

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 01

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Bananas Import Risk Analysis

Hansard Page: 35 (26/05/08)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—Let's make it very clear: can you please confirm whether Biosecurity Australia has received any advice either from the Bureau of Resource Sciences or from any member of the IRA team that there was no error in the assessment for black sigatoka?

Mr Cahill—I am not aware of any view expressed by the Bureau of Resource Sciences that there was an error in the modelling related to the assessment for black sigatoka—or, indeed, by any individual member of the IRA team.

Senator BOSWELL—Can you check that and come back to us.

Mr Cahill—I am happy to take that on notice.

Senator BOSWELL—This is also important because we are getting conflicting advice here. I have had this experience with Biosecurity before. I am not suggesting that you would do it, but someone did do it and paid a pretty heavy price for it. I do not want it to happen again. I will just repeat the question to be very clear: can you please confirm whether Biosecurity Australia has received any advice, either from the Bureau of Resource Sciences or from any member of the IRA team, that there was an error in the assessment of black sigatoka? I want a definite yes or no answer, not 'I'm not aware', or, 'I didn't hear'. I want the exact—

CHAIR—Senator Boswell, I will say before Mr Cahill does answer it that, if he does not know and agrees to take it on notice, I think that is fair.

Answer:

Biosecurity Australia has received no advice from the Bureau of Rural Sciences or from the IRA team that there was an error in the assessment for black sigatoka in the revised draft import risk analysis report that was issued for comment by stakeholders on 1 March 2007.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA02

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: 103 (26/05/08)

Senator Scullion asked:

Mr Nunn—We will know the outcome of the tests and then it will be a matter for Aquatic CCEAD to determine whether it is worth going for eradication or continuing with control programs, informal controls within Australia, if it were found to be an exotic strain.

Senator SCULLION—Is it possible to inform the committee of the results of the tests when they come out? That is all we would seek to know.

Answer:

Yes. The Australian Animal Health Laboratory in Geelong is conducting the tests and the results will be provided via the Aquatic CCEAD when received.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 03

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Didymo

Hansard Page: 107 (26/05/08)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—If it was on a felt boot—that would be pretty much the thing we would be looking for, the worst item, from someone walking on didymo rocks with a felt boot, which is a standard wader used in North America—how long would we expect it to last and be viable?

Ms van Meurs—I would have to take that on notice, but it is about 24 hours.

Answer:

Didymo cells on a felt boot may remain viable for as long as the item retains moisture.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 04

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Fruit fly outbreaks in Victoria

Hansard Page: 111 (26/05/08)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—So there has been no fruit fly found in the Mildura area?

Ms van Meurs—There has been in the past. I do not think there is an international outbreak considered at the moment but I would have to take that on notice.

Senator McGAURAN—Have you had any interest or concerns from our international markets such as the Asian markets in regard to this outbreak?

Ms van Meurs—I am not quite sure which outbreak you are referring to or whether there is an outbreak. We will have to take that on notice.

Senator McGAURAN—You do not think there is a fruit fly outbreak?

Ms van Meurs—It depends, again, on the export market that you are referring to. It might be an interstate outbreak. The Riverland might consider it an outbreak, New Zealand might or the USA might, but I am not sure. We would have to take that on notice as to which fruit fly outbreak you are referring to.

Answer:

a. So there has been no fruit fly found in the Mildura region?

An answer has been provided by Product Integrity, Animal Plant (PIAPH) as part of Question on Notice PIAPH 16.

b. Have you had any interest or concerns from our international markets such as the Asian markets in regard to this outbreak?

No.

c. You do not think there is a fruit fly outbreak?

An answer has been provided by PIAPH as part of Question on Notice PIAPH 16.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 05

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: National Sentinel Hive Program

Hansard Page: 128 (26/05/08)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—So in 2005 there were the recommendations of the report.

Can you give us a thumbnail sketch of what those recommendations were?

Dr Martin—It was just looking at whether there should be an increased number of ports. It made some recommendations about which ports should be done and whether there should be an increase in the number of hives at the ports.

Senator SCULLION—Was there to be an increased number of hives at the ports?

Dr Martin—Yes, that is my understanding.

Senator SCULLION—And an increased number of ports to be covered?

Dr Martin—I think so.

Senator SCULLION—I will find out at some other stage.

Dr Martin—I can provide you with a copy of the report.

Answer:

A copy of the 'Review of the National Sentinel Hive Program' (June 2005) is attached.

[BA 05 attachment]

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 06

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Queen bees

Hansard Page: 130 (26/05/08)

Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—I will very briefly return to the queen bees and the escorts. How do they meet their end?

Do they hit them with a hammer? What happens?

CHAIR—Ethyl acetate.

Mr Cahill—That sounds like a technical question to me.

Dr Martin—I cannot say that I have seen that. We might have to take that on notice.

Senator NASH—Could you take that on notice? I am quite interested if they have a humane finish to their sad trip.

Dr Martin—They need to examine the bees under the microscope for the varroa.

Senator NASH—Thank you. If you could come back to us, that would be great.

Answer:

The imported bees are killed by freezing.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 07

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Is it true that quarantine restrictions were imposed on IHHNV exotic strain

- (a) before it was proven that the strain was absent from Australia,
- (b) without carrying out challenge tests to prove the strain was harmful to Australian species; and
- (c) before BA was confident that tests to differentiate the strains existed?

Answer:

(a) No. Australia is considered to be free of exotic strains of IHHNV as demonstrated by surveillance and reporting to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

(b) Yes. Scientific literature provides evidence that exotic strains of IHHNV can result in disease in crustacean species of economic and environmental importance to Australia.

(c) No. There are tests which differentiate between Australian and overseas strains.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 08

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Don't OIE guidelines specify these fundamental requirements to justify quarantine restrictions?

Answer:

The OIE has a number of Codes and Manuals that are primarily reference guides for international trade. OIE does not specify fundamental requirements; rather it supports a number of principles to underpin quarantine measures. These include taking into account the nature of the commodity and the animal health status of the exporting country; compliance with WTO obligations; use of the latest scientific information; and an assessment of risks. Further details are available from the OIE website (<http://www.oie.int>).

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Question: BA 09

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Is it true that the (so-called) exotic strain of IHHNV has now been identified in Australian farmed prawns using laboratories accredited by BA?

If so, why hasn't BA recommended to AQIS that testing for that disease be immediately dropped?

Answer:

There has been a claim made that an exotic strain of IHHNV has been identified in Australian farmed prawns. Consistent with established national procedures for exotic disease investigation, the Aquatic Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (AqCCEAD) is investigating this claim. This investigation will need to be completed, and if any exotic agent were to be confirmed as present, AqCCEAD would need to determine what if any response might be taken. AqCCEAD would need to deem that neither eradication nor a control program were feasible before consideration would need to be given to any amendment to Australia's import requirements including testing.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 10

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn Testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Doesn't BA's lack of action expose Australia to WTO compensation claims, as well as needlessly damaging Australian businesses?

Answer:

No. No action is possible, or scientifically supported, until the Aquatic Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (AqCCEAD) investigation is completed.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 11

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Isn't it true that alternative, post border controls would significantly mitigate the risk of prawn disease incursion and reduce the need for costly quarantine restrictions?

For instance, doesn't the greatest risk arise from the remote possibility of prawn farmers (negligently) feeding prawns (local or imported) to their own stock?

Answer:

The revised draft IRA report on prawns and prawn products, issued in November 2006, acknowledges there are gaps in post-border measures to control the exposure of imported prawns to Australian prawns and other crustaceans through their use as aquaculture feed.

Biosecurity Australia has indicated that if appropriate post-border controls were implemented by State and Territory authorities it would reassess the quarantine risks and associated measures. Biosecurity Australia recognises controls would not be effective in stopping the use of prawns as bait by recreational fishers and this will remain an important disease exposure pathway.

The issue of post-border controls was raised with State and Territory Ministers by former Fisheries Minister Abetz and is under consideration by the Primary Industries Standing Committee of the Primary Industries Ministerial Council.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 12

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Why hasn't BA insisted that State Governments take action on this recommendation?

Answer:

See response to BA11. This matter is under consideration by the Primary Industries Standing Committee.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 13

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Is BA aware that it is already illegal for importers to sell prawns for any purpose other than human consumption?

Answer:

Yes.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BA 14

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Australia

Topic: Prawn testing

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Adams asked:

Does the risk from prawn disease warrant this cost, given that Asian prawn farms manage all these diseases with little or no impact on production?

Answer:

These issues are addressed in the revised draft IRA report on prawns and prawn products. The report assesses the diseases of quarantine concern in detail, including the costs associated with managing and/or eradicating each disease. For those diseases where the risk exceeds Australia's appropriate level of protection, risk management measures are recommended to protect Australia's wild stocks of prawns and other crustaceans and its aquaculture industries from exotic diseases.