



Communiqué:

2017 Quarantine Regulators Meeting

Vientiane, Lao PDR 10-12 May 2017

The 2017 Quarantine Regulators Meeting (QRM), with a theme *“Emerging Challenges and Opportunities for Biosecurity Compliance”*, was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, from 10 to 12 May 2017. The meeting, the ninth meeting of its kind, was co-hosted by the Lao Department of Agriculture and the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

The meeting was attended by 53 delegates representing 18 international biosecurity agencies, discussing issues pertaining to cargo and traveller movement and the very real risks associated with these pathways. Mr Vilaysouk Khennavong, Director General, Lao Department of Agriculture and Mr Andreas Zurbrugg, Deputy Ambassador to the Australian Embassy in Laos opened the meeting, with the keynote address provided by Ms Raelene Vivian, First Assistant Secretary from the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. All remarks highlighted the importance of the meeting in establishing and fostering international cooperation, which is fundamental to the management of biosecurity challenges that agencies are facing, and will continue to face, as trade becomes more liberalised and travellers become more mobile.

The Biosecurity Authority of Fiji presented on the recently established Sea Container Hygiene System, to manage the risks associated with the movement of containers in trade and how the implementation of bilateral arrangements within agencies can assist with the management of this.

The Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources focused on risk and behavioural analysis to inform the development of systems and initiatives to manage the risks associated with vessels and passengers. Discussion centred on underpinning methodologies to encourage voluntary compliance and reduce the occurrence of inadvertent and deliberate non-compliance. Australia also presented on pest surveillance activities that Australia undertakes to identify and respond to the risks associated with vector movement.

New Zealand’s Ministry for Primary Industries exposed delegates to the current risks resulting from the increased use of e-Commerce as a platform for consumers and how agencies can collaborate to identify and target the retailers and businesses associated with this source of trade.

The 2017 QRM included a field trip to the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge and border checkpoint, where delegates were provided with a comprehensive presentation on the activities that the Lao Department of Agriculture undertakes to overcome the challenges posed by the land movement of passengers and cargo. The field trip also included a visit to the Lao Department of Agriculture’s Plant Protection Centre, which enabled delegates to see the diagnostic capability that Laos has for the identification and analysis of plant related risks. The biosecurity aspects of the field trip were well

complemented by a tour through the varied and spectacular cultural sites of Vientiane, which illustrated the proud and rich heritage of the Lao people.

Finally, the meeting concluded with an active discussion on the value of the QRM and its future direction, with a resolve to improve the usefulness of the forum and obtain greater collaboration from all agencies involved in the QRM. The session reiterated the importance of engagement out of session, to effect meaningful change in agencies and assist with proactively identifying and responding to biosecurity challenges.