

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 01

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Melamine milk scandal in China / Food chain safety

Hansard Page: 63/64 (20/10/2008)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—What role has AQIS got? I always acted under the assumption that AQIS were responsible for quarantine of imports of food in Australia.

...

Dr O'Connell—I think much of the issues that are being raised here really do revolve around the coordinating the central role of FSANZ in managing this issue, which is in the health portfolio. I would be happy to take on notice a more precise explanation about the role of FSANZ in this.

Answer:

AQIS role on imported food products is twofold: under the *Quarantine Act 1908*, to ensure import requirements are met to prevent the entry of exotic pests and diseases; and under the *Imported Food Control Act 1992*, to check imported food for compliance with Australian food standards and the requirements of public health and safety. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is the agency which develops and maintains Australia's food standards. FSANZ advises AQIS on testing of foods that represent a medium to high risk to public health and safety.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 02

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Melamine milk scandal in China / Food chain safety

Hansard Page: 65 (20/10/08)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—If it comes in through New Zealand—and in our trade arrangements with New Zealand there is approval—do we retest it? The answer is no, I think.

Ms Clegg—I think it depends on what the food is.

Mr Read—It would depend on the food.

Senator HEFFERNAN—You might give us the details of that, on notice.

Ms Clegg—Yes.

...

Dr Samson—I am hearing particularly Senator Boswell. If it will help, we can get a list of all imports from China. We will talk to our colleagues in FSANZ and, against that list of imports, try to map the testing regimes that do or do not exist. A summary of that may be what you are seeking.

Senator BOSWELL—It is what I am seeking.

Answer:

Food products from New Zealand must first meet quarantine requirements. Food that has cleared quarantine is only subject to inspection for food safety at the border by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service if it is classified by Food Standards Australia New Zealand as a risk food. Risk food poses a medium to high risk to public health and safety.

Under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement (TTMRA), only risk food produced in, or imported through New Zealand is subject to further inspection, including testing, under the *Imported Food Control Act 1992*. All other food legally produced in, or imported through, New Zealand can be imported into any Australian jurisdiction without testing, provided that Australia's quarantine requirements are met.

How AQIS applies tests to various types of imported food, including imported food from China, is provided in question on notice AQIS 07, question 11, and its attachments 2 and 3.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 03

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Melamine milk scandal in China / Food chain safety

Hansard Page: 65/66 (20/10/2008)

Senator Boswell asked:

Senator BOSWELL—Yes, I have other questions. Can you provide us with the names of any other agricultural food products that currently are being imported from China? That would be your bailiwick, wouldn't it?

Ms Clegg—Yes. We could get you a list of those products; I do not have one with me. It would be a wide range of processed foods.

Answer:

AQIS only has data on food products imported from China that are referred to it by the Australian Customs Service. Attachment 1 contains the list of foods from China for human consumption referred by the Australian Customs Service to the AQIS for inspection under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme between 1 June 2008 and 20 October 2008.

With reference to AQIS providing to Senator Boswell test regimes for imported food, this information is provided in question on notice AQIS 07, question 11, and its attachments 2 and 3.

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Question: AQIS 04

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Cocos Island

Hansard Page: 74/75 (20/10/2008)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—Then what emergency facility would you have offshore? Do you require one?

Dr Samson—For what purpose, Senator?

Senator McGAURAN—You tell me. The fact that Cocos was a facility that was used—

Senator Sherry—I remember your trip to Cocos.

Senator McGAURAN—I have seen the facility and you are right; it is in disrepair.

Senator Sherry—We can take that question on notice.

CHAIR—Senator McGauran's question can be taken on notice.

Answer:

Australia's quarantine risk is managed through a variety of means including off-shore pre-export quarantine facilities and on-shore post-arrival quarantine facilities.

Mr Roger Beale, AO, was appointed in February 2008 as chair of an independent panel to undertake a comprehensive review of Australia's biosecurity and quarantine systems. The government is currently considering the future of Australian quarantine, including quarantine stations, in light of Mr Beale's recommendations.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: AQIS 05

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Animal Welfare during the Live Animal Export Chain

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Siewert asked:

1. How is it possible for AQIS to comply with Australian Standards for the export of Livestock when there is no independent monitoring of animals and their handling at the saleyards and feedlot points of the live export chain?
2. I understand that WA currently only has one inspector in the Animal Welfare Unit enforcing state animal welfare legislation. How is this one inspector expected to enforce the ASEL?

Answer:

1. AQIS's direct role in regulating welfare in the livestock export chain does not include the period when animals are still on the farm, at saleyards or being transported to a registered premises. Legislative responsibility for animal welfare at these stages lies with state and territory governments.
2. The Western Australian Government is responsible for enforcing Western Australian animal welfare legislation including the appointment of inspectors.

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Question: AQIS 06

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Cocos Island

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Williams asked:

1. Can the Minister confirm that, despite the findings of the Callinan Inquiry into horse flu, the Government is in the process of selling Australia's only Government owned off-shore quarantine station at Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean, to developers?
2. Considering that privately owned off shore quarantine stations have not proved entirely satisfactory in the past for a number of reasons, what plans does the Government have to replace this essential facility for importation of animals into Australia from countries likely to have contagious diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease?

Answer:

1. In January 1999, after extensive industry consultation, a decision was taken to decommission the Cocos (Keeling) Island Quarantine Station. The station had not been used as a government run quarantine facility since January 1997.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is in the process of transferring responsibility for the site of the former Cocos (Keeling) Island Quarantine Station to the Attorney-General's Department.

2. Australia's quarantine risk is managed through a variety of means including off-shore pre-export quarantine facilities and on-shore post-arrival quarantine facilities.

Mr Roger Beale AO, was appointed in February 2008 as chair of an independent panel to undertake a comprehensive review of Australia's biosecurity and quarantine systems. The government is currently considering the future of Australian quarantine, including quarantine stations, in light of Mr Beale's recommendations.

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Question: AQIS 07

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: Melamine milk scandal in China / Food chain safety

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Williams asked:

Biosecurity Australia/Quarantine/Food Safety

Melamine Milk Scandal in China/Food Chain Safety

1. Is the department aware of the Melamine milk scandal in china?
2. As a result of the scandal what measures has the department taken to guarantee the safety of Australia's food supply chain?
3. What Import Risk Assessments IRA's on Chinese products are currently under way?
4. Can the department provide a list of all new and existing import applications for food and agriculture/fisheries/forestry products from China?
5. What agriculture/food products are currently imported from China?
6. Please provide a list of all imported food and agriculture products.
7. What Australian agricultural/fisheries/forestry products are currently seeking permission from the Chinese Government to import permits into China?
8. What is the expected market value of these products?
9. How much funding is being made available to industry to help under take all aspects of accessing the Chinese markets?
10. Please provide a breakdown of which industries/commodities are receiving funding and how much funding they are receiving.
11. Other than melamine what else does Australia routinely test for in food products (fresh and manufactured) coming into Australia from China?
12. Please provide in percentage terms and the number of tests conducted on food products (fresh and manufactured) being imported into Australia from China.

Answer:

1. Yes.
2. Infant formula, food for infants and five products identified by FSANZ have been targeted for testing at 100% of consignments.
3. Food Standards Australia New Zealand has responsibility for the food safety risk assessment of imported foods.

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Question: AQIS 07 (continued)

4. There are currently 156 applications for import permits for goods from China awaiting processing.

They are for garlic, onions, ornamental plants, animal nutritional supplement, tea, citrus spp., finfish, mushrooms, foodstuffs, barley, thatching grass, used earth moving equipment, broom grass, banana leaf, manila hemp, rice, flax, snow or snap peas, prawns, almonds, pears, sesame seed, shallots, stock feed, tyres, veterinary therapeutics and grape vine woven articles.

5. Attachment 1 contains the list of foods for human consumption from China referred by the Australian Customs Service to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) between 1 June 2008 and 20 October 2008 for inspection under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme.

6. AQIS import systems only capture those imports that are of potential Quarantine concern, which is approximately 30% of all imports. More comprehensive data may be obtainable from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

AQIS import systems record that there have been 39,749 consignments of imported goods of potential quarantine concern from China for the period from 01 July 2008 to 31 October 2008. Each consignment may contain multiple products. In the period from 01 July 2008 to 31 October 2008 AQIS systems record that the consignments were made up of 225,432 separate lines.

The most commonly imported food and agriculture products of potential quarantine concern that are imported from China are:

Fish and Fish products

Fish, frozen, whole or fillets, including Whiting, Hake, Smooth and John Dory, Hoki and Garfish.

Squid, frozen in rings or tubes

Prawns or Shrimp, including frozen raw, cooked or dried

Scallops are presented frozen with roe-on or roe-off

Live ornamental fish - Goldfish etc

Products of Animal Origin

Dog chews and Rawhide dog bones

Seashells including powdered

Duck and Goose feathers and Down (washed)

Live Plants and Cut Flowers

Live plant tissue cultures

Fresh cut roses, chrysanthemum and onion flowers

Dried flowers, Mushroom spawn and live plants

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Question: AQIS 07 (continued)

Vegetables

Garlic either fresh, chilled, frozen, dried or dehydrated, powder and fresh sprouts

Onion again fresh, chilled, frozen, dried or dehydrated and powder

Fresh and dried mushrooms, including Shitaki, Enoki, white and black fungus

Dried vegetables

Fresh sugar snap and snow peas

Frozen vegetables, broad beans, broccoli, green beans, peas, mixed vegetables and stir fries

Fruit

Fresh and Asian pears

Dried apples, chestnuts, dates, apricots and strawberries

Frozen strawberries and diced apricots

Macadamia kernels, pinenuts, walnuts and peanuts

Sultanas and raisins

Tea and Spices

Tea - black, green, jasmine and chinese

Spices - anise, ginger, cardamons, chilli both paste and powder, cinnamon and peppercorns.

Cereals

Buckwheat, pearl barley, cornstarch, lotus root starch and wheat gluten

Prepared Foodstuffs

Prawns/crumbed/battered/marinated

Crumbed fish fillets

Frozen tempura squid rings

Frozen Garfish fillets in beer batter and fish fingers

Frozen breaded butterfly shrimp

7. The department is pursuing the following Australian agricultural industry priorities for new market access to China:

- table grapes
- summer fruit (apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums)
- cherries
- apples (mainland)
- kangaroo meat

In addition, the department is pursuing the restoration of market access for the following products to China:

- meat from non-integrated establishments
- tripe
- pork

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Question: AQIS 07 (continued)

- possum meat
- poultry meat

8. The department does not predict the market value of potential exports given the number of variables that affect potential trade (for example: conditions of entry and consumer demand). However, market access for the products listed above are priorities for the relevant Australian agricultural industries.

9. The department does not make funding available to industry to undertake all aspects of accessing the Chinese market. However, the department manages the Australia-China Agricultural Cooperation Agreement (ACACA) that provides funding for farmers; agri-businesses; industry groups; rural and regional associations; and educational and research academic institutions to visit locations within China and make business contacts that might otherwise not be possible.

Applications are being assessed for the ACACA missions to occur in 2009-2010. Australia will fund international travel to China and a daily incidentals allowance for six missions of four people. The Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China will fund the remaining expenses for the missions when in China.

10. Applications are being assessed for the Australia-China Agricultural Cooperation Agreement missions to occur in 2009-2010. The department cannot advise which industry representatives will receive funding, and how much that will be, until the assessment process is complete.

11. Attachments 2 and 3 contain information which is publicly available from the AQIS website on the tests that are routinely applied to food products from all countries including China. It is important to note that imported food must first satisfy quarantine requirements before it is referred for inspection under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme. If the food product is not permitted for quarantine reasons, it is not referred to the Imported Food Inspection Scheme.

12. From 1 January 2008 to 30 June 2008, 9.8% of all inspections undertaken by AQIS on food consignments from all countries were on food from China; 1 625 analytical tests were applied, which includes tests for microbiological, chemical, contaminant and food additive content of foods.

Attachment 1: Chinese food referred to AQIS for inspection between 1 January and 30 June 2008.

Attachment 2: Risk category food Import Food Notice

Attachment 3: Random surveillance category Import Food Notice

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Question: AQIS 08

Division/Agency: Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Topic: The government's response to the equine influenza inquiry

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Williams asked:

At present the thoroughbred racing industry doesn't recognise AI from overseas sires as a legitimate reproduction technique for their industry. Has AQIS developed a strategy to encourage the thoroughbred racing industry to use AI involving semen from overseas sires instead of importing the live horse as a means of reducing the risk of another EI outbreak?

Answer:

The use of artificial insemination (AI) for racehorses is a matter for the thoroughbred industry. Changes implemented and showing the Callinan Inquiry will ensure that horse importers meet the full cost of biosecurity risk mitigation measures.