

19 March 2013

The Secretary
Public Works Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: pwc@aph.gov.au

Re: ASF Submission to Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for a post-entry quarantine facility at Mickleham, Victoria

The Australian Seed Federation (ASF) is the peak industry body for the Australian seed industry at the local, state, national and international level. The ASF website is located at www.asf.asn.au

As the CEO of the ASF I have been permitted to make this submission on behalf of ASF members who import seed for sowing and on behalf of the broader ASF membership.

I submit the following comments

Capacity

The stated need for the new facility is to replace the five current DAFF operated sites that are near the end of their useful lives and existing commonwealth leases cannot be renewed beyond the short-term.

The ASF has become aware that some privately operated and State Government operated post entry quarantine facilities are going to close. For example, the ASF is alarmed at the Queensland Government's sudden exit from its Post Entry Quarantine (PEQ) facility at Eagle Farm. With new capacity many years from development, this closure places a great burden on the seed industry and risk to the broader tropical agricultural industry.

Access to overseas varieties and germplasm is vital to the agricultural and horticultural industries of Queensland. Without sufficient quarantine facilities to service industry's needs, variety development will stall; an outcome that is not welcome.

The ASF is currently urging the Queensland government to review their decision for immediate closure and consult with Industry on how the interests of industry in this State can be adequately provided for in both the short and longer term.

The closure of the PEQ facilities like Eagle Farm has a significant implication. In the short term there will be an under capacity to meet the need for screening of imported high-risk plant species into Australia through post entry quarantine. The new DAFF Biosecurity run facility in Victoria is not scheduled to come on line before October 2015 and current capacity does not appear to allow for the loss of capacity provided by privately operated and State Government operated facilities such as Eagle Farm.

Can the Public Works Committee confirm that the new facility can also meet capacity lost through the closure of privately operated and State Government operated facilities in the short and medium term?

Quarantine restrictions

The ASF fully supports the application of appropriate quarantine strategies to prevent the introduction of exotic pests and diseases that would have serious economic or environmental consequences. However, we believe that some of the current quarantine restrictions do not take account of new detection and control techniques that results in species being subjected to more rigorous quarantine restrictions than is necessary. This increases costs for importers, the Government in providing facilities and reduces the import of improved genetics which in turn reduces agricultural productivity improvement.

Introduced germplasm captures breeding gains made overseas and provides an essential source of new genetics and traits for local breeders. As an example, the US spends in excess of \$500 million per year on plant breeding and over a billion dollars on genetic improvement in general. We can capture benefits from their investment at a fraction of that cost provided we have adequate access to efficient, cost effective post entry quarantine. We believe this half of the risk equation is all too often ignored in disease risk assessments.

In addition, an unnecessarily restrictive quarantine regime stifles the Australian seed industry's opportunity to provide contra season seed production services for the Northern hemispheres seed industries. Both New Zealand and Chile have developed profitable trade servicing this market. Australia is well positioned to participate; what restricts us are slow and onerous quarantine restrictions. We believe that for numerous species we have natural comparative advantages, the only element we lack is a timely and efficient post entry quarantine process.

The ASF believes that a more effective post entry quarantine regime is possible and in fact would in all likelihood cost the Commonwealth less than the current approach and would certainly lead to Australian Agriculture capturing more of the benefits of genetic advances made globally. Key elements of an improved regime would include

- Science based risk assessments that;
 - take account of both the costs and the savings from outbreak prevention.
 - examine alternative strategies to achieve an acceptable level of risk mitigation, including new detection technologies.
- A high level of co-operation between DAFF Biosecurity and the other stakeholders, including the seed industry.
- Resolution with the States regarding the division of responsibility for the provision of the various post entry quarantine services including post entry quarantine facilities, pathology services etc.
- DAFF Biosecurity being able to articulate present and defend the scientific basis for specific quarantine restrictions.
- Elimination of regional and species by species inconsistencies in the application of quarantine rules.

An effective and efficient quarantine regime is vital to the Australian seed industry, we support science based quarantine rules but strongly believe the government should not burden Industry with unnecessary costs or restrictions.

Yours sincerely

Bill Fuller

CEO

Australian Seed Federation