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Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

SECRETARY

21 September 2009

Senator Glenn Sterle  
Chair  
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs  
and Transport Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Sterle

I am writing to clarify answers to questions on notice arising from your Committee's Budget Estimates hearing of 26 May 2009.

The answers provided to questions 53 and 55 included lists of food and agriculture products described as imported from China. These lists were extracted from the AQIS Import Management System (AIMS) and included beef and lamb products. Investigations have shown that these beef and lamb products were in fact imported directly from New Zealand.

The data in AIMS that indicated the beef and lamb products had been imported from China is not correct. The data error occurred because an incorrect country of origin code was entered by an Australian customs broker into the Integrated Cargo System (ICS), which is managed by the Australian Customs & Border Protection Service. The ICS then automatically referred the data to AIMS because quarantine risk material (beef and lamb) had been identified by the quarantine profiles in the ICS. AQIS staff are not able to amend data entered into ICS by brokers, although where they are detected, brokers are requested to correct them.

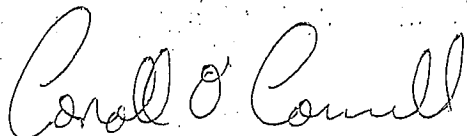
The anomalies in AIMS data do not in themselves represent any biosecurity risk.

The lists provided in answer to questions 53 and 55 can more accurately be described as extracts from the AIMS, showing food and agricultural product imports during the period 1 March 2009 to 31 May 2009 that have been declared by brokers and importers as originating from China.

I regret any misunderstanding arising from this material and would appreciate you bringing this clarification to the attention of Committee members.

If you have any questions on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact the Executive Director of AQIS, Mr Rob Delane on (02) 6272 5455 or the Executive Manager of the Quarantine Operations Division of AQIS, Mr Tim Chapman on (02) 6272 5445.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Conall O'Connell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Conall O'Connell