

Policy Position for Horticulture on Biosecurity

Background

Primary horticultural imports into Australia are currently valued at around A\$690 million on an annual basis (2005/06) and have been growing strongly over recent years. Concurrently the scale and complexity of the threat of pests and diseases is increasing, which together with increasing imports and exposure to natural spread, requires effective management of risk of incursion and spread.

Australia has the strategic advantage of relatively pest and disease-free status, along with our reputation as a supplier of fresh, high quality and clean produce, which need to be maintained. Accordingly, Australia requires an import regime which maintains high import quarantine standards to protect Australia's horticultural production base, in particular - our export trade, for instance (eg potential loss of Fruit Fly Free status); and the environment and biodiversity more generally (including potential risks to tourism and geographic risks (eg risk of incursions).

Issues

In support of these objectives, Australia seeks to maintain a rigorous, science based quarantine regime, the elements of which cover a combination of pre-border, border and post border management of quarantine threats with responsibilities shared between governments, industry and the community generally. These activities must be transparent to the international community. It must be clear that these regimes are developed and operated independently; and based solely on sound scientific principles and analyses to defend the integrity of our environment and production areas, rather than as a barrier to trade.

Australia's quarantine system must include an IRA process that is transparent, science-based and contestable and is capable of being carried out within a reasonable timeframe, whilst retaining the confidence of stakeholders in its ability to deliver an objective outcome. Horticulture believes that Australia should continue to take a conservative approach to managing quarantine risk, consistent with the scientific, and other, evidence of potential impacts of incursions.

In particular the government agencies have identified responsibilities for the management, operation and maintenance of a quarantine regime which is effective for those threats which can be regulated and places them in the forefront of Australia's biosecurity requirements.

Horticulture industries are encouraged to engage in all relevant consultative processes to ensure their interests are represented and that they have a sound understanding of the handling of key biosecurity issues, and to utilize the feedback mechanisms included in these processes. Horticulture industries are encouraged to become members of Plant Health Australia (PHA), to develop national biosecurity committees, and to implement various strategies to minimize threats from plant pests. Horticultural industries need to be well protected by a strong quarantine system and well prepared for invasive pests via the proactive development and implementation of ongoing industry biosecurity programs.

Our Position

The horticulture industry's position is that the conduct of a quarantine regime by adequately resourced government agencies should:

- ❖ Involve consultation with the horticulture industry on all critical aspects of biosecurity management which impact on industry.
- ❖ Take all reasonable steps to identify quarantine risks (whether from imports, or domestic movement of produce between jurisdictions).
- ❖ Take a conservative approach to managing quarantine risks based on an Australian appropriate level of protection (ALOP) which sets a low level of risk.
- ❖ Communicate this level of ALOP to the horticulture industry to secure industry's understanding of the measures in hand or recommended.
- ❖ Pursue a risk analysis process which is based on high quality science supported by scientific review and contestability as appropriate.
- ❖ Pursue a risk analysis process which is transparent to industry with opportunity for formal and informal discussion and input at multiple stages.
- ❖ Pursue a risk analysis approach which is timely through minimizing delays and alleviating international and domestic pressures on the system.
- ❖ Include an economic consequence analysis concurrent with the risk analysis to the extent appropriate, including the economic consequences which may result from a disease or pest incursion.
- ❖ Involve industry in the process of receiving and prioritizing import requests which is part of the government agency approach.
- ❖ Maintain a quarantine operational process which does not allow for the incursion of pests and diseases through regulated pathways – including a transparent process for incursion responses and preparedness.
- ❖ Require that government agency inspection performance is to a consistently high standard and is supported by work plans which are clear and unambiguous.



- ❖ Require that government agency quarantine inspectors are effectively trained and make decisions on the basis of experience and that such decisions are consistent between locations of same quarantine status.
- ❖ Strengthen and maintain a close integration between quarantine policy and operational functions.
- ❖ To ensure transparency and generate confidence by industry, maintain the best possible communications processes between the government agency and the horticulture industry on quarantine policy and operational matters.

Industry contact on Biosecurity Issues

Horticulture industries are encouraged to address their own specific biosecurity issues or to seek advice from the industry service and support organizations, such as Horticulture Australia Ltd (HAL) and Plant Health Australia (PHA). For issues which are judged to be of a policy level, horticultural industries may contact Horticulture Australia Council (HAC) and/or the Horticultural Market Access Committee (HMAC) which is a committee of HAL through the committee's coordinator Stephen Winter tel: 03.9832 0787 email: stephen.winter@etower.com.au