



# Importation of live garden snails (*Cornu aspersum*) for heliculture: Webinar transcript

[Duration: 22 minutes and 46 seconds]

29 September 2025

## Introduction

This is the transcript of a webinar presented by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, to discuss the release of the final report for the '*Importation of live garden snails (Cornu aspersum) for heliculture*'.

## Transcript

[Webinar begins]

Screen 1 [Video description: Webinar text over green background with an image of a garden snail on a person's hand.]

### Brian Clarke:

Good morning everybody. Anybody who is in the audience, we will just give a couple of minutes for everybody to join and we'll start.

But welcome first of all, welcome to our webinar regarding the importation of live garden snails for heliculture, into Australia.

As I said, we'll just give people a couple of minutes to join in and then go forward from that point. Hopefully you can see me on your screen. We'll just give it one more minute for anybody else who would like to join in and then we will kick off today's presentation. I'm just going to roll through just another 30 seconds just to give the last couple of people I can still see. We've got a few people, so we'll just give up just a little bit more and then we'll kick off.

All right, good morning. Thank you everybody for joining us. My name is Doctor Brian Clarke; I am the principal regulatory scientist for Animal Biosecurity Branch in the Department of Agriculture. With me presenting today is Doctor Sam Beckett, who you can also see along with a number of staff from the department.

So, the purpose of the presentation today is to update you on the progress and to announce the release of the department's final report into the importation of live garden snails for heliculture.

Firstly, what I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional guardians and owners of the land on which we meet today. I'd like to acknowledge their Elders past and present and any other

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be present today. In the Canberra region, these are the Ngunnawal people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city in the region and I would also like to acknowledge all of the various attendees, and the traditional custodians of the lands in which we all are meeting today.

We've just had another flurry of people join us, so we're just working through the introduction.

Thank you all for joining us. For some very brief housekeeping, there will be plenty of opportunities for individuals to ask questions and if you'd like to ask questions, open the Q and A box. There's a box at the bottom for you to type questions into and we will work through answering them at the end of the presentation.

So, thank you all who are attending and your interest in this piece of work by the department. I think it's fair to say we have had a very broad set of perspectives and information provided to the department throughout this review process and we have taken our time to address and to go through the comments from you all from the draft of the report to the final.

In addition to the webinar today we will hold a further workshop for importers following the release of the report towards the end of October. It is our intention at that time to work through the nitty gritty of how this piece of work can be and will be operationalised, and work through what the next steps of the process are.

So today we'll roll through the outcomes of the review, and it's an opportunity for people to ask questions. Once the report is released later this week, if you have any further questions that don't relate directly to the specifics of imports, we're always willing to receive them and we can respond to them. For those stakeholders and attendees directly interested in importing snails as I mentioned, we'll be holding a further importer workshop towards the end of October to work through the day-to-day steps that will be involved in progressing the report to being able to actually move through the exciting steps of being able to import snails for heliculture into Australia.

So, on that very brief introduction, I'll hand over to Sam who will roll through the outcomes of the report.

**Sam Beckett:**

Thank you, Brian. Hello, everybody. It's always a bit surreal doing these webinars as we can't actually see your faces, but good morning to everyone. We see this as a fairly short webinar. As Brian has pointed out we're heading towards a workshop at the end of October that will be a half-day workshop. I've got a slide to talk about that later in the presentation.

Most of the technical questions that you might have in regard to the measures, we're going to explain in the presentation. These will be the source of topics that we could then go through at the workshop at the end of October. So again, we'll see how today pans out but it will be an information sharing briefing today with the workshop later on in the month.

So, just a few slides to go through. I'll talk a little about the import risk analysis process. Brian has mentioned that the final report will be out later this week, so 2nd of October. We're in the system ready for that to go.

I'll just tell you a little bit about the background of the review, but I think most of you here are pretty familiar with that. I think we'll spend most of the slides going through the risk management options, this is probably the area that you're most interested in. Then I'll just say a little about the important workshop at the end of October and all that would be about.

OK, so just one slide about the department's biosecurity import risk analysis process. So, BIRAs, or biosecurity import risk analyses, and reviews, can be triggered by a range of things. Either by an access request from overseas, by a request from an Australian industry group, and that was the case for this one, or by developments in the science or developments in the global situation for key diseases.

There are then eight steps to our process for going through this. We start with the risk analysis; we then assess biosecurity risk and release the draft report. We consult with the public. We then finalise the report and publish the final report. We then develop import conditions and publish import conditions on our website.

The last two steps we find are very commonly underplayed. They're very important steps and it can take a fair bit of time and a fair bit of effort to get those last two steps done. So, we're at this point here of publishing the final report and I guess the focus of the workshop would be to help us to develop those import conditions.

There's really just a couple of things I thought I'd bring back onto the table. Items that I think most of you are familiar with. One is that we started this process with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water – or DCCEEW, with their assessment of the invasive potential of this snail *Cornu aspersum*. That was then added to the live import list in 2020.

Following that, the industry, and most of you are from the heliculture industry on this teleconference, approached the department with a view to import the snail. This is just the larger strain of an endemic species and better suited to the restaurant trade.

We asked CSIRO to review the biosecurity risks. This went from 2021 to November 2022. And then we produced the draft import risk review in August of 2024. So, it's been a while, but it's quite a difficult and detailed process to go through.

OK, so this is probably the start of the material that's of most interest. This is the risk management measures, and what we're going to see as a general comment is a much broader scope of options than were in the draft report. So, we haven't lost anything that's in the draft report. We've just added to it and you'll all be familiar with it, seeing the draft report. Basically, this reflects industry feedback on the draft report and particularly two key issues. One was, we were asked can we consider self-managed approved arrangements and alternatives to the use for quarantine facility. So that was a key thing for us to think about. The second was can we consider the importation of hatchling or baby snails as an alternative to importing adult snails.

So you'll recall that the draft report was all about the importation of adults. So again, a big change, and something that we've turned our minds to. So, the final report actually includes both of those suggestions as options. I think you'll be pleased to see that. It doesn't mean you have to do either of those things, but they're there as options. We'll talk through this.

Risk management measures first, regardless of the pathway that you take. So, adult snails or baby snails, there'll be some preliminary requirements and there's really 2 steps here.

The first we need to approve the exporting country's competent authority for the person certifying the export of this commodity. And this is not, particularly for snails, this is something for any new commodity, we need to make sure that the certifying authority in the exporting country is able to verify either the Information or information about the biosecurity status of the export. So that's the first step. We don't see that as a huge thing. It's a substantive card, but not a huge one because the countries that you've indicated you're likely to export from are countries that we're fairly familiar with. So, we don't see that as a massive hurdle, but that's a step we'll need to take.

The second one is the approval of the snail farming establishments. And this is something we'll go through in the workshop. It'll be a key topic I think for us there. These must be commercial, they must be government certified for basic quality standards of food safety and general hygiene, and this quality standard must be linked to a specific import permit application. This will then be reviewed as part of the permit assessment process. We'll set this out and explain how this works. In a nutshell, I guess people apply for a permit and imports for a permit and then our operations people respond to that with a questionnaire which will set out the information that we need and that will include this information about the standards of production and exporting countries. So that's how that will work, but this will be a topic that we'll go through at the end of October.

So, aside from the preliminary stuff, there are two pathways. One for adult snails and one for baby snails – hatchling snails. So, if we focus first on adult snails, the first step here is certification by the exporting country that these are *C. aspersum* only and we can do that by morphology. So that's just dissection, and that was in the draft report. What we've added here is a molecular tests and alternative. Now a molecular test is something you may not be familiar with, but will go through this again at the end of October and make sure you understand what we're getting at here. The technology we're likely to be seeing here will be cytochrome C mitochondrial sequencing and we can explain what that is. Brian you've heard from a minute ago as an expert in this area of diagnostics and can talk you through all that. But basically, we need a test to be developed, to be validated, to be standardised and then to be approved by the department. So, it's not a trivial undertaking, but it's not a huge one either. It's not one we're not familiar with, and we've got some providers that we could suggest you as you providers, that would be more placed to do this fairly easily and fairly quickly. And a molecular test is potentially a far more powerful thing to have in our toolkit because it's something we can do in any location and without sacrificing the snails. Obviously we need to sacrifice a snail that we're going to dissect, so it's a nice thing to have on board. We'll explain that in due course.

Having arrived in Australia, the adult snails will be directed to an approved arrangement and again this could be a government quarantine facility or it could be a privately managed approved arrangement and again, we'll talk through this at the workshop. Although intuitively you know, that's a great idea, having your own approved arrangement, there's a lot hanging off that both in terms of the management of that approved arrangement with the management of materials in and out of the approved arrangement. Also, the cost is not insignificant, so, we'll make sure we've got the information to share with you at that workshop so that you're better informed about what's involved if you choose to go down that route.

OK, having done that, so we're still on adult snails species verification within the AA (approved arrangement), so this is in Australia. So, we'll need species verification at point of export from the certifying authority in the exporting country. But then on arrival in the AA, the approved arrangement, we'll also have species verification. Here the morphology would be based on an approved inspector. So, approved is ourselves [the department]. And also, an approved diagnostic key, and again we'll talk through both of these options in the workshop. And then, the molecular test is sitting there as an alternative to morphology. And again, it would be a simpler, quicker and easier alternative once developed.

Then the adult snails would be bred in the approved arrangement through to the next generation. The hatchlings would be released from biosecurity control and these could go forward into your production systems. The adults would remain in the approved arrangement for the life and the adults would then be disposed of as biosecurity waste when they're dead or killed off.

So that's how the system would work, and I think you guys all understand that the purpose of this is that the adults we feel could be carrying zoonotic nematodes. Nematodes that have the potential cause harm to human health. And the way the life cycle works with these nematodes is that we need the direct host. So that if we constrain these imported snails to an approved arrangement where there's no access to the direct host, then we know that we're breaking that life cycle. And the babies can go forward without any risk of transmitting those nematodes. So that's the idea of the approved arrangement. OK, so those are adult snails, and it's fairly complex.

Now, baby snails are a lot simpler extensively. They may not turn out to be a good pathway for you for a range of reasons, but ostensibly it's a simpler option. So, we're pleased to see this comments on the draft. So here, hatchling snails are less than 10 days old. And again, we'll talk through all of this in the workshop. I think this will be a key topic for us. They'd be bred in an internal, mixed internal and external farming system. But the key point being that they've only received commercially processed livestock feeds and no access to fresh plants.

So, the idea here is obviously that the baby snails and we should have thought of this, probably the draft stage as well, but the baby snails have had no access to the plant material which might contain the life cycle stage from either of those nematodes because they've only been fed processed food. So those baby snails would be clean when they come into Australia and we wouldn't need to then manage them in our approved arrangement. So, they'd be certified by the exporting country as *C. aspersum* only. Now because we're talking about very small hatchling snails, these could only be verified using a molecular test. It's just not practical to do a dissection on a tiny little baby snail so the molecular tests are only for this pathway, so we'd need that as a prerequisite. They would be directed on arrival to a government approved arrangement for species verification. That again would be a molecular test only. So, we'd need that to be done offshore at the point of certification and also onshore in Australia.

The verified consignment would then be released from biosecurity controls and no need for a quarantine period in Australia. With the condition only that on the import permit, that imported snails are breeding purposes only and must not be used for human consumption. So, we're not importing these baby snails as snails that would be eaten by people. These are baby snails for the purpose of breeding. That's an important consideration because if we were importing them as a food source, we would have to go through a lot of other different terms because this is a food source. So,

we're not doing that. It's just importing baby snails for the purpose of breeding and setting it up in a filler industry.

So ostensibly, a much simpler thing was sort of import pathway that could be rolled out quite quickly and easily and fairly cheaply, but it does rely completely on this molecular test. So that's going to be a key thing for us. And again, in the workshop at the end of October, we'll go through this.

OK, so two pathways - adults and baby snails.

So, the workshop this is really about explaining these risk management conditions, just discussing options that you might want to follow. It'll be half a day and we'll run from Canberra. We'll run it from one of our big meeting rooms downstairs. That can be a public meeting room, so if anybody would like to come to Canberra, that'd be brilliant. And I know one person who I hope is on this webinar was keen to come here in person, and the more that do, the better. That's always a nice discussion, but we'll also run it online so you'll all have access to that. We'll advertise the details on our web page and contact you all and let you know what's going on when we have a date and what the arrangements are.

We want to work through the risk management options, including the import logistics, so single versus multiple import pathways and consignment size and frequency. There's a range of ways you could do this. You have distributors as importers in different States and you know it immediately occurs to us that maybe you'd import into one place and then send them to one point in Australia domestically to another place. Or maybe you'd want to import into all these different States and do that at the front. Maybe you'd like hatchling snails, maybe you like the idea of adult snails. Maybe you want to have your own approved arrangements. All these sort of things. So, we'll talk through all this.

Self-managed approved arrangements for adult snails - we'll bring people [to the workshop] or educate ourselves sufficiently to answer your questions about the logistics, the cost and other likely practical considerations there.

Developing and validating molecular tests - we'll explain how that works and what you need to do so they get that up and running. That's an option again for adult snails, but it's a requirement for the hatchling snails and key considerations for hatchling snails over and above that, and any other topic.

So, we'll come back to you well in advance of this workshop, make sure you're OK with the dates. We'll send out a draft agenda at that point and you can come back to us with any topics you feel you'd like to be added to that aren't there, at that point.

So, a bit of a whirlwind tour.

Questions and Answers - has anything come through?

**Brian Clarke:**

I might jump in for a second, if we can put the screen back on me. as unfortunate as that might be for all of you. So, the next steps for us, and whilst I'm just talking, I'll just again encourage anybody who does have any questions to post them in the Q&A box on the side of the screen, and then just go through kind of briefly what the next steps are.

The next steps are, we will be releasing the final report on the 2nd of October. That will be on our website. And then as we've discussed reasonably extensively today, we will meet with all of the interested importers towards the end of October to work through what the next steps look like.

Whilst I appreciate you have not, at this point yet had time to review the report. What we'll do now is just pause very briefly to see if there are any further questions.

And again, what I'd just like to emphasise is really just our appreciation of the diversity of responses and the thoroughness of the responses that we got to the initial report. Those responses really did cover the entire gamut and perspectives regarding the importation of *Cornu aspersum* for heliciculture. Those contributions, as they always do from our stakeholders, really did facilitate us producing the best report we possibly could.

So having said all that and now hopefully giving everybody as much time as possible. If they had any questions to ask us today, which haven't come through, what we'll do now, is the next steps from us. If there are any further questions coming from today or from the publication of the report, please feel free to put them to the department by email, through the normal stakeholder approach processes and we will be able to respond to those. Also noting we will run the importer workshop towards the end of October.

At this point, as we haven't had any questions come through, I will thank everybody for their attendance, their interest and all of the submissions we received on this report, and thank everybody and wish you all a very happy Monday and say goodbye.

Thank you all very much for coming.

[End of transcript.]

#### **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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