



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry**

Cargo Scheduling Policy



OFFICIAL
Cargo Scheduling Policy

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Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone 1800 900 090

Web agriculture.gov.au

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

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Introduction

Purpose

The *Cargo Scheduling Policy* outlines the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's approach and decision-making process to schedule and deploy departmental officers to attend third-party sites (e.g. approved arrangements, wharves and other premises) for the purpose of conducting biosecurity and imported food inspections.

This policy covers the eligibility and governance processes related to the management of the scheduling arrangements within scope of the policy: standard appointments, group appointments and recurring appointments.

Background

We provide advice to importers and their representatives when an inspection is required under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* or *Imported Food Control Act 1992*. Upon receiving advice, an entity may then notify us when their goods will be available for inspection to enable us to schedule an inspection appointment. Entities include importers and/or their representatives, operators of entry points, approved arrangement operators and brokers.

We appoint officers who regularly attend third-party sites for the purpose of conducting biosecurity and imported food inspections.

The volume of goods handled by entities varies daily. To service this varying demand and to ensure an efficient manner to inspect goods, we have developed the scheduling model outlined in this policy.

This policy aligns with one of the 9 strategic actions outlined in [Commonwealth Biosecurity 2030](#): 'Invest in a skilled and responsive workforce supported by improved regulatory tools and information'.

In the event of inconsistency between this policy and the legislation governing our statutory functions, the legislation takes precedence.

Scope

This policy covers scheduling and deployment arrangements for:

- department coordinated attendance
- standard appointments
- group appointments
- recurring appointments.

This policy does not cover:

- arrangements for export inspections
- inspections undertaken by non-departmental officers

- inspections undertaken by industry participants operating under an approved arrangement.

This policy describes:

- the types of scheduling arrangements available for the department to perform its biosecurity and imported food regulatory activities at third party premises
- the processes that support the establishment of appropriate scheduling arrangements and communicate the kinds of arrangements available
- the effective utilisation of departmental resources and minimising the administrative burden associated with scheduling of deployable capacity
- how the establishment of recurring appointments will not unreasonably prevent other entities from being able to obtain an appointment for inspection
- how scheduling will not impact the ability to prioritise goods
- how the department will enable timely regulation of imported goods subject to biosecurity and imported food control
- how we will manage information collected for the establishment and management of recurring appointments in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*
- the responsibilities of the entity including ensuring provided information is accurate to enable the department to appropriately manage resource deployment.

1 Principles

Scheduling and deployment arrangements for officers to sites for the purpose of conducting cargo inspections must:

- be lawful
- be flexible
- be transparent and equitable to entities
- consider consistent application across the inspectorate where practical
- consider pathway priority and appropriately manage risks
- be efficient and promote the effective utilisation of resources
- not be unnecessarily restrictive to trade
- allow for the collection of data to validate the servicing arrangements and inform future practice.

Entities must enter scheduling arrangements on a voluntary basis; department may not compel an entity to make an appointment. However, there may be circumstances where the department is required to coordinate the attendance of officers to a site (see [Department coordinated attendance](#)).

2 Fees

Fees for biosecurity activities are available in the Biosecurity Regulations 2016, and fees for imported food activities are available in the Imported Food Control Regulations 2019. The [Biosecurity cost recovery implementation statement](#) (CRIS) and fee tables outline current prices for our regulatory activities.

2.1 Unused time during standard appointments

- If the officer cannot be deployed to another appointment, fees apply to the entity booking the inspection for the entire time booked.
- If the officer can be deployed to another appointment, fees apply for utilised time only.

2.2 Unused time during recurring appointments

- Fees for unused inspection time apply to the organiser of the recurring appointment.
- Fees relating to the inspection of an individual consignment apply to the broker or importer who is responsible for the goods being inspected.
- If the officer cannot be deployed to another appointment, fees apply to the entity booking the inspection time for the unused inspection time booked.
- If the officer can be deployed to another appointment, fees apply for utilised time only.

3 Scheduling arrangements

The scheduling and deployment arrangement types available are based on the volume of cargo and other criteria that an entity may handle. We will publish an overview of the scheduling and deployment arrangements available which include:

- department coordinated attendance
- standard appointments
- group appointments
- recurring appointments.

3.1 Department coordinated attendance

Authorised department officers can arrange department coordinated attendance. This must be done in consultation with the delegate and key stakeholders governing the policy.

Department coordinated attendance does not enable scheduling recurring or group appointments through local agreements (see [Recurring appointments](#)).

We will endeavour to contact the entity to discuss the requirements of a coordinated attendance, prior to establishing the deployment model. We will consider any additional information provided by the entity when establishing a suitable arrangement.

Subject to the provisions under either the *Biosecurity Act 2015* or the *Imported Food Control Act 1992*, we may proceed with an inspection of imported goods subject to biosecurity control or imported food control, without notification prior to or from the entity regarding the availability of goods.

Instances where we may elect to proceed directly to an inspection may include:

- targeted operations
- non-compliance
- biosecurity risk
- animal welfare issues
- surveillance, monitoring and assurance activities.

An entity has the right to provide further information that may impact our ability to undertake such activities.

3.2 Standard appointments

A standard appointment is specific to a single consignment. It is the primary appointment type used to schedule cargo inspections.

Unless otherwise determined by the department, we won't schedule an inspection unless we have issued the entity either:

- a biosecurity inspection direction, or
- an imported food control certificate.

3.2.1 Prioritisation of inspections

We will apply prioritisation rules when scheduling inspections for imported cargo to manage factors such as:

- animal welfare
- emergency response
- staffing capacity
- time sensitivities or dependencies
- biosecurity and imported food risk
- WHS health and safety impacts to officers.

3.2.2 Hours of operations

Unless requested otherwise, we will schedule inspections within our ordinary hours of duty as defined in the Biosecurity Regulation 2016. For an inspection that commences within ordinary hours of duty and concludes outside ordinary hours of duty, the overtime rate for cost recovery will only be imposed for activities performed outside ordinary hours of duty.

An entity may submit a request for an inspection to be performed outside of our ordinary hours of duty. These inspections will incur an overtime rate for cost recovery. The approval of a request will be subject to:

- the availability of inspectors
- the safety of the inspector, including fatigue and personal safety
- the need for adequate lighting.

3.3 Group appointments

We will consider grouping requests for standard appointments made by an entity where it is efficient and where officers are appropriately accredited and equipped to perform multiple inspections within one appointment.

A request for a group appointment covering multiple consignments and inspection types may be made in the following circumstances:

- The inspection type is eligible for a group inspection appointment.
- The request covers multiple consignments; or a single consignment that requires an inspection for both biosecurity and imported food.
- Due to system-based processing and declaration requirements, the request covers a single consignment reported across more than one declaration.

The availability of group appointment options will vary depending on the location due to regional constraints and capacity. We will assess and manage deployable capacity to ensure equitable resource availability and allocation.

3.4 Recurring appointments

A recurring appointment is a voluntary arrangement with regularly scheduled appointments that may be available for entities handling significant volumes of consignments on a regular basis.

Based on the volume and operational requirements of both the entity and the department, an arrangement may range from a single attendance per week to the allocation of multiple officers, multiple days per week, for the full or part length of their shift (see [Minimum threshold criteria](#)).

An entity may request periodic recurring appointments to cover seasonal fluctuations in import volumes. Recurring appointments will be subject to a minimum 8-week schedule.

To set up a recurring appointment, the entity needs to provide written acceptance and follow the terms of the agreement.

A recurring appointment commits the attendance of officers in line with our [service standards](#). To meet operational demands and facilitate or support other recurring appointments the department may make amendments to existing arrangements from time to time. We will notify the relevant entity of the amendments to their existing recurring appointment prior to its finalisation.

The availability of appointment slots for recurring appointments will vary depending on the location due to regional constraints and capacity. We will assess and manage deployable capacity to ensure equitable resource availability and allocation.

In addition to holding a recurring appointment, an entity can request standard and group appointments for any goods where necessary.

We will not publish or make publicly available information on recurring appointments held by entities.

3.4.1 Acceptable inspection types

Only the approved inspection types noted in the recurring appointment agreement can be inspected at recurring appointments. Not all inspection types will be eligible for a recurring appointment due to the availability of officers, the accreditations held by these officers, the volume of imports and the operational needs of the department.

To ensure equity, we will assess applications against the availability of scheduling arrangements for all other entities within the same industry groups. An inspection type approved for other entities in the area will be acceptable. Where the number of entities seeking a recurring appointment for an inspection type exceeds the department's resources, all recurring appointments covering that inspection type within the region will be reassessed.

An inspection type will not be considered acceptable where:

- the time it takes to complete a single inspection including travel to the site would prevent more than one inspection being completed per attendance

- there are insufficient officers available to be assigned to the appointment (see [Eligibility criteria and assessment](#))

A recurring appointment may include more than one type of inspection providing:

- each inspection type will be undertaken during most appointments
- the number of inspection types do not exceed the accreditation limits of officers within the region.

In addition, and when assessing the minimum threshold criteria, recurring appointments will consider including inspection types where alternative arrangements exist, such as:

- an inspection that is eligible to be performed by a biosecurity industry participant
- an imported food inspection that is eligible to be undertaken virtually.

3.4.2 Minimum threshold criteria

As at 6 May 2026, the following criteria must be met to enable eligibility for a recurring appointment:

- Full import declarations (FID)
 - 5 to 9 inspections per week, consisting of at least 10 hours of inspection time
 - 10 to 14 inspections per week, consisting of at least 6 hours of inspection time
 - 15 or more inspections per week
- Self-assessed clearances (SAC)
 - 10 consignments or at least 1 hour of inspection time per week
- Unaccompanied personal effects (UPE)
 - 10 consignments per week
- Country Action List (CAL)
 - 5 hours of inspection time per week.

We will review the minimum threshold criteria as required or within 3 years following implementation.

Where major changes to the minimum threshold criteria are required, we will undertake consultation with entities and internal stakeholders.

4 Arrangement requests and governance processes

4.1 Who may submit a request

The following entities may request a recurring appointment:

- operators of biosecurity entry points
- operators of approved arrangements sites
- importers, with an existing approved arrangement or endorsement from an operator of an approved arrangement site
- brokers or freight forwarders, with an existing approved arrangement or endorsement from an operator of an approved arrangement site.

4.2 Submission of requests

To request a recurring appointment, complete the [Request for recurring appointment form](#).

4.3 Eligibility criteria and assessment

Recurring appointments will be approved where they are likely to achieve an efficient outcome for both the department and the entity by:

- maximising the number of inspections conducted per attendance
- reducing travel
- reducing the scheduling workload associated with managing multiple appointments.

The number of officers at locations across the country varies due to the operational needs of the department. The assessment of a request for a recurring appointment will consider:

- inspection types
- nature of the goods in accordance with prioritisation requirements
- volume of inspections to be undertaken
- the requested schedule
- efficiency for both the department and the entity
- working conditions at the site for the officer
- equity and impact on other entities
- commitment of resources and resource availability
- temporary or seasonal increase in imports
- minimum threshold criteria.

The assessment of an application for a recurring appointment will determine whether there is:

- a reduction in the number of attendances to the site by officers
- an increase in the number of goods inspected during an agreed recurring time
- a reduction in the amount of time spent travelling to the site for officers
- reduction in bookings and the associated workload for both an entity (goods preparation and presentation) and the department (attending to the goods).

The establishment of recurring appointment must not unreasonably prevent other entities from being able to obtain an appointment for an inspection.

We will schedule recurring appointments at a time within the department's operating hours that does not prevent the department from being able to inspect goods in accordance with any prioritisation requirements.

4.4 Approved recurring appointment

The department's recurring appointment team must approve recurring appointments. The approval must be in writing and include a covering statement indicating that the arrangement is voluntary and both the department and the entity may withdraw from the arrangement at any point. The approval must also include:

- defined start and end date
- defined review date.

The end date must be no more than 12-months from the start date.

An entity is responsible for requesting an extension of their arrangement at least 8 weeks before the defined end date within the agreement. If an entity does not request an extension of their agreement prior to the defined end date, the agreement will end as scheduled.

4.5 Declined recurring appointment

Where we have declined a request, the entity will be notified in writing. The notification must include:

- the reason we have declined the request
- the process to follow to have the decision reviewed.

Where we have declined a request due to unavailability of departmental resources, we will proactively undertake a review of the application every 4 months for a period up to 12 months from the date of the assessment to determine if an arrangement can be established.

4.6 Reviewing a decision

An entity can apply for an independent review of a decision where the decision includes a decline of a new request, a cancellation, or modification of an existing arrangement within 20 business days of receiving an outcome.

Entities may submit a request for review to the director designated as being responsible for recurring appointment application outcomes. The request made by the entity should outline:

- reason for seeking the reassessment
- data that supports the reasoning (may include volume of goods handled for an extended period)
- any other information that supports the request for review.

Upon receiving a request from the entity, the director responsible for recurring appointments will review the decision. The applicant or holder of the appointment must request the review.

We will endeavour to notify the entity of the outcome of the review within 20 business days of the review request or when we receive additional information from the entity; whichever is the latter.

4.7 Review of existing recurring appointments

We will review all recurring appointments (including department coordinated attendance) at least 6 months – and no more than 8 months – after implementation. A review may also be triggered when the number of entities seeking a recurring appointment for an inspection type exceeds our resources. When this occurs, we will reassess all recurring appointments covering that inspection type within the region and notify recurring appointment holders of the outcome.

Where it is determined that officers are not being effectively utilised for the entire duration of the allotted time, we may modify or cancel the appointment.

We will notify entities with an active appointment of their biannual review date at the time we approve their arrangement. Entities will be able to notify us of any change in circumstance, or additional information or data for consideration.

We will endeavour to notify arrangement holders of the outcome within 20 business days of commencing the review.

4.8 Amendments or cancellations of arrangements

The department or the entity requesting the appointment may cancel or amend the arrangement at any time if:

- the entity no longer wants the arrangement
- the entity doesn't require the arrangement as the volume of goods handled by the entity has reduced
- officers are not being utilised for the full length of the appointment
- the working conditions at the site are unsafe and any attempt by the operator to remedy the conditions were unsatisfactory
- other entities are impacted due to the unavailability of officers.

The department or the entity responsible for amending or cancelling the arrangement must notify the relevant party 5 business days prior to the change, or within 24 hours of a cancellation based on unsafe working conditions. Notifications must be made in writing.

5 Working conditions

Where the working conditions at a site have been deemed unsafe, we may cease all inspections at that site until the safety issues have been addressed by the site operator. The appropriate authority to cease inspections at a site are as follows:

- Officers attending a site may refuse to conduct an inspection upon identifying unsafe conditions.
- All leadership positions within the department (APS 5 to SES) may temporarily suspend inspection activities at a site pending rectification of the unsafe conditions.
- Workplace health and safety representatives may issue a direction to cease unsafe work to the cargo inspectorate in accordance with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.

Once safety issues have been resolved, inspections at the site will recommence.

An entity is responsible for advising us of planned or unplanned site changes that may impact an officer's ability to effectively and safely undertake activities.

The working conditions for officers at third-party sites must adhere to:

- *Public Service Act 1992*
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*
 - Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011
 - Work Health and Safety (How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks) Code of Practice 2015
- State work health and safety Acts and regulations
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Enterprise Agreement
- Other workplace laws and regulations in the jurisdiction where the site is located.

In addition, officers must not be subject to:

- an unsafe workplace
- bullying, harassment and intimidation
- attempts at collusion
- illegal activities.

Where we determine that the working conditions at a site are unsuitable or unsafe, we may suspend inspection services at that site.

6 Legislation and policy framework

The primary reference documents related to this policy are:

- *Biosecurity Act 2015*
- Biosecurity Regulations 2016
- *Imported Food Control Act 1992*
- Imported Food Control Regulations 2019
- *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*
- *Public Service Act 1999*
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*
- *Privacy Act 1988*
- [Client service charter](#)
- [Corporate plan](#)
- [Regulatory practice statement](#).

6.1 Legislative accountabilities and delegated powers

This policy sets out our scheduling arrangements, including new recurring appointments to enable effective and proper use of departmental resources. The legislative accountabilities and delegated powers related to this policy are in Table 1. Relevant legislation is in Table 2 and relevant policies are in Table 3.

Table 1 Legislative accountabilities and delegated powers

Role	Accountability or delegated power
Authorised officer	<i>Imported Food Control Act 1992</i> : s12 Issue of food control certificate.
Biosecurity officer	<i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> : s125 Inspecting goods and taking samples.
Secretary	<i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• s15 Duty to govern the Commonwealth entity<ul style="list-style-type: none">– (1)(a) promote the proper use and management of public resources for which the authority is responsible– (1)(b) promote the achievement of the purposes of the entity• s16 Duty to establish and maintain systems relating to risk and control• s37 Records about performance of Commonwealth entities

Table 2 Relevant legislation

Legislation	Relevant section
<i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i>	s 592 Fees and other rules for fee-bearing activities.

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Legislation	Relevant section
Biosecurity Regulation 2016	Chapter 9 Miscellaneous, Part 2 Cost recovery, Division 1 Fees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • s106 Fees that may be charged in relation to fee-bearing activities • s106A Fee-bearing activities carried out in special processing areas.
<i>Imported Food Control Act 1992</i>	s36 Fees for certain services.
Imported Food Control Regulations 2019	s30 Payable amounts for chargeable services.
<i>Public Service Act 1999</i>	s10 APS Values.
<i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • s16 Duty to establish and maintain systems relating to risk and control. • s37 Records about performance of Commonwealth entities. • s38 Measuring and assessing performance of Commonwealth entities.
Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014	s10 Preventing, detecting, and dealing with fraud

Table 3 Relevant policies

Policy	How it applies
Accountable authority instructions	The accountable authority instructions (AAIs) are issued by the secretary under section 20A of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> (PGPA Act) to officials on matters relating to the use of public resources in the delivery of policies, programs and services. The AAIs apply to all department officials.
APS Values	The APS Values articulate the parliament's expectations of public servants in terms of performance and standards of behaviour. The principles of good public administration are embodied in the APS Values.
Client service charter	Policy outlining the department's servicing commitments to clients.
Enterprise Risk Management Framework and Policy	The Enterprise Risk Management Framework and Policy (ERMFP) outlines the department's approach to effective risk management in line with the PGPA Act.
Regulatory practice statement	Sets out the way the department approaches its regulatory responsibilities, how it regulates according to better practice, and achieves regulatory outcomes that benefit the Australian community, our regulated entities, and industries.
Scheme for Compensation for Detriment caused by Defective Administration (CDDA Scheme)	The CDDA Scheme enables the department to compensate you in circumstances where we are not legally liable and statutory compensation is not available. We can make a payment under the CDDA Scheme if we agree that our administration has been defective and our defective administration has directly caused you loss. Payments made under the CDDA Scheme are discretionary, meaning a decision-maker does not have to approve your application.

7 Assurance

The following departmental mechanisms assure appropriate implementation of this policy:

- Officers scheduling standard and group appointments will be subject to
 - training and assessment
 - job cards
 - verification.
- Recurring appointments
 - must be reviewed by the recurring appointments team at least 6 months – and no more than 8 months – after implementation
 - must be endorsed by the recurring appointments team executive
 - records must be appropriately maintained.
- We will review this policy and associated documents as required or within 3 years following implementation.
- Where there are major amendments to the policy; the department will consult internal stakeholders and entities to submit any identified issues or major amendments to the policy.
- Where there are minor amendments that do not impact the overall administration of the policy, the department will notify entities of the minor amendment.

Glossary

Term	Definition
department coordinated attendance	To effectively manage biosecurity risk, we may coordinate attendance of officers to third-party premises (see Department coordinated attendance).
entity	May refer to importers and their representatives, operators of entry points, approved arrangement operators or brokers.
group appointment	Single appointment for inspection covering multiple consignments or inspection types. Currently available for limited commodities only.
industry group	Entities that are managing the importation of the same or similar inspection types.
inspection type	Describes the commodity and is used by the department to allocate the correct competency of the inspector and calculate the correct duration of the inspection.
officer	Refers to a departmental employee authorised as a biosecurity officer and/or imported food authorised officer.
officer accreditation	Accreditations held by officers that enable them to perform biosecurity inspections on different inspection types.
prioritisation	Prioritisation rules we may apply when scheduling inspections for imported cargo to manage factors such as those outlined in Prioritisation of inspections .
recurring appointment	A voluntary agreement requested by an entity that provides efficient outcomes for the entity and the department.
site	A third-party premises, which may include an approved arrangement, first point of entry or importer premises.
standard appointment	Single appointment for inspection covering an individual consignment only.