of product, to the satisfaction of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and Biosecurity Australia. Arrangements accepted to date are based on the application of a range of risk management measures including restriction to use in warmer waters or complete thawing of the product prior to end-

use, combined with pre-export fish inspection, processing and health certification requirements.

Those arrangements that have been approved, are on the basis of their consistency with Australia's conservative approach to the management of biosecurity risks. The interim measures were introduced despite pilchards being imported over the last decade without the known introduction of VHSV into Australia. As such, the measures reflect a very cautious approach.

International standards are guidelines and, may or may not meet Australia's appropriate level of protection (ALOP). Biosecurity Australia evaluates the standards on a case-by-case basis. The international standard for VHSV is evisceration of fish and meets the required level of protection. However, Australia's domestic legislation and international agreements oblige Biosecurity Australia to consider least trade-restrictive measures, consistent with our ALOP. In the case of the interim policy, it was determined that there were alternative, less trade-restrictive measures for VHSV that would still meet Australia's ALOP, including complete thawing of fish prior to end-use in combination with various pre-export requirements.

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The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry was asked to provide a written response (Hansard, p321) to comments from the Queensland Environment Protection Agency that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) had not responded to a request for cooperation in developing a protocol for inspecting and handling apprehended illegal entry vessels.

BACKGROUND

Ms Pauline Semple, of the Queensland Environment Protection Agency (EPA) advised AFFA during the week of 6-10 May that it wished to complete, as a matter of urgency, a state-based protocol to manage the risks posed by bio-fouling on apprehended suspected illegal entry fishing and people smuggling vessels. She indicated she would like something in place before June 2002.

The protocol is intended to provide guidelines for relevant agencies on the EPA's requirements for inspecting and assessing the marine pest risks apprehended boats may pose to coastal ports, as well as outline suitable mooring locations, inspection procedures and response officer contact details. In completing the protocols, agreements also need to be reached on the range of appropriate costs that can be charged to the Commonwealth agencies for the costs of the inspections and vessel management.

Following discussions between AFFA staff and Ms Semple on which Commonwealth agencies would be best placed to assist her, Ms Semple circulated a draft of a protocol to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) on 21 May 2002. The draft was largely based on an interim protocol that the Northern Territory had already in place for the handling of apprehended illegal entry vessels brought into its jurisdiction.

DIMIA advise that the Queensland EPA was contacted by phone around 4 June and 11 June 2002, indicating a willingness by DIMIA to cooperate on developing the protocols. The DIMIA response also raised a number of issues and resource requirements that would need to be put in place, including EPA nominated inspection sites, provision of trained inspection divers and media protocols.

AFMA advise that it responded directly Ms Semple by e-mail on 29 May 2002, providing a clear indication of its willingness to assist as well as its ongoing concern that there were no arrangements in place in Queensland to address the risks posed in directing apprehended vessels to port. In their response, AFMA provided further advice of the resources that the Queensland EPA would need to put in place to make the protocols effective. This particularly included the availability of trained inspection divers on Thursday Island, which is the only port AFMA is using at this time for apprehended illegal fishing boats. When AFMA contacted the Queensland

EPA in late July to follow up progress on the matters raised, it was advised that the matter had not been progressed further due to EPA leave and training requirements. AFMA has advised that the Queensland EPA has not made any further contact with AFMA and the current version of the draft protocols were as first circulated in May 2002.

In a related point, AFFA would also like to clarify and correct information provided to the Committee at its last hearing in Canberra on Friday, 20 September 2002. At those hearings Mr Daryl Quinlivan noted the work being done by the Commonwealth and the States/NT to develop more consistent national protocols to address the risks posed by illegal entry vessels as well as recreational yachts.

We would like to point out that the interim protocols that have been put in place by the Northern Territory (NT) and Western Australian (WA) are currently limited to apprehended illegal fishing vessels as well as people and smuggling vessels and do not encompass internationally travelled recreational yachts. Similarly the incomplete Queensland protocol does not address recreational yachts.

The National Introduced Marine Pests Consultation Committee (NIMPCG) identified the development of a more consistent national approach to the risks posed by illegal entry vessels as a priority. At its meeting in November 2001 it was agreed that Queensland, the NT and WA should develop a national protocol, based on the two existing interim protocols, that once cleared, could be endorsed by relevant Ministerial Councils. NIMPCG has been advised that the development of the national protocol was delayed, and that a draft is expected to be provided in December 2002.

AFFA is conscious of the need to develop suitable protocols for yachts travelling to and around our coast and see these protocols as offering a potential management tool to reduce the risks these boats pose. AFFA staff have periodically followed this matter up with State and NT colleagues and encouraged an approach to the development of the national protocols that would allow them to form the basis of operational approaches to dealing with the risks posed by recreational yachts.