

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2012

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 70

Division/Agency: Biosecurity – Animal Division

Topic: Live Animal Exports to Pakistan

Proof Hansard page: 124

Senator RHIANNON asked:

Senator RHIANNON: Minister, I am seeking some clarification about the circumstances surrounding the shipment of live export of cattle that ended up in Pakistan in controversial circumstances.

Senator Ludwig: Sheep.

Senator RHIANNON: Sheep, I am sorry. There have been some contradictory statements as to how sick those animals were. On 3 September on ABC *Lateline* it was stated that:

The department of agriculture says that the shipments are both infected with the disease scabby mouth.

Then on 15 October AAP reports—and this is the latest report that we are aware of—that the sheep were not affected. There had been an earlier report on 1 September that a veterinarian certificate of health citing Perth for ocean voyage was actually backdated nearly a month after the ship left, possibly, again saying the sheep were healthy. Could you clarify what you understand to be the health of the sheep was at different stages during their voyage?

Dr Glyde: I did not hear quite all of that but I could give you on notice the details of what was said. What you are quoting is a series of media reports that were made primarily in Pakistan but here as well and most of which were wrong. All along the Australian authorities and DAFF has maintained that the animals were healthy—they had no notifiable animal health diseases. Indeed, that subsequently has proven to be the case. I think was yesterday or the day before that the exporter Wellards put out a press release showing the results of the independent testing that had been done by a laboratory in the United Kingdom at the request of the High Court of the Sindh Province that demonstrated that the animals were healthy. Whilst they may have had scabby mouth, that was not a notifiable disease. They were free of all the diseases they have been accused of. If you like, I could put on notice the exact claims that have been made over the course of the last few weeks.

Senator RHIANNON: Could you do that from when they leave Perth, to Bahrain, the circumstances, and then to Pakistan?

Dr Glyde: Sure.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) maintains that the animals were healthy and had no notifiable animal health diseases.

The sheep were prepared in accordance with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock prior to departure. On 1 September 2012 the Australian health certificate, prepared in consultation with the Pakistan Ministry of National Food Security & Research, confirmed that the sheep had been inspected by accredited veterinarians within 72 hours of export on 4 August 2012. The health certificate also confirmed that Australia is officially free from Foot and Mouth Disease, Rinderpest, Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Rift Valley Fever,

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Sheep Scab, Goat Pox, Sheep Pox, Maedi-visna, Nairobi sheep disease, classical scrapie, Rabies, Brucella melitensis and Contagious Caprine Pleuropneumonia.

The independent laboratory test results from UK's Pirbright Institute also proved negative for the presence of antibodies to Bluetongue, PPR virus and foot and mouth disease (FMD) virus.

Copies of laboratory reports demonstrating absence of anthrax, Bluetongue Virus, PPR Virus and Foot & Mouth Disease have been posted as part of the Wellard Rural Exports statement on their website.

The health and welfare of the sheep was monitored by a DAFF accredited veterinarian throughout the voyage and during unloading. The final report following unloading shows a mortality rate for the entire shipment of 1.8 per cent, which is below the reportable level of 2 per cent for sheep to the Middle East.

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Question: 71

Division/Agency: Biosecurity – Animal Division

Topic: DAFF import statistics

Proof Hansard page: 127

Senator NASH asked:

Senator NASH: I understand that. I will just then ask on notice whether you could take for me, and perhaps pass it on to the relevant people if you do not mind: does DAFF make statistics publicly available around the number of applications received to import food, broken down into categories, and in terms of the total number, how many were approved and how many were rejected in any given year? Can you provide that information? If not, can you explain why not?

Answer:

Inspection data gathered under the imported food inspection scheme published in six monthly reports is available from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's website at www.daff.gov.au/aqis/import/food/inspection-data. Further information on the inspection scheme is available from the department's website at www.daff.gov.au/aqis/import/food.

The department also publishes a list of foods that were found to fail requirements under the imported food inspection scheme (for food safety and compliance with Australian food standards) each month. These monthly failing food reports are available from the department's website at www.daff.gov.au/aqis/import/food/failing-food-reports.

Broad statistics on the volume of food imports are available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and from the department's publication, Australian food statistics, published annually and also available from the department's website.

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Question: 188

Division/Agency: Biosecurity – Animal Division

Topic: Live exports

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

1. The government exported 3.5 million tonnes of wheat to Indonesia much of it to feed Australian cattle in Indonesian feedlots. Did the government consider the impact on the wheat industry when they shut down live exports?
2. What Minister to Minister contact has there been with the governments of Pakistan and Qatar over the latest live animal export incidents?

Answer:

1. Australia exported 3.5 million tonnes of bulk wheat to Indonesia during the 2010–11. The majority of this wheat was for human consumption, including for milling for flour. Some feed grade wheat was exported to Indonesia but for poultry and fish, not for cattle. Indonesia has been Australia's major export market over the past seven years and is expected to remain a major importer of Australian bulk wheat.
2. Minister Ludwig has received daily briefings on livestock export market issues. The Minister has instigated high level approaches at both Ministerial and High Commissioner/Ambassador level for both Pakistan and Qatar. Constructive contact has been made with Ministers from both countries. It is not usual practice to detail the substance of interactions between Ministers, however Ministers from Pakistan and Qatar have confirmed their commitment to observe high animal welfare standards for Australian livestock exports.

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Question: 190

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Foot and Mouth Disease Forum

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

1. Did the Foot and Mouth Disease Forum held in August consider the risk of FMD becoming established in Australia as a result of illegal importation of meat products?
2. Where did the forum consider responsibility for minimising illegal importation of products rested?

Answer:

1. 'A review of Australia's preparedness for the threat of foot-and-mouth disease' (the report), commissioned by the Secretary of DAFF in 2011, considered the risk of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) entering Australia as a result of illegal importation of risk products. The report identified illegal importation of risk products as an area requiring greater focus. At the time the report was published (November 2011) the department was already actively addressing this issue under a number of biosecurity reform initiatives. These include the development and implementation of intelligence and profiling capabilities, targeted compliance campaigns and increased cooperation and information sharing with other border agencies, particularly the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.
2. The forum did not discuss illegal importation of products. The forum considered inter alia the global FMD situation, the update of Australia's FMD emergency response policy (under the FMD AUSVETPLAN strategy), the emergency use of vaccination, efforts to enhance field surveillance and emergency response resourcing, and the work of the Industry Government FMD Working Group.

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Question: 256

Agency: Biosecurity – Animal Division
Topic: Animal Health Training Scheme
Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator EDWARDS asked:

In relation to Question on Notice 55 (May Budget Estimates 2012) about the Animal Health Training Scheme.

1. Why was the program terminated?
2. When was this decision made?
3. a. Why was an additional \$25 000 put into the program in 2011?
b. When was the decision made to put an additional \$25 000 into the program?

Answer:

1. The Aquatic Animal Health Training Scheme was established in 2010 as a three-year program ending in 2012. Any decision to renew the scheme will be based on an assessment of the program's achievements over its three year period of operation.
2. Please refer to the answer to Question 1.
3. a. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry contributed an additional \$25 000 to the Aquatic Animal Health Training Scheme to allow funding of applications that strongly satisfied the selection criteria and would have otherwise been unfunded in the 2012 round.
b. The decision was made following an assessment of applications in the 2011 round by the Fisheries Research Development Corporation's Aquatic Animal Health Subprogram Steering Committee.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

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Public Hearing November 2012

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 8

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Scabby Mouth

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator BACK asked:

1. Can the Department explain its focus on Scabby Mouth as a disease condition of special interest in the inspection of sheep for export?
2. Does the department accept in relation to Scabby Mouth:
 - a. It is a viral condition which is endemic in WA sheep populations, especially in young sheep and prevalent in spring and early summer in WA where sheep are aggregated
 - b. It is a self limiting minor disease, with little if any mortality, which self cures in 10 to 14 days without any treatment and with minimal transitory adverse impact on the young sheep
 - c. that there is no effective treatment for the condition in any case
 - d. that, in up to 40+ years of exporting live sheep to Middle East markets such as Kuwait, there has never been one consignment ever rejected on the basis of clinical disease due to Scabby mouth. There may have been instances when Scabby Mouth was USED as a reason for rejection of a consignment. My question relates to actual disease as the cause of a shipment being rejected.
3. I urge that the Department consults with experienced AAVs and reconsiders its position on Scabby Mouth as a serious disease of sheep transported overseas.

Answer:

1. Livestock sourced for export must meet any relevant health and welfare requirements under state and territory legislation. Animals must also meet the importing country's health requirements and most importing country conditions require that Australia certify that animals are free from clinical signs of disease. As such it is also a requirement of the Australian Standards for Export of Livestock that animals for export be free of signs of a range of diseases including scabby mouth. In order to minimise the potential for rejection of consignments by importing countries, heightened screening regimes have been implemented for all major consignments to the Middle East.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Public Hearing November 2012

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 8 (continued)

Saudi Arabia and Israel have specific import conditions for scabby mouth in their health protocols. These include vaccination, inspection and segregation for scabby mouth that requires the Australian government to attest on the health certification that these conditions are met. Other countries in the Middle East and neighbouring regions have also demonstrated sensitivities regarding scabby mouth. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are currently considering changes to their import requirements for sheep to achieve greater consistency between their countries. They have indicated that scabby mouth is included in these considerations.

2.

a. Yes.

b. Scabby mouth is usually a self limiting minor disease, with little if any mortality, in which lesions develop approximately 3 to 14 days post exposure to the virus. Studies of sheep have shown that clinical signs continue on average for 31 days for the first infection and 22 days for subsequent infections. There is little mortality unless secondary infection occurs.

c. Yes, individual animals may benefit from supportive care but there is no treatment for scabby mouth.

d. Scabby mouth has been stated over the past two decades as the reason for multiple shipments experiencing either delayed unloading or being rejected on arrival in a number of countries in the Middle East namely Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Of note, Saudi Arabia rejected shipments because of scabby mouth concerns in 1989, 1995 and 2003, each time leading to reassessment of health conditions regarding scabby mouth. Clinical cases of scabby mouth have formed the basis of rejection of Australian livestock shipments in some markets. However, rejections do not always have a legitimate justification based on international standards, science and animal or public health. While scabby mouth is not considered a serious disease for livestock, importing countries determine the conditions under which any product enters their borders.

3. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has consulted on scabby mouth with experienced veterinarians and industry. While DAFF recognises that the disease itself is a minor one, importing countries have at times taken a different approach resulting in significant trade disruption. DAFF's position on scabby mouth is a considered one and is aimed at ensuring animal welfare and minimising potential trade disruptions.