



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

# **National Policy on Pest Freedom Programs and Pest Absence**



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This publication (and any material sourced from it) should be attributed as: DAFF 2025, *National Policy on Pest Freedom Programs and Pest Absence*, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Canberra, 10 December 2025. CC BY 4.0.

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### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank staff in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, state and territory governments and plant industry stakeholders for their input.

### 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.

### Version control

This policy was endorsed by the Plant Health Committee on 10 December 2025.

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# Introduction

This document sets a national framework for implementing a pest free area (PFA), pest free place of production (PFPP), pest free production site (PFPS), and determining an area of pest absence (APA), to facilitate trade. The term ‘pest freedom program’ refers collectively to a PFA, PFPP and PFPS.

The terminology, definitions and frameworks related to pest freedom programs and pest absence determination align with the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) adopted by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Commission on Phytosanitary Measures. For commonly used terms, see the [Glossary](#).

A pest freedom program or APA demonstrates that specific pests are absent from a geographical location and supports the phytosanitary certification of plants and plant products (collectively referred to as ‘plants’) exported from those locations. An APA is an overarching category that includes all areas where a specified pest is not present, with varying degrees of confidence and assurance. A pest freedom program can be considered a subcategory of ‘pest absence’, characterised by active and ongoing efforts to manage and verify that the location remains free of the pest.

‘Pest absence’ is a pest status (IPPC 2022a) for a geographical location. A pest’s status can be ‘present’ or ‘absent’ (or be classified according to other subcategories under ISPM 8) and is determined using information from surveillance, pest records, and systems that prevent the entry and establishment of pests into a specific area. If a pest’s status in a specific geographic location is determined to be absent, jurisdictions may use that status for domestic or international trade. Pest status for an area is determined by the National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO) of the exporting country. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is the NPPO for Australia.

Acceptance of a pest freedom program or APA for trade is subject to the importing jurisdiction’s agreement. However, an importing jurisdiction should not require a pest freedom program to be established unless there is technical justification for that requirement.

The purpose of a pest freedom program or APA in the context of trade in plants is to allow export on the basis that a specific geographic location does not have a particular pest, or group of pests. A pest freedom program or APA is for:

- a specific pest or group of pests associated with those plants
- specific markets regulating a pest or group of pests on those plants.

An evidence-based program that maintains pest freedom for a specific pest enables the trade of plants originating from a pest freedom program or APA without requiring additional measures (e.g. methyl bromide treatment) for that pest. For international trade, exporters must obtain a phytosanitary certificate to confirm that the consignment meets phytosanitary import requirements, including appropriate packaging if the products pass through a pest-infested area.

To facilitate domestic and international trade, the relevant jurisdiction issues an area freedom certificate to declare that plants originate from a location that is free from the pest of concern.

## Policy objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- create a national framework that is applicable to pest freedom programs and APAs to facilitate plant trade
- outline the requirements for a pest freedom program
- provide guidance on determining an APA, in accordance with ISPM 8
- outline agreed roles and responsibilities of governments, industry and other stakeholders (e.g. authorised third-party service providers, growers, relevant businesses and individuals) in managing a pest freedom program and APA
- promote safe, least-restrictive trade for Australian growers
- support Australia's national plant health system with appropriate national regulation for plant pests to minimise biosecurity risk
- enhance consistency between domestic policies and international standards.

This policy does not cover:

- pests under an eradication program or transition-to-management program as part of an emergency response under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD)
- plants moved from an area of low pest prevalence as part of a systems approach.

This Policy is in effect following consultation with government and industry. Any future proposals for amendment should be directed to the department at [nationalpestpolicy@aff.gov.au](mailto:nationalpestpolicy@aff.gov.au).

## Connection to domestic trade

Pest freedom programs and APAs established domestically are the responsibility of jurisdictions. Appropriate biosecurity legislation and policies are in place to prevent the introduction of pests and to manage the movement of plants between jurisdictions, including the use of pest freedom as a condition for moving plants. The implementing jurisdictions are responsible for advising other jurisdictions and seeking recognition of the pest freedom program or APA. Information shared among jurisdictions facilitates domestic trade and market access negotiations, encourages cooperation and supports Australia's national plant health system. Where required, jurisdictions should ensure that domestic measures to support pest freedom programs are no less stringent than equivalent measures at international first points of entry (FPOEs).

## Connection to international trade

The department assures Australia's trading partners that our export systems are consistent with international requirements and principles, as set out in the ISPMs. Where the use of a pest freedom program or APA has been agreed as a phytosanitary measure or condition for trade, the department issues phytosanitary certificates to attest that exported products meet the biosecurity requirements of importing countries. Exporters are also required to adhere to legislative requirements (*Export Control Act 2020* and *Export Control [Plants and Plant Products] Rules 2021*). When negotiating

export requirements with importing countries, the department uses a jurisdiction's area freedom certificate as supporting evidence.

Where a pest has been declared as absent from Australia, or absent in parts of Australia, in accordance with ISPM 8, no further measures should be required for domestic trade and international exports for that pest, unless there is technical justification for such measures (IPPC 2024a). Upon request, the exporting jurisdiction is responsible for providing supporting evidence (e.g. pest records) to an importing jurisdiction, while the department is responsible for providing such evidence to an importing country.

This policy aligns with relevant ISPMs, including ISPM 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 26, 29 and 47. The *National Guideline for Implementing Pest Freedom Programs and Areas of Pest Absence* elaborates on the requirements to demonstrate pest freedom. The *Template for Implementing Pest Freedom Programs and Areas of Pest Absence* guides stakeholders through setting up a pest freedom program or APA.

# 1 Pest freedom programs

## 1.1 Definitions

The 3 types of pest freedom programs are:

- 1) **Pest free area (PFA)** – ‘an area in which a specific pest is absent as demonstrated by scientific evidence and in which, where appropriate, this condition is being officially maintained’ (IPPC 2024b).
  - a) Area – ‘an officially defined country, part of a country or all or parts of several countries’ (IPPC 2024b).
- 2) **Pest free place of production (PFPP)** – ‘place of production in which a specific pest is absent as demonstrated by scientific evidence and in which, where appropriate, this condition is being officially maintained for a defined period’ (IPPC 2021a).
  - a) Place of production – ‘any premises or collection of fields operated as a single production or farming unit’ (IPPC 2024b).
- 3) **Pest free production site (PFPS)** – ‘a production site in which a specific pest is absent, as demonstrated by scientific evidence, and in which, where appropriate, this condition is being officially maintained for a defined period’ (IPPC 2021a).
  - a) Production site – ‘a defined part of a place of production, that is managed as a separate unit for phytosanitary purposes’ (IPPC 2024b).

Each of these may be considered a ‘phytosanitary measure’ for trade.

## 1.2 Stages

The main stages of a pest freedom program are initiation, establishment, maintenance (including the development of a corrective action plan if a pest incursion or outbreak occurs), verification and review.

### Initiation

This includes the identification of the pest, the geographical location of the pest freedom program, and suitability of the environmental conditions.

### Establishment

Measures and procedures to establish a pest freedom program aim to demonstrate the pest free status of the geographical location (including, if necessary, eradication). Key elements include assessing the risk of pest introduction into the designated area, applying movement controls on identified entry pathways, and validating pest freedom through surveillance. A buffer zone may be needed to establish a pest freedom program.

After a pest freedom program is established, the exporting jurisdiction should seek formal recognition from the importing jurisdiction or country prior to trade commencing.

## Maintenance

Measures and procedures to maintain the pest freedom program include all activities that are undertaken to prevent pests from entering the pest freedom program and to remain free of the pest (including regulations, surveillance and responses to detections where necessary).

## Outbreak response

The detection of a pest in a PFA, PFPP or PFPS may result in:

- **Suspension** – Temporary suspension of pest freedom status for all or part of a PFA occurs when evidence or conditions, which are set in the corrective action plan for the PFA, indicate that a PFA requires temporary control and eradication measures to be implemented. For example, this can occur where the detection of the specified pest within a PFA is made or exceeds a technically justified threshold or trigger (IPPC 2021b). The surveillance and eradication activities outlined in the corrective action plan will then be implemented.
- **Reinstatement** – Pest freedom status may be reinstated when a suspended pest freedom program has had a sufficient period and evidence collected to assure that the pest is no longer present in the specific pest freedom program or associated buffer zone (where relevant). Reinstatement criteria are based on pest biology and the confidence provided by surveillance and management of the pest freedom program and its buffer zone. Reinstatement of trade depends on the importing jurisdiction's requirements and acceptance.
- **Withdrawal** – Where the specified pest is detected in a PFPP or PFPS (or a buffer zone intended to be pest free), pest freedom status should be withdrawn until re-establishment conditions are met. If the pest freedom program, or part of it, is no longer considered free of the pest or it is not economically or technically feasible to eradicate the pest, then the pest freedom status should be withdrawn.

## Verification and review

To verify the pest freedom program is being maintained, growers, industry and government authorities conduct activities that ensure:

- the measures and systems to maintain pest freedom remain effective (e.g. ongoing surveys, inspection of exported commodities or audit outcomes of the pest freedom program)
- required documentation and other records are complete and current.

Regular review of program effectiveness and feasibility should be conducted to ensure the pest freedom program is achieving its objectives.

## 2 Program elements

All pest freedom programs require a combination of elements at each stage to be effective, provide an acceptable level of confidence for trade and support APA claims. These elements include:

- risk assessment
- surveillance
- diagnostics
- movement restrictions and phytosanitary measures
- auditing and documentation
- corrective action plans for detections, incursions and outbreaks
- public information, support and participation
- review.

The elements required for a pest freedom program should be appropriate to the type of pest freedom program (PFA, PFPP or PFPS), the stage of the pest freedom program, the pest, and environment characteristics. Pest freedom programs may adopt measures of other phytosanitary programs, including common surveillance infrastructure, diagnostics and regulatory controls.

A combination of these elements may be necessary to ensure an acceptable level of confidence in determining an APA or establishing a pest freedom program.

### 2.1 Risk assessment

Jurisdictions are responsible for performing a risk assessment that aligns with ISPM 2 (IPPC 2021b) and ISPM 11 (IPPC 2021c). A risk assessment helps determine the risk of pest introduction, spread and economic impact, and informs appropriate risk management measures in implementing a pest freedom program or determining an APA. The risk assessment should be conducted by suitably experienced persons from the jurisdiction and may include input from industry experts and relevant businesses. The documentation of this process justifies the establishment of the pest freedom program or declaring an APA and the measures implemented.

### 2.2 Surveillance

Surveillance activities for pest freedom programs must be sufficient to provide confidence that the pest would be detected if present in the pest freedom program (IPPC 2021e), and to establish a basis for the measures and procedures to maintain and verify freedom. Surveillance undertaken to maintain confidence in pest freedom claims should consider the pathways of pest introduction. Where appropriate, activities should also include surveillance of areas surrounding or adjacent to the pest freedom program, including buffer zones.

General and specific surveillance can support a pest freedom program or APA. General surveillance involves information on the pest that is gathered from existing sources. Specific surveillance involves official, targeted surveys within the area to obtain evidence of the pest over a defined period. The

type and design of surveillance must account for pest characteristics, host availability, environmental suitability and rates of spread. Relevant national or international surveillance protocols should be used if available.

The greater the risk a pest poses to the pest freedom program or APA, the more evidence is required from surveillance activities to ensure that pest freedom is maintained.

## 2.3 Diagnostics

Diagnostic procedures and tools must support surveillance activities and provide confidence in pest identification (IPPC 2021f). Selection and design of diagnostic tools and procedures, in particular sensitivity and specificity of tests, should consider the likelihood of pest detection in plants originating from the pest freedom program and in areas where a specific pest has been determined as absent (IPPC 2022a). Confident diagnosis of certain pests may need additional tests beyond physical inspections (e.g. molecular tests).

Diagnostic protocols should be agreed by jurisdictions. If available, relevant and effective international or national diagnostic protocols should be used.

## 2.4 Movement restrictions and phytosanitary measures

Pest freedom programs and APAs must include control measures that prevent pests from entering the pest freedom program or APA. These controls can be active, such as regulating the movement of regulated articles, and passive, like physical or biological barriers. Programs may also apply interventions that modify environmental conditions or reduce suitability for pests.

Control measures may be implemented in buffer zones (where relevant). Buffer zones can be an important part of a pest freedom program. Buffer zones are not necessarily pest free but may include movement controls and other interventions to prevent the pest introduction to the pest freedom program.

Measures to ensure phytosanitary security are needed to prevent infestation or contamination of traded goods. To ensure traceability, goods should be labelled according to importer requirements.

## 2.5 Verification, auditing and documentation

Procedures to ensure that pest freedom programs are being properly implemented are essential to maintain confidence in the pest freedom programs. They also ensure that any issues and failures in the program are identified and addressed.

Verification may include spot checks, audits, analysis of collected data and other oversight mechanisms used to identify issues, ensure compliance and assurance. An audit is a documented verification process (IPPC 2023) and in this context is used to evaluate whether a pest freedom program has measures and procedures to prevent pest introduction and maintain pest free status.

The applicant should maintain documentation to support pest freedom programs for auditing purposes. This includes records of risk assessments, surveillance, diagnostics, movement controls, and corrective action plans. For domestic trade, the importing jurisdiction may request to conduct an

audit either directly or through an independent auditor. For international trade, the department may audit these documents to ensure the pest freedom program complies with Australian export legislation, import conditions and international standards.

## **2.6 Corrective action plans for detections, incursions and outbreaks**

Pest freedom programs should include corrective action plans for incursions and outbreaks. These should include appropriate triggers for corrective actions and measures for eradication, control, surveillance and diagnostics. The triggered measures may be different from, or in addition to, measures at other stages of a pest freedom program. Additionally, corrective action plans should specify mandated timelines in which notifications are issued by jurisdictions to affected stakeholders to report of any changes to the pest freedom program. This may include notifications of detections (e.g. detection of a single fruit fly) based on pre-agreed reporting thresholds of the pest freedom program.

If a pest is detected within a pest freedom program or APA and the detection affects international trade agreements, the department may be required to notify trading partners of those detections.

## **2.7 Public information, support and participation**

An important factor in the establishment and maintenance of pest freedom programs is the support and participation of the public. Target audiences for communication material are local communities, industries and councils, and individuals who travel to or through the area – including parties with direct interests (e.g. producers, airlines, transportation agents) and indirect interests (e.g. tourists, school children, local shoppers). In many cases, educating and informing the public are important tools to promote awareness, foster public cooperation and encourage pest reporting.

## **2.8 Review**

Pest freedom programs should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are valid and incorporate current scientific information. If new evidence changes the level of risk associated with a pest freedom program, the responsible jurisdiction or business owner with jurisdictions oversight must review the program to ensure it continues to meet trade requirements. A new risk assessment may be needed where new information invalidates a previous decision, such as a change in pest freedom program boundaries, new pest detections or changes in pest distribution.

## 3 Program requirements

Pest freedom programs must be:

- technically justified and risk based
- applied at the appropriate spatial and temporal scale
- authorised and transparent.

### 3.1 Technically justified and risk based

Pest freedom programs must be evidence based, and provide confidence that the pest is not present and continues to be excluded from the designated area. This includes spatial and temporal boundaries. Risk assessments guide the development of measures that support pest freedom programs. These measures should include appropriate surveillance, diagnostics, movement restrictions, verification activities, and outbreak response plans. These measures should be based on the relevant pest and geographical characteristics of the pest freedom program.

Pest freedom programs should include measures that reduce the likelihood of pest introduction through all potential risk pathways. Measures should also be proportionate to the risk of each pathway.

Pest freedom programs must be reviewed and revised as required to maintain confidence that pest freedom programs continue to exclude pests based on best practice. This may include consideration of emerging evidence and new technology, as well as changes to information provided in the risk assessment.

If there is evidence that the pest has become established in the pest freedom program, the relevant jurisdiction must evaluate the program and advise the relevant parties whether the pest freedom program is still being recognised.

Where changes are made to a pest freedom program that supports international trade, the relevant jurisdiction must inform the department. Where the pest freedom program is no longer recognised it may be suspended or withdrawn.

### 3.2 Appropriate spatial and temporal scale

Pest freedom programs must have defined spatial boundaries based on pest introduction pathways, geographical characteristics of the area, and environmental conditions. These boundaries can be administrative (e.g. interstate borders, property boundaries), physical or natural barriers.

If appropriate, buffer zones that can provide protection and early warning signs for pest introduction to the pest freedom program are strongly encouraged. Where the boundary of a pest freedom program aligns with an interstate border, consideration will need to be given as to the boundaries of any required buffer zone. Formal agreements between jurisdictions may be required where a buffer zone is established across neighbouring jurisdictions.

The time and frequency that procedures and mandatory activities are applied must be technically justified. This can include factors such as detection probability and seasonal behaviour of the pest.

To reinstate a pest freedom program after an eradication response, the length of the activity and the criteria to demonstrate freedom should be agreed by relevant parties prior to implementation.

If pest freedom recognition is suspended or withdrawn, the minimum period to reinstate or re-establish the pest freedom program must be technically justified.

### **3.3 Authorised and transparent**

Regulatory controls required to maintain pest freedom programs must be enforceable. Stakeholders – whether jurisdictions, industry bodies, or third-party service providers – must have clearly defined authority to undertake activities that support the pest freedom program such as surveillance and diagnostics. Jurisdictions are responsible for overseeing pest freedom programs within their territories and authorising exports from those programs.

The department is responsible for recognition and certification of a pest freedom program as an official phytosanitary measure to facilitate international exports. The department will not certify for international export on the basis of pest freedom where pest freedom programs do not meet the requirements of this policy. The ability to meet additional requirements agreed with international trading partners is also essential to facilitate successful trade.

Stakeholders involved in implementing pest freedom programs must establish and maintain appropriate records and document activities related to the requirements outlined in this policy. Nationally coordinated systems and platforms support pest freedom programs and APA by providing diagnostic resources and verified pest records. The exporting jurisdiction is responsible for keeping the importing jurisdiction informed of aspects of the pest freedom programs. Any changes to how phytosanitary measures and activities are implemented in the pest freedom programs should be communicated to the importing jurisdiction.

For international exports, international trading partners may request records and documentation to verify the pest freedom program.

## 4 Level of required evidence

Pest freedom cannot be definitively proven and is determined based on confidence that the pest is not present in a geographical location. This is supported by the collection and analysis of surveillance and evidence used to support a pest freedom program. Pest freedom programs should be designed to produce evidence that supports a level of confidence – appropriate to the specific pest and trade context—that the pest is not present. Typically, evidence should confirm that the pest population has not become established in the area. Under international guidelines and standards, intermittent and unrelated individual detections within a PFA may not trigger the suspension of a PFA, unless pest thresholds and triggers for an outbreak have been reached (IPPC 2019, IPPC 2021b). If there are detections, affected stakeholders should identify the source of detection and, where feasible, strengthen controls to reduce the likelihood of future incursions.

For domestic trade, jurisdictions may be required to inform other jurisdictions of detections based on the pre-agreed reporting thresholds of the pest freedom program. If international trade is involved, the department may be required to inform our trading partners of those detections based on pre-agreed reporting thresholds.

The risk posed by the pest informs the acceptable level of confidence. The risk is based on the likelihood of pest introduction, spread and associated economic consequences. Characteristics of the pest and the pest freedom program (including entry pathways, host availability and climatic suitability) inform the risk of pest introduction into the pest freedom program and appropriate measures to manage that risk. The level of confidence required can be expressed in qualitative and/or quantitative terms. Evidence to support pest freedom programs should be quantitative (e.g. surveillance data, environmental records, compliance records), where possible.

## 5 Additional considerations

### 5.1 Official control

Official control is the active enforcement of mandatory phytosanitary regulations and the application of mandatory phytosanitary procedures with the objective of eradication or containment of quarantine pests or for the management of regulated non-quarantine pests. Official control may contribute to a pest freedom program or an APA. Information on official control can be found in the [Official Control of Plant Quarantine Pests: National Policy 2025](#). The department can implement quarantine measures for a pest at international FPoEs when that pest is considered under official control.

### 5.2 Cost effectiveness

The establishment and maintenance of a pest freedom program or an APA may require a significant investment of time and resources. The cost of maintaining pest freedom programs or APAs should not exceed the cumulative benefit of maintaining the value of market access or potential market access. When considering a pest freedom program or an APA, other biosecurity options to achieve the importing jurisdiction's importing requirements and their expected costs should be considered. Other cost factors include environmental and social impacts, the time it takes for pest freedom program and APA objectives to be realised, and the risks involved in maintaining pest freedom.

### 5.3 Feasibility

A pest freedom program or an APA should be feasible to operate. Depending on the type of pest freedom program or APA, responsible parties should determine whether they have operational capability and capacity to implement a pest freedom program or APA. Factors that determine feasibility can also be influenced by the biological characteristics of the pest, pest pressure, environmental and climatic conditions, ease and accuracy of detection, number of pathways for pest introduction, stakeholder cooperation, and accessibility for conducting surveillance activities.

### 5.4 Sharing of responsibilities

The complexity of some pest freedom programs and APAs requires sharing of responsibilities among stakeholders. This may involve the Australian Government, jurisdictions, industry bodies, growers and third-party service providers. All parties must agree to their roles and responsibilities in a pest freedom program or APA and cooperate to implement it.

### 5.5 Trading partner checks and audits

An importing jurisdiction or country may request further information or conduct their own evaluation to confirm that activities are suitable and based on the level of acceptable risk to the importing jurisdiction or country. All involved parties should be prepared to facilitate audits and other verification activities undertaken by the importing jurisdiction or country, where appropriate.

## 6 Area of pest absence

### 6.1 Distinction between area of pest absence and pest freedom program

'Pest absence' (ISPM 8) is a pest status category that describes an area where a specified pest is not present and reliable information supports this claim. Pest absence may be further categorised depending on the level of confidence and the measures implemented to ensure that a pest is absent from a specified area. An APA may be determined for an entire country or part of a country.

A pest freedom program also describes a location (area, place of production or production site) where a specified pest is absent. A pest freedom program represents a specific and structured approach to demonstrating pest absence. It is officially maintained as a phytosanitary measure and provides ongoing assurance that the pest is not present. APAs and pest freedom programs can both be used to facilitate market access and trade.

A pest freedom program may not be necessary to maintain an 'absent' pest status where the pest has not been detected, its absence is verified through surveillance, and the risk of pest introduction is assessed as minimal. This is consistent with ISPM 4, which states:

If an exporting country has declared a pest to be absent in an area in accordance with ISPM 8, then establishing a PFA in that area should not be required, unless there is technical justification by importing countries.

This concept also applies to domestic trade where a jurisdiction has declared a pest to be absent and supports that claim with reliable information.

However, where pest records provided by surveillance are not sufficient to demonstrate an APA in a geographical location and the area is at risk of pest introduction, importing jurisdictions or countries may seek assurance of pest freedom, including a pest freedom program as a phytosanitary measure for trade. The importing jurisdiction or country is responsible for assessing documented evidence and technical packages to support a pest status determination or a pest freedom program.

Where an exporting jurisdiction has completed a risk assessment and determined the risk of pest introduction into the designated area to be minimal, and the importing jurisdiction or country assesses that as achieving its appropriate level of protection (ALOP), it may be unnecessary to establish a pest freedom program for trade.

However, if the result of a risk assessment by the exporting jurisdiction indicates that multiple risk management measures are needed to reduce the risk of pest introduction into the designated area, this suggests that a pest freedom program may be needed to demonstrate pest free status. The importing jurisdiction or country can also request a pest freedom program as an import condition to achieve its ALOP.

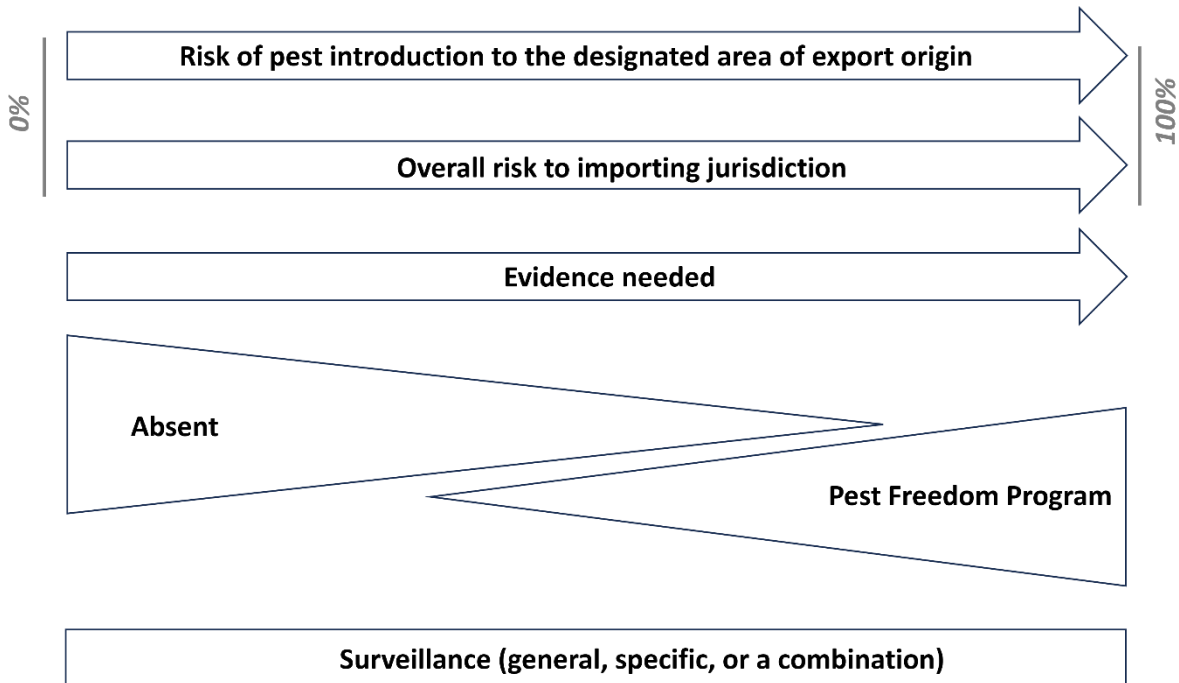
The level of evidence required to determine APA or establish a pest freedom program will depend on the pest risk. This includes the likelihood of pest introduction, spread and consequences.

The exporting jurisdiction and importing jurisdiction or country perform their own risk assessments

prior to agreeing on market access conditions. The greater the economic and environmental consequence the pest presents to an importing jurisdiction or country, the stronger the phytosanitary measures that may be required.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between pest risk, evidence requirements, and surveillance to support an APA or a pest freedom program. The exporting jurisdiction assesses the risk of pest introduction, specifically entry and establishment, into the designated area. In contrast, the importing jurisdiction evaluates the overall pest risk, including the potential for spread and its consequences within its territory. Pest absence, as defined by IPPC (2022a), can be demonstrated when the pest risk is minimal and supported by appropriate surveillance. When pest risk does not meet the importing jurisdiction’s ALOP, the importing jurisdiction may refuse access or request a pest freedom program as a phytosanitary measure to achieve its ALOP and facilitate trade.

**Figure 1 Relationship between pest risk and required evidence to support area of pest absence or pest freedom program**



## 6.2 Determining an area of pest absence

Where a pest has been declared as absent in an area in accordance with ISPM 8, then establishing a PFA in that area should not be required, unless there is technical justification by importing countries (IPPC 2024a). ISPM 8 specifies that lack of information resulting from inadequate or insufficient surveillance activities does not constitute a basis for determining pest absence and it is essential that reliable information is available to declare pest absence.

A pest freedom program is expected to strongly consider and demonstrate the [program elements](#) and [program requirements](#). An APA is not expected to demonstrate the elements and requirements

as strongly as a pest freedom program, but several aspects must be considered and will inform the feasibility of determining an APA, including:

- identification of the pest, the geographical location of the APA, and suitability of the environmental conditions
- whether surveillance supports the conclusion that the pest is absent from the whole of Australia or absent from parts of Australia
- where the pest is present in Australia, the inherent risk of pest introduction into the APA is minimal
- where the pest is present in Australia, control measures (e.g. official control) are applied to potential pest entry pathways into the APA
- whether, in the absence of a pest freedom program or official control program, declaring an APA may be justified if evidence suggests the pest has minimal risk of introduction into the area
- whether the pest has a limited host range, low habitat suitability, high detectability and low natural dispersal potential.

A risk assessment is needed to demonstrate the risk of pest introduction is minimal. Phytosanitary measures may be employed in demonstrating an APA and to provide an acceptable level of confidence for trade. Criteria should also be established for responding to a pest detection or incursion into an APA. These criteria may include eradication activities, or modifying or withdrawing pest absence claims

Surveillance activities and suitable diagnostics are required to demonstrate an APA and should be proportionate to the risk of pest introduction and targeted at the likely points of entry and establishment.

When the risk of the pest becoming present has increased, APA claims should be reviewed to ensure the pest continues to be absent within an area. Pest records and other supporting evidence confirming pest absence in an area should be current and complete. An importing jurisdiction or country may request information to support an APA.

# 7 Roles and responsibilities

## 7.1 The department

The department, as the Australian NPPO, is responsible for authorising and negotiating recognition of a PFA, PFPP or PFPS as a phytosanitary measure for trade with international trading partners.

The department regulates pests (including quarantine pests and pests under official control) and undertakes surveillance of national priority pests at international FPoEs. Additionally, the department's quarantine efforts are strengthened through surveillance and early detection of biosecurity threats on non-regulated pathways in remote northern regions by the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS). The department is also responsible for communicating pest status to the IPPC. If requested by an international trading partner, the department may provide information to support a pest status (e.g. pest absence) declaration. The department engages with stakeholders across various forums to contribute to national biosecurity management and programs.

Jurisdictions, industry and stakeholders are encouraged to consult with the department on the implementation of pest freedom programs or APA intended for international exports. The department assesses pest freedom programs and APA against requirements set out in this policy to facilitate international market access negotiations and trade.

The department notifies the applicant whether their pest freedom program application meets international export requirements. The department also notifies jurisdictions, as well as industry stakeholders when ceasing to certify for a pest freedom program. Additionally, relevant jurisdictions are informed of any non-compliance with goods exported internationally, including those from pest freedom programs.

The department oversees compliance and assurance activities of pest freedom programs intended for international exports. These may include organising audit activities to ensure that pest freedom programs remain valid. The department will not certify exports based on pest freedom if the requirements for pest freedom are not met.

Depending on the reporting requirements agreed to with each importing country, the department informs those countries that recognise Australian pest freedom programs of detections, outbreaks and suspensions.

## 7.2 Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions are responsible for overseeing the initiation, establishment, maintenance, verification and review of pest freedom programs, as well as APA claims, within their jurisdictions.

Responsibilities include submitting a pest freedom program application to the department if the program is intended for international exports. The pest freedom program or APA claim must be authorised and accepted by the department prior to trade commencing. An area freedom certificate may be used to support a pest freedom program or APA claim.

Jurisdictions are responsible for declaring pest status within their jurisdiction and providing information and/or documentation on pest status to the department, where required. Jurisdictions

are responsible for monitoring pests and carrying out biosecurity activities on public lands under their jurisdiction and, under certain circumstances, on private land, as well as regulating pests that pose significant risks. Jurisdictions should ensure they have appropriate regulatory powers to undertake functions, including where necessary the power to compel compliant behaviour.

Jurisdictions have oversight of pest freedom programs and APAs within their territories, which may include internal audit activities, to ensure that pest freedom programs and APAs remain valid. Jurisdictions may consider partnering with or recognising industry bodies or industry-led programs, growers or other appropriate third-party service providers to carry out the required activities (including general surveillance; IPPC 2022b). Formal agreements may be required between the jurisdictions and third parties to assure that the required measures to maintain pest freedom are implemented. Jurisdictions must ensure that they have the power to revoke or suspend any agreements with third parties where pest freedom program or APA requirements are not met.

Jurisdictions should consult with industry and community stakeholders who may be affected by a pest freedom program or APA, and mandatory actions associated with those claims.

Jurisdictions must maintain up-to-date records of pest freedom programs and APAs in their jurisdiction. Jurisdictions have responsibility to suspend or revoke a pest freedom program or APA claim if it is determined as not effective or in line with agreed requirements. Jurisdictions may also choose to suspend or withdraw a pest freedom program or APA if it is considered there is no longer a benefit in maintaining that claim for a particular pest. Jurisdictions should notify domestic counterparts when a pest freedom program or APA claim is suspended or withdrawn.

Where a pest freedom program or APA supports export to international trading partners, jurisdictions must assist the department in meeting international obligations. Jurisdictions must ensure that they have the capacity to share information with the department and relevant international NPPOs, on request, pertaining to a pest freedom program or APA claim. To mitigate potential international trade implications, jurisdictions must consult the department prior to suspending, withdrawing or altering a pest freedom program.

### **7.3 Industry and third-party service providers**

Industry has direct interests and plays a major role in establishing and maintaining pest freedom programs or APAs. Industry possesses capabilities and resources that are required for pest freedom programs or APAs to be successful. There may be existing industry-led biosecurity programs, biosecurity plans and surveillance strategies in place that provide a framework for biosecurity risk mitigation measures including surveillance, identification, exclusion, eradication and control.

Industry bodies, growers and third-party service providers comply with relevant government frameworks, direction and enforcement in order for pest freedom programs or APAs to be authorised by jurisdictions and the department for domestic and international trade, respectively. Industry and third-party service providers perform phytosanitary activities including monitoring, sampling, surveillance, and treatment to maintain the pest freedom program or APA. These activities should be overseen by the exporting jurisdiction for export assurance.

Industry actions and processes must be acceptable to the exporting jurisdiction (for domestic trade) and department (for international trade) for the pest freedom program or APA to be recognised and used as a basis for certification for trade.

Industry and growers should work closely with their respective jurisdictions to discuss pest freedom program or APA requirements. Jurisdictions are responsible for providing advice to growers within their territories on trade requirements, as well as certifying pest free status for goods.

# Glossary

Term	Definition
appropriate level of protection (ALOP)	ALOP is defined as ‘providing a high level of sanitary and phytosanitary protection aimed at reducing risk to a very low level, but not to zero.’
area	An officially defined country, part of a country or all or parts of several countries. (IPPC 2024b)
area freedom certificate	A domestic biosecurity certificate or an interstate biosecurity certificate that certifies that a jurisdiction, or part of a jurisdiction, is free from a specified pest or disease.
Australian Government	The national government of Australia, represented in this case by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.
buffer zone	An area surrounding or adjacent to an area officially delimited for phytosanitary purposes in order to minimize the probability of spread of the target pest into or out of the delimited area, and subject to phytosanitary or other control measures, if appropriate. (IPPC 2024b)
consignment	A quantity of plants, plant products or other articles being moved from one country to another and covered, when required, by a single phytosanitary certificate (a consignment may be composed of one or more commodities or lots). (IPPC 2024b)
containment	Application of phytosanitary measures in and around an infested area to prevent spread of a pest. (IPPC 2024b)
controls	Measures and factors designed to ensure the integrity of the pest freedom program, these include physical barriers, movement prohibitions and interventions altering environmental conditions/suitability.
corrective action plan	Documented plan of phytosanitary actions to be implemented in an area officially delimited for phytosanitary purposes if a pest is detected or a tolerance level is exceeded or in the case of faulty implementation of officially established procedures. (IPPC 2024b)
delimiting survey	Survey conducted to establish the boundaries of an area considered to be infested by or free from a pest. (IPPC 2024b)
detection survey	Survey conducted to determine the presence or absence of pests. (IPPC 2024b)
element	A part of a pest freedom program including risk assessment, surveillance, diagnostics, controls and verification are the activities which when combined make up pest freedom programs.
Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD)	A legally binding agreement between PHA (Plant Health Australia), the Australian Government, all state or territory governments and national plant industry body signatories covering the management and funding of responses to emergency plant pest (EPP) incidents, including the potential for owner reimbursement costs for growers. It also formalises the role of plant industries’ participation in decision making, as well as their contribution towards the costs related to approved responses. PHA is the custodian of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.
eradication	Application of phytosanitary measures to eliminate a pest from an area. (IPPC 2024b)
general surveillance	An official process whereby information on pests in an area is obtained through various non-official or official sources other than surveys. (IPPC 2024b)
incursion	An isolated population of a pest recently detected in an area, not known to be established, but expected to survive for the immediate future. (IPPC 2024b)
inherent risk	Also referred to as unrestricted risk. This is the risk before further risk management measures are implemented to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.
inspection	Official visual examination of plants, plant products or other regulated articles to determine if pests are present or to determine compliance with phytosanitary regulations. (IPPC 2024b)
integrity (of a consignment)	Condition of a consignment as described by its phytosanitary certificate or other officially acceptable document when its identity is unchanged, its packaging undamaged and it shows no signs of tampering. (IPPC 2024b)

## National Policy on Pest Freedom Programs and Pest Absence

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
interception (of a pest)	The detection of a pest during inspection or testing of an imported consignment. (IPPC 2024b)
International Plant Protection Convention	International Plant Protection Convention, as deposited with FAO in Rome in 1951 and as subsequently amended. (IPPC 2024b)
jurisdiction	An Australian state or territory.
monitoring	An official ongoing process to verify phytosanitary situations. (IPPC 2024b)
National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA)	The National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA) was signed by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in January 2012. It establishes the national arrangements for responding to significant pest and disease incursions where there are predominantly public benefits.
National Management Group (NMG)	The National Management Group (NMG) is the decision-making body for national exotic plant pest and animal disease eradication programmes under the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) established in 2002 and the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) established in 2005.
official	Established, authorised or performed by the national plant protection organisation. (IPPC 2024b)
official control	The active enforcement of mandatory phytosanitary regulations and the application of mandatory phytosanitary procedures with the objective of eradication or containment of quarantine pests or for the management of regulated non-quarantine pests. (IPPC 2024b)
outbreak	A recently detected pest population, including an incursion, or a sudden significant increase of an established pest population in an area. (IPPC 2024b)
pathway	Any means that allow the entry or spread of a pest. (IPPC 2024b)
pest diagnosis (diagnostics)	The process of detection and identification of a pest (ISPM 27: <i>Diagnostic protocols for regulated pests</i> ).
pest free area (PFA)	An area in which a specific pest is absent as demonstrated by scientific evidence and in which, where appropriate, this condition is being officially maintained. (IPPC 2024b)
pest free place of production (PFPP)	Place of production in which a specific pest is absent as demonstrated by scientific evidence and in which, where appropriate, this condition is being officially maintained for a defined period. (IPPC 2024b)
pest free production site (PFPS)	A production site in which a specific pest is absent, as demonstrated by scientific evidence, and in which, where appropriate, this condition is being officially maintained for a defined period. (IPPC 2024b)
pest freedom program	Pest freedom programs include procedures and measures required to establish, maintain and verify a pest free area, pest free place of production or pest free production site.
pest pressure	Sustained levels of pest activity or infestation within or adjacent to an area. The level of pressure may be affected by multiple factors including host availability, climatic conditions, the pest's life cycle and open pest pathways.
pest risk assessment (for quarantine pests)	Evaluation of the probability of the introduction and spread of a pest and the magnitude of the associated potential economic consequences. (IPPC 2024b)
pest status (in an area)	Presence or absence, at the present time, of a pest in an area, including where appropriate its distribution, as officially determined using expert judgement on the basis of current and historical pest records and other information. (IPPC 2024b)
phytosanitary certificate	An official paper document or its official electronic equivalent, consistent with the model certificates of the IPPC, attesting that a consignment meets phytosanitary import requirements. (IPPC 2024b)
phytosanitary regulation	Official rule to prevent the introduction or spread of quarantine pests, or to limit the economic impact of regulated non-quarantine pests, including establishment of procedures for phytosanitary certification. (IPPC 2024b)

## National Policy on Pest Freedom Programs and Pest Absence

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
phytosanitary security	The application of phytosanitary measures to maintain the integrity of a consignment and prevention of infestation and contamination. (IPPC 2024b)
place of production	Any premises or collection of fields operated as a single production or farming unit. (IPPC 2024b)
plants	Living plants and parts thereof, including seeds and germplasm. (IPPC 2024b)
plant products	Unmanufactured material of plant origin (including grain) and those manufactured products that, by their nature or that of their processing, may create a risk for the introduction and spread of pests (IPPC 2024b).
production site	A defined part of a place of production, that is managed as a separate unit for phytosanitary purposes. (IPPC 2024b)
quarantine	Official confinement of regulated articles, pests or beneficial organisms for inspection, testing, treatment, observation or research (IPPC 2024b).
quarantine pest	A pest of potential economic importance to the area endangered thereby and not yet present there, or present but not widely distributed and being officially controlled (IPPC 2024b).
reinstatement	When a suspended pest freedom program has had a sufficient period of time and evidence collected to confidently assure that the pest is no longer present in the specific area. This must be based on the biology of pest and the surety provided by the surveillance and management activities. Note that there is no guarantee that trading partners will recognise the same reinstatement date as the one applied domestically.
requirement	A condition demanded or obligatory. Processes that are essential under this policy for implementation of a pest freedom program for international export of plants or plant products.
revocation	If the area of a pest freedom program, or part of it, is no longer considered free of the pest and it is not feasible/desirable to eradicate the pest from the specified area, or it is no longer considered economically/technically feasible to maintain the pest freedom program then it may be revoked. Measures and components can be removed with consideration of contingent dependencies (such as overlapping or adjacent pest freedom claims utilising common surveillance infrastructure).
spatial consideration	The recognition of geographical effects such as distance.
specific surveillance	The process whereby information on pests of concern in an area is obtained by the NPPO over a defined period. Specific surveillance activities are official surveys, monitoring or other procedures that are established, authorised or performed by the NPPO. Specific surveys can be used for all surveillance objectives. (ISPM 6: <i>Surveillance</i> )
state or territory government	State or territory governments of Australia.
surveillance	An official process which collects and records data on pest presence or absence by survey, monitoring or other procedures (IPPC 2024b). The department defines plant health surveillance as: 'formal and informal monitoring to detect changes in Australia's plant pest status or changes in plant biosecurity risk, which may affect imports, exports and/or onshore production'.
survey (of pests)	An official procedure conducted over a defined period to determine the presence or absence of pests, or the boundaries or characteristics of a pest population, in an area, place of production or production site (IPPC 2024b).
suspension	Temporary cessation of pest freedom claims (and associated exports) for all or part of a PFA, PFPP or PFPS when conditions in the pest freedom program indicate that pest freedom is not maintained. For example, detection of the specified pest or exceeding a technically justified threshold.
technically justified	Justified on the basis of conclusions reached by using an appropriate pest risk analysis or, where applicable, another comparable examination and evaluation of available scientific information. (IPPC 2024b)

## National Policy on Pest Freedom Programs and Pest Absence

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
temporal consideration	The recognition of the effect of time on the confidence of the absence of a pest from the PFA, PFPP or PFPS being monitored.
transparency	The principle of making available, at the international level, phytosanitary measures and their rationale (IPPC 2024b). This principle flows down to the jurisdiction level as they must provide adequate information to the NPPO to provide confidence in certification and negotiations with trading partners.

# References

IPPC 2019, [Guide for Establishing and Maintaining Pest Free Areas](#), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, accessed 13 June 2025.

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—2021d, [ISPM 11: Pest risk analysis for quarantine pests](#), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, accessed 1 October 2025.

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