



Australian Government

Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Senator Glenn Sterle
Chairman
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Sterle

In the course of reviewing the transcript of my responses to questions during the Additional Estimates hearing conducted by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee (the Committee) on 23 February 2009, I have determined that my answers to two of Senator Milne's questions may have been incomplete.

The relevant exchange is at pages 93 to 95 of the Proof Hansard:

Senator MILNE—Thank you for that. I wanted to move onto the question of imported flowers. There has been quite a bit in the papers recently saying that there is a biosecurity threat because imported flowers are not being treated according to AQIS requirements. Can you just update this committee as to what the situation is and whether, in fact, imported flowers have been found to be able to be propagated, as has been reported.

Mr Chapman—Moreover, in the three weeks leading up to Valentines Day this year we did test 100 per cent of incoming cut flower consignments. That was over 60 consignments using the tests that we have agreed with Biosecurity Australia to manage the quarantine risk. They all passed. So in other words none of them were able to be propagated.

Senator MILNE—Yes. The serious allegation is that imported flowers coming from countries such as India, Columbia, Zimbabwe, Ecuador and China are not treated according to the AQIS requirements. Is there any basis for that claim? Has Biosecurity Australia or anyone gone in recent times and had a look to see whether they are actually treating those flowers according to AQIS requirements ?

Mr Chapman—As I said, in the three weeks preceding Valentines Day this year we tested 100 per cent of consignments. That was 60 consignments in all. We tested them according to the protocols that we have agreed that are necessary to meet the biosecurity risk. All flowers were clearly treated, because none of them could be propagated by those propagation methods.

I wish to advise the Committee that since the hearing, I have been made aware that not all of the propagation tests conducted on the 60 consignments of imported cut flowers during the period leading up to Valentines Day have been finalised. All of the tests that have been finalised have verified that those consignments met quarantine requirements.

I apologise for supplying incomplete information at the hearing, and for any misunderstanding that may have arisen as a result. It would be appreciated if this additional information could be brought to the attention of the members of the Committee.

If you have any questions on this matter, please contact me on 6272 5445.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Chapman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Tim Chapman
Executive Manager
Quarantine Operations Division