

Import Risk Analysis

Thanks to our strong biosecurity system, Australia is free from many serious pests and diseases. Before an agricultural product can be imported into Australia, we first determine whether it is safe to do so. For some products, we do this by conducting an import risk analysis.

As the name suggests, an import risk analysis is focussed on risk! As a World Trade Organization member, we consider the pests that an imported product can carry and the consequences they have for us. But we can't consider whether the imported product will compete with Australian products.

So, what exactly does an import risk analysis involve? Let's follow an example of a country wanting to send a particular type of fruit to Australia.

Our first step is to create a list of all the known pests that are in that country and are likely to be associated with the fruit. This includes insects, bacteria, viruses and fungi. Once we confirm what pests are present in the country and are likely to be associated with the fruit, we then narrow the list down to those pests that could be a risk. We do this by asking a series of questions.

- Is Australia currently free of this pest or are we actively managing the pest?
- Can the pest be carried on the fruit?
- Is the pest able to establish and spread in Australia?
- Is the pest able to cause economic or environmental damage to Australia?

If we answer yes to all these questions, then we look at the pest in more detail.

Our next step is to determine if the pest is a high risk. This is an important step as it determines the conditions to allow the fruit to be safely imported.

To determine if the pest is a high risk, we first look at whether it is likely to enter Australia on the imported fruit. We only allow commercially produced and packed products into Australia. So we consider how the country grows and packs the fruit. This can include washing the fruit to reduce the number of pests.

Once we know if the pest can enter the country on the fruit we look at how likely it is to call Australia home. We look at the pest's biology and if our environment is suitable for the pest to establish. Next, we look into how likely it is to spread to other parts of the country.

Finally, we look at what the consequences could be if the pest was to call Australia home. Whether it will affect the entire country or only a small area. From the effect the pest will have on crops or the environment, to the effect it will have on trade.

Once we have all of this information we can determine if the pest is a high risk. If it is, then we will need the exporting country to do certain activities to reduce the risk. We call these import conditions. These can be anything from treatments, like fumigation to kill the pest, to sourcing the fruit from an area free of the pest.

During an import risk analysis, we talk to the country requesting access and even visit them to see how they produce the product. We also consult with a range of other stakeholders, including our industries here in Australia, state and territory governments, and the general public. One way we do this is by releasing a draft report for public consultation, which allows stakeholders to comment on our findings. When we develop the final report, we consider all the comments received.

And there you have it, that's an import risk analysis!

But we don't stop there. Once safe trade is allowed, we inspect the product at the border to ensure the product meets our conditions.

To learn more, check out our 'At the border' video.