

Chapter One

Introduction

Terms of reference

1.1 On 23 June 2010, the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport (the committee) for inquiry and report by 22 November 2010:

- (a) the adequacy of [Australia's] current biosecurity and quarantine arrangements, including resourcing;
- (b) projected demand and resourcing requirements;
- (c) progress toward achievement of reform of Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) export fees and charges;
- (d) progress in implementation of the 'Beale Review' recommendations and their place in meeting projected biosecurity demand and resourcing; and
- (e) any related matters.

1.2 The inquiry was subsequently re-adopted by the committee in the 43rd Parliament.

1.3 On 22 November 2010, the Senate granted an extension of time for reporting until 28 April 2011. The reporting date was further extended to 21 March 2012 and 4 April 2012.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.4 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* on 30 June 2010 and 13 October 2010. The committee also sought submissions from interested organisations, agencies and individuals. Notice of the inquiry was also posted on the committee's website.

1.5 The committee received 79 submissions, including 12 supplementary submissions and two confidential submissions. A list of submissions is provided at Appendix 1.

1.6 Throughout the inquiry process, the committee took a specific interest in the progress toward reform of the AQIS export fees and charges regime. In addition to holding hearings directly related to these reforms, committee members pursued specific issues through the Senate Estimates process. The committee also wrote directly to a number of key stakeholder groups, organisations and individuals seeking submissions specifically in relation to term of reference (c).

1.7 The committee held a number of public hearings relating to this inquiry. The dates, and issues raised during these hearings are as follows:

- **Monday, 14 February 2011**
 - Response to Beale Review recommendations
 - Funding for national plant biosecurity
 - Facilities to replace Knoxfield and Eastern Creek Quarantine Stations
 - Responses to disease incursion and eradication
- **Thursday, 7 and Friday, 8 July 2011**
 - Removal of the fee rebate for AQIS certification functions
- **Thursday, 21 July 2011**
 - Importation of apples from New Zealand

1.8 A list of witnesses who attended these hearings is provided at Appendix 2.

1.9 On 27 and 28 June 2011, the committee conducted inspections and site visits in Sydney in order to gain a more detailed understanding of AQIS facilities and services. The committee visited:

- AQIS Central East Regional Office – Rosebery;
- Eastern Creek Quarantine;
- Sydney Gateway Facility (International Mail), Clyde;
- Sydney International Airport; and
- Port Botany.

Previous committee inquiries

Inquiries into the import (or proposed import) of specific plant or animal products

1.10 The committee notes that it has, over the past decade, undertaken a number of inquiries which have examined biosecurity and quarantine arrangements in relation to the importation (or proposed importation) of specific plant or animal products. These inquiries include:

- 2001, 2005 and 2007 – inquiries into the importation of New Zealand apples;
- June 2009 – inquiry into the Import Risk Analysis (IRA) for the importation of Cavendish bananas from the Philippines; and
- June 2010 – inquiry into the possible impacts and consequences for public health, trade and agriculture, of the Government's decision to relax import restrictions on beef.

Inquiries into the management of incursions of particular pests and diseases

1.11 A number of the committee's past inquiries have also considered issues surrounding the management of particular incursions of pests and diseases into Australia, such as:

- June 2006 – inquiry into the administration by Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) of the citrus canker outbreak;
- August and November 2010 – inquiry into the Australian horse industry and an Emergency Animal Response Agreement; and
- June 2011 – inquiry into the science underpinning the inability to eradicate the Asian honey bee.

1.12 A number of the issues raised by submitters to the current inquiry were raised by stakeholders during a number of these previous inquiries. Whilst a number of submissions raised concerns in relation to the IRA process for specific products, stakeholders also expressed concerns in relation to the IRA process generally. Concerns were also raised in regarding Australia's current definition of Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP), the current arrangements as they relate to import processes and the status of the Eminent Scientists Group (ESG).

1.13 The committee also received submissions which provided comment and raised concerns in relation to outcomes, possible future problems, and lessons to be learned from the management of incursions of specific pests and diseases into Australia.

Interim report – reform of export fees and charges

1.14 As noted above, part of the terms of reference for this inquiry required the committee to examine the 'progress toward achievement of reform of Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) export fees and charges'.

1.15 Given the timing of the reforms, the committee resolved to inquire into the issues raised regarding term of reference (c) separately, and table an Interim Report on its findings. The committee tabled *Biosecurity and quarantine arrangements – Interim report: the management of the removal of the fee rebate for AQIS export certification functions* on 12 December 2011.

Current report

1.16 As noted above, the committee has, over a number of years, taken a keen interest in biosecurity and quarantine arrangements in relation to the importation (or proposed importation) of specific plant or animal products. The committee has also undertaken a number of inquiries which have reviewed the management of specific incursions of pests and diseases into Australia.

1.17 In addressing the remaining terms of reference (a), (b), (d) and (e) the committee is conscious that proposed new legislation to replace the *Quarantine Act*

1908 is close to finalisation. DAFF have indicated that 'the new Biosecurity Bill exposure draft and a consultation regulation impact statement is expected to be released in the first half of 2012'.¹ DAFF also anticipates that the Biosecurity Bill will be introduced into Parliament in the second half of 2012.

1.18 The committee signals its interest in conducting a detailed examination of the exposure draft and/or conduct a further inquiry following the tabling of the proposed Biosecurity Bill. Therefore, the committee's current report will essentially provide a brief overview of Australia's current approach to biosecurity and quarantine and outline several issues raised by submitters (and the evidence received from industry stakeholders and DAFF) during the current inquiry.

1.19 Evidence provided to the committee's current inquiry has enabled the committee to gain a further appreciation of the operation of Australia's biosecurity and quarantine arrangements and examine a number of issues from a more strategic viewpoint. The examination of these issues has provided a valuable source of background material which will assist the committee to conduct a more detailed examination of the exposure draft and/or the Biosecurity Bill when introduced later this year.

Structure of the report

1.20 Chapter 2 of the report outlines Australia's existing administrative and legal arrangements in relation to biosecurity and quarantine. The chapter also provides a brief overview of Australia's current approach to managing the risk of incursions of exotic pests and diseases.

1.21 Chapter 3 outlines the issues and common themes which have been raised by key stakeholders; both during both past inquiries and in evidence to the current inquiry. The issues raised include concerns about the IRA process generally, Australia's definition of ALOP and Australia's current preparedness for a major pest or disease incursion.

1.22 Chapter 4 outlines the committee's examination and response to term of reference (c) – the reform of AQIS export fees and charges, and term of reference (d) – progress toward the implementation of the Beale Review recommendations.

Acknowledgements

1.23 The committee appreciates the time and effort of all those organisations and individuals who provided submissions and attended public hearings. Their work has assisted the committee considerably and has provided the committee with valuable evidence for the purpose of this and potentially future inquiries.

1 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, *Reform of Australia's biosecurity system – An update since the publication of One Biosecurity: a working partnership*, March 2012, p. 18.

A note on references

1.24 References in this report are to individual submissions as received by the committee. The Hansard transcripts of the committee's hearings are available on the Parliament's website at www.aph.gov.au. References to the Hansard throughout the report are to the proof transcript. Page numbers may vary between the proof and the official transcript.

