



Webinar for the *Review of the biosecurity risks of prawns imported from all countries for human consumption: final report.*

Webinar transcript

(Duration 63 mins 50 secs)

30 May 2023

Introduction

This is the transcript of a webinar, presented by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, about the final report for the *Review of the biosecurity risks of prawns imported from all countries for human consumption* (the prawn review). The 60+ participants included members of domestic and international industry organisations.

Transcript

[Webinar begins]

Peter Finnin: Good afternoon, everyone, welcome to the Prawn Review webinar. We're just working through a few little technical elements in the background, but we should be all ready to go.

We're right on 2:01, according to my iPhone, we might just give it another minute to allow anyone else who wants to join us, to join the feed, and then we'll kick off, but thanks for joining us.

Peter Finnin: Good afternoon, again, everyone. Welcome, to our webinar event this afternoon. My name is Doctor Peter Finnin, I'm the Assistant Secretary of the Animal Biosecurity Branch from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and I'm here today with my colleague Doctor Kally Gross, who's the director of our Aquatic Biosecurity Risk Assessment team.

Before we proceed, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the land from where I am meeting with you today, here in the ACT, and also recognise any other peoples or families with connection to the lands at the ACT and its region. I extend this recognition and acknowledgement to the traditional custodians of all other lands on which those attending today's webinar are gathered, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attending today's event.

Welcome to our webinar. We are using the Microsoft Teams live platform which is a little bit different from your typical MS Teams meeting. Hopefully you can see and hear us, but we cannot see you, so we'll be speaking into the ether, but hopefully there are people on the other end who can hear us.

The purpose of today's webinar is to give you, our key stakeholders, a preview of the department's review of the biosecurity risks of prawns imported from all countries for human consumption, the Prawn Review, and to address any questions that you might have.

We will take you through some of the key elements, summarize the import conditions, and the implementation of the recommendations from the prawn review. These recommendations are designed to provide some additional assurance around the current import conditions, and to also further strengthen disease freedom requirements for imports of whole uncooked prawns.

Questions can be asked at any time today during the webinar using the question-and-answer text box, which you should see at the bottom of your screen. I think there was a message on the very first slide that if you can't see that box you might need to leave the event and re-join. But hopefully you do see the Q and A text box there at the bottom of your screen. If you do have a question, please pop it into the Q and A box and our team today will do their very best to answer those questions. But be aware that any question you ask will not immediately be visible to all participants. During the Q and A, we will make your questions visible to all participants as we answer. If we get multiple questions, perhaps on a particular topic, we may make one version of the question visible, but we will do our best to cover all aspects of any questions asked on a particular topic. Also, don't despair if we cannot get to your question today, we will be providing written answers to all questions that we receive in today's webinar on our website. We'll also make a transcript of today's webinar available on the website as well.

At the conclusion of today's webinar, we will be providing each of you, our key stakeholders, with a copy of the prawn review under embargo. We do ask that you do not make the document public ahead of the formal publication of the prawn review, on the 5th of June 2023. What this does is it provides each of you an opportunity to delve into the detail ahead of the formal release, but we do ask that you do respect our confidence until publication.

Just so everyone's aware, we've got a number of participants from a number of key stakeholder groups here with us today on the webinar. Including, representative of the Australian Council of Prawn Fisheries, the Australian Prawn Farmers Association, Food and Beverage Importers Association, the Seafood Importers Association of Australia, Seafood Industry Australia, and state and territory governments.

So, by way of introduction, I'll just walk you through some of the history, if you like, of how we're here today and why we're here today.

The prawn review was initiated after the 2016-17 White Spot disease outbreak in Queensland, and its purpose was to update and review the import risk analysis for prawns and prawn products that was published in 2009. Now, the prawn review that we're going to talk about today represents nearly seven years of collective effort with yourselves, and many other stakeholders, as we have worked to pull together all available information to understand and manage the biosecurity risks associated with the importation of prawns. Following the 2016 outbreak, imports of uncooked prawns were suspended in January 2017 for six months, and then they recommenced with strengthened import conditions in July 2017.

As we've worked through the process of the prawn review, a series of additional strengthened import conditions were put in place from 2018, through to 2020, in response to new information about trade trends and new scientific information that was considered important to manage biosecurity risks.

The prawn review was conducted by the department's biosecurity experts, was subject to peer review by independent experts with knowledge of biosecurity and crustacean diseases, and also underwent public consultation. At the request of the former Minister of Agriculture, and to provide some further assurance that the outcomes of the prawn review were robust, the department

engaged the members of the Scientific Advisory Group, the SAG, to review the draft report and the provisional final report of the prawn review.

In their report on the provisional final report of the prawn review, the members of the SAG were supportive of the outcomes of the prawn review and found that the department had appropriately considered their findings in relation to the draft report, the stakeholder submissions received in response to the draft report and all new scientific information.

The prawn review findings indicate that prawns and prawn products can continue to be safely imported into Australia under the strengthened import conditions implemented progressively since imports recommenced in 2017. All available contemporary science in relation to the biosecurity risks associated with the importation of prawns and prawn products, and all stakeholder feedback, was considered in the finalisation of the prawn review.

Some further strengthening of the import conditions is recommended to require freedom from additional pathogenic agents for whole uncooked prawns exported to Australia, the application of a minimum core temperature requirement for cooked prawns, as well as some additional assurance around freezing.

So, is that as an introduction, what I'll do now is pass to my colleague Doctor Kally Gross, who will take you through the import conditions, what we are doing to monitor imports, the new information we have considered, and the next steps. Thanks Kally.

Kally Gross: Thank you, Peter. Welcome everyone. So, as Peter mentioned, the final report does not propose a reduction in the biosecurity measures required to manage the risk of imported prawns. What it does do, is confirms that the measures that have been implemented since 2017 have helped to achieve Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection for prawns. The final report provides the risk assessments which support these measures.

This table shows the current import conditions for prawns, including those additional measures that are proposed in the final report. The green cells represent conditions that were implemented on resumption of trade in 2017. Primarily, this was the removal of marinated prawns from the value added, or highly processed, category and they are now considered as an uncooked peeled prawn, so they are subject to the same pre-export and on arrival testing requirements. The other part that was changed in 2017, was the implementation of batch testing post-processing, which is pre-export to be free of white spot and yellow-head virus.

The yellow cells show the changes that we implemented in 2018 as a result of assessment of trade data. This was the implementation of a requirement that all breaded, battered, and crumbed prawns needed to be par cooked. This is to solidify the coating to the prawns, and to ensure that all products imported under this category type are, and were, genuinely breaded, battered, and crumbed prawns, and not a means to bypass testing requirements.

The blue cells are the changes that we put in place in 2020, and this was due to the release of a new scientific paper. Where, at which time, we considered that information and we determined that deveining was a necessary addition to manage the risks of EHP in imported prawns.

In the final report, we've proposed three changes to the import conditions, and they're shown in this table here in the dark pink colour. Firstly, we've sought to further assure ourselves that products being imported achieves Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection, by requiring all imported prawns and prawn products are frozen. This is to manage not only risks for EHP, but also *Candidatus* *Hepatobacter penaei*, and vibrio parahaemolyticus strains causing AHPND. We do already know that

for practical purposes, product is already frozen – but making this an import condition further assures us that risks are managed for these hazards.

Second, new requirements we're adding in is a minimum core temperature for cooking of prawns, and this is that prawns need to achieve a core temperature of at least 65 degrees during the cooking process to ensure inactivation of white spot and yellow head virus, and to help assure us that Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection is being achieved. We also already know that most products do, in fact, already meet this requirement.

Finally, we are strengthening the measures for uncooked whole prawns. To export this product, a country's zone or compartment must be free from all 10 hazards listed in the final report, and this also requires the full assessment of the systems to ensure that the product is from a disease-free country, zone, or compartment, including desktop audits and in country visits. The current requirement is actually only for freedom from 4 hazards, so we have increased that by six.

So, as I already mentioned, the final report confirms that the measures in place manage risk to a level that achieves Australia's ALOP, and in fact these measures that are in place, right now are far more stringent than those in place pre 2017 and are a lot stricter than those recommended by the World Organization for Animal Health for prawn trade. How do we know that these measures are managing risk to a level that achieves Australia's appropriate level of protection? We know that they are managing risk because we are checking, our on-arrival testing results for white spot syndrome virus and yellow head virus genotype 1 is shown here. As you can see, in the 2022 calendar year just under 1% of consignments tested positive on arrival for white spot syndrome virus. All these consignments were re-exported or destroyed. In the first four months of this year, it has been slightly above this level. But again, you can see that there are no yellow head virus 1 positives.

All products that tested positive on arrival are exported, and when we do detect a positive on-arrival we follow up with the competent authority of the country of export regarding that positive result. Pending the situation may also request that they do an investigation. We can, and have, suspended supply chains, exporters, or countries if we've determined it's been necessary. We also undertake retail testing for white spot syndrome virus and since the first of January 2019, there has only been one very weak positive detected. Following a detailed consideration of the exposure likelihoods and other issues associated with this, we determined that in this case Australia's ALOP had not been exceeded, as such, further work was deemed unnecessary.

So, how do we get to the final proposed measures in the final report, and what differences will you see when you read the final report, compared to the draft report? Firstly, there was a raft of new information that was considered and there have been many significant changes made to the final report. We have considered the recent outbreak of white spot disease in New South Wales, we've received the results from the bait and berley survey, which ABARES and the University of Canberra conducted during 2019-2020. This information was used to further understand the behaviours of fishers and to inform the exposure likelihoods, and we did in fact change a number of exposure likelihoods based on the outcomes of this study, and this was including the use of uncooked, de-headed and shelled prawns, and the use of cooked prawns for bait.

We also commissioned the University of Arizona to look at the effect of temperature on EHP and white spot syndrome virus and yellow head virus. That is, we investigated the effect of freezing on the infectivity of EHP and the effect of cooking on the infectivity of white spot and yellow head virus. Both those studies changed our entry assessment for these hazards.

We've also conducted testing for emerging diseases in imported products, and the results from these studies also changed our entrance assessments for decapod iridescent virus one and covert mortality nodavirus. And we've looked at significant amounts of new scientific information, comments from stakeholders, and the members of the scientific advisory group, and we've updated various parts of the report to take all these comments and new information into account.

As I mentioned, one of the key pieces of information that we have considered since the draft report was the results of the bait and berley survey, and pleasingly, the results showed us that most recreational fishers do the right thing to protect our Australian waterways. That is, we found that around 93% of recreational fishers who had fished in the past year did not report using prawns purchased from a retail store as bait. Key to this statistic is that even though it was a very small percentage of fishers who did use prawns from a retail shop, the vast majority of those – around 80% - were using uncooked whole prawns, which we considered to be of Australian origin. So, for those fishers who used a product type that may be imported, or Australian origin, we were looking at a much smaller figure, so the usage is incredibly low – less than 3% for those products that are uncooked and shelled, or a cooked product type.

But these results did change the outcomes in the final report compared to the draft report, and even though the usage rates are so low, we do choose to be conservative in the way we manage biosecurity risks and therefore we consider that any usage has the potential to result in an exposure and we estimate the likelihoods of this exposure occurring taking into account these results. In the draft report, we had assumed the usage rate of shelled, but uncooked, prawns was the same as whole uncooked prawns. However, the results from this study have been clear that this is not the case, and as a result the exposure likelihood for this product type was reduced in the final report. Conversely, we noted that the cooked usage was more than we had assumed it would be, so we increased our cooked usage exposure likelihoods, and as a result, commissioned the research from the University of Arizona to ensure that risks for white spot syndrome virus and yellow head virus are managed.

In 2020, because of new scientific reports about the amount of EHP in the gut of an infected prawn, we changed the import conditions to require deveining. At that time, we did not consider that there was sufficient evidence that freezing inactivated EHP and therefore it was considered necessary to implement the deveining measures. Since then, there have been additional reports and anecdotal information about the impacts of freezing on EHP, including World Organisation for Animal Health disease card for EHP, which suggests that live feed should be frozen for 48 hours before use to manage risk. In addition, the University of Arizona advised that they had to import live prawns into their facility in order to be able to establish an EHP infection. In order to ensure that the risks of EHP were managed, we commissioned the University of Arizona to do a scientific trial to investigate the effect of freezing EHP and its ability to then infect others on exposure.

The University of Arizona is a world organisation for Animal Health Reference Laboratory for five diseases of crustaceans, not including EHP because of course, infection with the EHP is not a listed disease. For the study, prawns were infected with the EHP and then euthanized and the hepatopancreas was frozen for 24 hours, 7 days, and 14 days. SPF prawns were then fed with the frozen organs, or fresh organs, for a positive control group. The results showed that freezing had an impact on the viability of EHP over time. The in-situ hybridisation results demonstrated that there was no EHP present in the 7 and 14-day treatments, but it was present in the 24hour and positive controls, although at reduced levels after 24 hours compared to the positive control. From this we determined that freezing impacted EHP ability to cause infection, but in a time dependent manner. In order to ensure risks are managed to achieve Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection, in our final

report, we assumed that product is only frozen for 24 hours, and therefore we only reduced our entry likelihood slightly we did not completely remove it. As a result, we consider that deveining, de-heading, and shelling are still necessary to achieve Australia's ALOP. However, we are confident that this manages risk because product is frozen on average 3.5 months before it reaches the retail shops, and in fact we have anecdotal evidence suggesting it could be up to 21 months.

What are the next steps? Firstly, release of the final report next week will mark the end of the formal prawn review process. It doesn't mark the end of managing risks for prawns. But it is the end of the prawn review. At the same time the final report is released, we provide a notification of the proposed changes to import conditions to the World Trade Organisation. As part of our international obligations, we are required to give trading partners a period of 60 days to provide comment on the proposed measures. We will then consider these comments during this period and also work with our trading partners to negotiate health certificates to ensure there is minimal trade disruptions. Following consideration of comments from trading partners on the proposed measures, we will then advise of the implementation date. This will be approximately 60 or so days after the end of the consultation period. So, we're anticipating this will be around the 13th of October.

Following implementation of the new measures, we will continue with on-going review and monitoring of the biosecurity risks associated with imported prawns. This will include monitoring and review of information about new and emerging diseases or changes in the scientific information about known hazards, we will consider the new science and changes to trade patterns and industry practice, as well as outcomes of assurance activities that the department may undertake. Additionally, you will see down the side, the arrows, which show stakeholder input, and which show that this can occur at any time, and the department always welcome stakeholder input and any new science, and information, about biosecurity risks associated with prawns. We are happy to take that information at any time. Thank you.

Peter Finnin: Thanks everyone, hopefully you've found that presentation informative, but I'm sure there are questions that you have. So, we have got, about 36 minutes according to my clock there, to answer any questions that you might have of us. Got our producers standing by, I'm not sure if we've got any questions that they want to feed to us. As I said, we had a few minor technical hitches, so we've just got to switch between computers.

So, the first question there is *"Re bait survey - can you advise on the methods used to target stakeholders, what demographics were captured, numbers and what time period this survey sought responses on? How was bias avoided? The people likely to be happy to answer such a survey are not likely to be the group that use imported supermarket prawns as bait"*.

So, thanks for that question, I might pass to Kally in a moment, but I guess, there's an overarching response to that. The bait and berley survey was, as Kally mentioned earlier, conducted by ABARES in conjunction with the University of Canberra. It's part of a broader survey and the full details of that survey, its analysis, its methodology is now, I believe, published on –

Peter Finnin: Will be shortly published on the department's website, and particularly the elements around bait and berley survey will be published at the same time as the prawn review is published next week. Kally, did you want to answer them all?

Kally Gross: Yes. So as Peter said, the survey will be published next week. It should be published in time to coincide with the release of the final report, and the final report does have a lot of information about the survey methodology, how they accounted for bias, and all that topic information. Off the top of my head, I think it was something like around 23,000 people were

surveyed and they did target across all the demographics to ensure that we could get a good representation of what the fishers were doing. But, like I say, the real detail is in that bait and berley survey and that's probably the key place to look for the, all that information.

Peter Finnin: I think that other point, just to add, is that we haven't used the information for the bait and berley survey in a way that overemphasises that information or under emphasises that information. We recognize that there is a risk there and that has been used in our risk assessment process which includes looking at what is the likelihood of a disease agent entering the country, what is then the likelihood of a susceptible animal being exposed to that disease agent and then combined with the consequences of that which arrives in our overall estimate of risk. Certainly, in all of our approaches we have taken a very conservative approach noting that we are obligated under the Biosecurity Act to apply Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection, which is a very low but not zero level of sanitary and phytosanitary risk. So, we're not in a situation in which we are trying to achieve zero risk but we are trying to achieve a very low level of risk and so we need to take all of those things into account when we're applying our risk management conditions.

So, the next question, *"If 1.28 in 100 shipments of grain had Karnal bunt or meat had FMD would you consider this level of risk acceptable?"*, So I think we need to be really careful about what we're talking about when we're considering this sort of questions. In short, we certainly see, and expect, that we will have products coming across the border where you will be able to detect things – like foot and mouth disease, in fact, we reported on that last year. However, we've applied the appropriate level of risk management in those circumstances, and we believe that to be an acceptable level of risk. Certainly, again, it's about being consistent across all the range of commodities that we're dealing with when we're managing risk down to an acceptable level of protection.

And how will we *"ensure that cooked product is cooked to 65 degrees"*, so I'll let you answer that one, Kally.

Kally Gross: Sure, so for all cooked product it's required to be accompanied by a specific consignment specific health certificate issued by the competent authority. We will be negotiating these new health certificates as part of this process, so the health certificate will require that the competent authority attests to that and that allows us to then if we wanted to, we can audit the country to check their systems that they're actually able to attest to that. So that's the process that we use for many commodities is through the use of a competent authority certificate.

Peter Finnin: Thanks Kally. Yes, so that's again the process that we apply right across the board when we're managing biosecurity risk for imported products. As Kally has indicated, we will apply a level of assurance and verification over the top of that. We do, do audits of competent authorities on a regular basis and that's risk based. So, if we see that there is an increased level of risk, perhaps by monitoring material that's coming across the border, that then makes us believe that we should go and check, we will indeed go and check and ensure that the systems that the competent authorities relying on to make their certifications in the health certificates are actually based in fact and in evidence.

So, the next question is in relation to the bait and berley survey, *"Who funded the bait survey? Who managed the project? Where is the report being published?"*. So, as I said, the report was part of a broader survey that ABARES was conducting in conjunction with the University of Canberra. Not sure whether Kally knows about who funded the survey.

Kally Gross: I think that's funding from the FRDC as well.

Peter Finnin: But certainly, all of that information is available in the ABARES report. As I say, the bait and berley survey, as it particularly applies to the prawn review, will be published next Monday along with the final review report, and the broader survey is shortly to be published by ABARES. All of which will be accessible from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's website, and we can certainly provide web links to people who are participating today once those things are actually published on the website.

Kally Gross: I believe the broader surveys have actually just been published so people can read the detailed methodology. But the actual, so when they conducted the survey, the bait and berley was a secondary part of it., so they're publishing it as two different reports. So, the bait and berley component will be released next week, but the actual broader – which was, social and economic impacts associated with recreational fishing – is available. So, we can certainly send you the link to that if you're interested.

Peter Finnin: Looking across to the team, I don't know whether someone's got the link to that recreational fishing survey. We can drop it into the chat. Otherwise, we'll certainly send you out a link once today's presentation is finished.

"What are the hazards for whole uncooked product?", you can probably recite them, Kally.

Kally Gross: White spot virus, yellow head virus, Taura syndrome virus, IMNV, Div1, Laem-Singh virus,

Belinda Morahan: *Candidatus* Hepatobacter penaei

Kally Gross: *Candidatus* Hepatobacter penaei, EHP

Belinda Morahan: AHPND

Kally Gross: AHPND

Peter Finnin: CMNV

Kally Gross: CMNV, yes so, all the 10 hazards that were considered in the draft report are the same 10 hazards that is required for uncooked, whole prawns to be from a country, compartment, or zone must be free for those.

Peter Finnin: So, as you could appreciate, that's clearly the highest risk product that we would contemplate importing. At present, there's only one country that we believe is likely to be able to meet those requirements.

We expect that we may be getting applications for zones or compartments at some point, and if we do get some of those applications it will be a rigorous process before we would approve such a zone. Which would include in country visits to look at the compartmental zone in detail, to understand how we can get the assurance that the compartment or zone is truly free from those 10 hazards.

So, post borders and retail surveillance, so that is part of our ongoing retail insurance program. So, the way in which we manage that is each year the division sits down, and it works through assurance and verification work plan which will involve retail testing across the range of products. Certainly, uncooked prawns are frequently a target for that retail surveillance, but also we do, so similar surveillance across the range of other imported good products, which are of a concern to provide that additional assurance that what we think is happening at the border, that the measures that we're putting in place and the competent authorities are certifying, that's borne out by the evidence of what's on retail shelves when we test it, that if it's supposed to be free from white spot, if it's supposed to be free from African swine fever, that when we test it is truly negative for those disease

agents. So, it is something that we do each year, as we look at the results of the preceding year what our current risks are, particularly in the face of what might be occurring in the world at large. Obviously, three or four years ago with African swine fever moving into other areas of the world which I hadn't previously been in, we had a particular focus on African swine fever. We will continue to always have focus on uncooked prawns around which spot, given the history and the potential impacts that that could have, and we will also continue to do our emerging disease monitoring on imported prawns and other products to ensure that things that we assume today. For example, around the likelihood of entry of DIV1 and CMNV, that information doesn't get overtaken by circumstance. So that we are continuing to monitor, and if we do start seeing things like CMNV in a higher prevalence in product that's coming across the border that we then take that information into account that we redo our analysis of the risk and if we need to put additional risk mitigation in place, then we will do so, and we won't wait. We will do it as soon as we believe it's important to do that. As we have done since 2017.

On the *"legislative responsibility to ensure effective labelling is in place for raw prawns sold in the retail setting?"* One of the requirements that we do have is that we require any product that is coming across the border to have, what's the precise wording Kally? What's the labelling requirement we have?

Kally Gross: Not to be used as aquatic animal feed or bait

Belinda Morahan: for human consumption

Kally Gross: Yes, and for human consumption only.

Peter Finnin: Yes, those two particular statements – for human consumption only, and not to be used for animal feed or bait, and so that is a requirement for any imported prawns that are coming across the border. So, we monitor that requirement, and we ensure that requirement is met at the border, and then once product reaches the retail setting that is where the state or territory where the product is being sold, where their legislative responsibilities come into place. So that includes a whole range of food labelling requirements, around country of origin, and those sorts of things. Certainly, we're working very closely with our counterparts and States and territories around how we can get and ensure the message get out that retail prawn products are perfectly safe for humans to eat. And nobody should have concerns there, but they may not necessarily be safe to be using in an aquaculture setting or as a bait, and so certainly that's something that we continue to work with our state and territory colleagues on. In trying to get that message out.

As I say, when we have gone through the process of the prawn review, we have acknowledged and recognised that there is a subset, although quite small according to the results, in the recreational fishers' survey that do use those products and so that information has gone into our calculation of the risks and the risk management setting that we're putting in place.

So, the next question is *"Why are uncooked peeled prawns not free from all hazards listed in the report as whole uncooked prawns are?"* that is around the different level of risk those two products present. So, whole uncooked prawns represent a high level of risk, that is a high likelihood of entry for those hazards, and there is also, as you've seen, from the results of the bait and berley survey, a higher likelihood that those products will be used as bait and berley. When it comes to uncooked prawn that have had their heads removed, that's taking away a large proportion of the prawn where a lot of the disease agents are actually concentrated. The peeling, and the deveining as well, also then reduce the – what's the word I'm looking for – attractiveness, that's the word I was looking for, attractiveness for use as bait and berley, not completely but up to some extent. So that is why the

calculus comes out the way it does, is that we are reducing the volume of the hazard by the hazard reduction management measures, de-heading, shelling, deveining and then for a certain number of those hazards it is not a requirement that they are free from the hazards but, for example, for white spot and yellow head, there is an absolute requirement that the uncooked product be free from them, and that's why there's the pre-boarder and post-boarder testing to assure us to a 95% confidence – that's assuming that that's present at 5% prevalence that we will detect it, and if it's there then that product does not cross the border it gets re-exported.

So, Kally, the next question is *“How do you reconcile the results of your bait and burley survey with those conducted by Kantar in QLD, in 2019, which found around 25% of anglers use supermarket purchased prawns as bait, and cheaper ones (i.e. imported) are preferred?”*

Kally Gross: Thanks Peter, so we did certainly, in the final report you will see that there is a comparison of all the different bait and berley survey reports that have been done over time, including Kantar, as well as the earlier Queensland government ones. Then more recently the ABARES bait and berley report. So, we certainly don't discount the Kantar report, that supports what we have done as far as the ABRARES report, that yes, people are using prawns purchased from a supermarket and we're taking that into account in the report. The thing with Kantar is that it was just for Queensland, and when considering our report, it is for the whole nation. So, there may be some small difference there, but we haven't considered the percentages such that we say that's 25%, that's 10 times more than 2.5% or whatever. We're looking at it as a pattern and as a risk likelihood. So, we acknowledge and have considered that people do use prawns from the supermarket as bait.

Peter Finnin: Thanks Kally.

Belinda Morahan: So, the next questions is *“Why has the department not adopted the recommendations of the IGB report?”*

Peter Finnin: Ok, look, if there are specific recommendations that you feel we haven't adopted, happy to address that – but in broad terms, we have agreed with all the IGB has found and recommended when the IGB did their review following the 2016 incursion. So, I think, unless you've got.

Kally Gross: Yes, just I think actually all the IGB recommendations have been completed apart from one. The release of the final report will be the completion of almost all, apart from one. But it's just one which is still in progress, which is around the aquatic deed. Everything has actually been completed.

Peter Finnin: Correct, yes. So that's the two elements here are the release of the report which will be achieved on the 5th of June, and then the aquatic deed is obviously a topic of continuing conversation between the government, States, and territories, and affected industries.

The next one is *“Why is DIV1 not being tested for?”* why don't you answer that one?

Kally Gross: Yes sure, we've actually undertaken an emerging disease monitoring program and we specifically targeted for Div1, and we also look for CMNV as well, neither of which were found. We targeted uncooked, head and shell removed prawns that were imported into Australia for a period of six months, and I think we sampled something like about 80% of those consignments. Then we targeted specifically, consignments of prawns from countries that are known to have Div1 and CMNV and there was also no detection of DIV1 or CMNV. So, at the moment, whilst we acknowledged that it is a hazard, and we've considered it in our report, we do know what the current approach rates are for it, and we're considering that along with rafter, but the measure suggest that we don't need to

test for those agents at present. But of course, we keep watching on it, and will continue to monitor the situation for those emerging diseases.

Peter Finnin: Thanks, Kally. So just to reinforce that, the emerging disease testing program will continue. It was commenced in 2021 initially with a look at CMNV, DIV1 and EHP. We'll continue to implement that program over the coming years, including DIV1 and CMNV, but we will also if we get more information, or if further hazards emerge, then we'll be testing for those as well. So, we won't limit ourselves just to CMNV or DIV1, but to any hazard that we feel might be coming through and pose a greater threat likelihood than we currently have assessed in the review.

So, the next question says *"Kally noted three additional measures to be recommended in the 2023 review - and also noted these things are already in place/being implemented. What material impact is this actually going to have in terms of improved risk management (as sounds as if not really changing anything)?"*. So, I think one sense that's probably right. However, what we're doing here is trying to provide us with the highest level of assurance that the measures that are required are actually occurring. In one case though, it is substantially increasing and strengthening the measures, because for any whole uncooked prawns coming into the country, will no longer need to be free from just four of the hazards, but all 10 of the hazards. So, as Kally has indicated, we have certainly very much upped the game for any whole uncooked prawns coming into the country. In relation to uncooked prawns, and in fact in relation to any prawn product, we know that freezing does impact the infectivity of EHP and so ensuring that all product that's coming into the country has been frozen ensures that the likelihood of entry of viable EHP into the country is substantially reduced. Then the final element is around cooking, and that was really about, again, providing us with the appropriate assurance that the product is appropriately cooked. We have a general level of assurance in that we require cooked product, but we will be requiring that it's not just cooked, but that it has reached a minimum core temperature of 65 degrees Celsius, than that in combination with the information we have gathered through the University of Arizona cooking study, gives us reassurance that provided that parameter is met, that white spot and yellow head, would be appropriately deactivating in those products.

So yes, we are confident of those things occurring today. However, we're going to ensure that the competent authority from the country that's sending us this product actually has systems in place to check that, and we will be checking them.

"It is good to have these conditions but what resources are put in place to ensure compliance. It is this lack of compliance that led to the 2016 WSV outbreak." So certainly, there was a lot to learn from the events that led up to the white spot outbreak in 2016, and we do know that there were some actors in the system who were – what's the word I'm chasing? Well, I can use that term from public popular media, right – they were gaming the system, they knew what they were doing. We were very predictable, and so they were able to obfuscate, and they were able to work around the systems that we had in place. So, since then we have put in place new approaches to managing the risks of imported prawns. We're requiring seals intact inspections, we have provided a lot of additional training to our biosecurity officers, we have explained to them the sorts of behaviours that were being seen back in 2016, and before, so that our officers are alert to those sorts of things. Integrity, is also very important for our biosecurity officers and we are well aware and on the alert for the things like regulatory capture, where if you're sending the same officer over, and over to the same place and he's meeting his mates every day, and they buy him a coffee or whatever, it might be that an unhealthy relationship can develop between the regulated and the regulator. So, these are all the lessons that we've learnt, not just through prawns but through a whole range of things that we're doing in the biosecurity system. So, we are very much alert to them, and we are continuously

engaged with our staff, providing them with regular training and information around the risks and interface.

Retail testing is another level of assurance that we have, the ongoing on arrival testing is another level of assurance that we continue to have. Also, it is cooperative with all of you, and so certainly if you have credible information that would indicate that there are people who are gaming the system to work around things, than we will certainly investigate those things and ensure that if such behaviours are occurring, that those people are weeded out and whether that's at the importer level, or the exporter level, or even at the competent authority level, we will take action. I think the other thing that we do need to be aware of, and all be alert to, is there continues to be illegal activities going on, and we saw that earlier in the year with the outcomes of Operation AVOCA, where there was one of the largest detections ever of illegally imported goods, which represented a biosecurity risk. So, we need to be alert not just to the hazards that are coming through the regulated legal pathways, but also the hazards that are coming through the unregulated illegal pathways, and certainly we're continuing to use all of the resources that we have available to us to detect people who are importing product illegally, and when we detect them then we will use all of our resources, and all of the legal powers available to us, to ensure that those people are punished appropriately.

So, the next question is in relation to the impacts of white spot *"will Commonwealth move to ensure exposure risk is further lowered through regulating labelling requirements in supermarkets (human consumption not to be used as bait) - labelling on the shop window - not just on the external boxes, which end up in the bin. It is imported under Commonwealth requirements, surely the labelling of this at the destination should follow through as a requirement"*. Kally?

Kally Gross: I mean, it would be ideal if we could do that, unfortunately the Biosecurity Act doesn't allow us to put those conditions in place. It's really up to the jurisdictions to make those considerations and put in place those labelling requirements, our labelling as far as import is not just on the external boxes though it is actually on each of the individual retail packaged products. So, you will see in supermarkets that most of the prawns in the freezer section will have the labelling on the bags. However, it's when it becomes either repackaged on arrival in Australia, or is sold loose in a deli, for example, at that point that is the labelling that is done at the jurisdictional requirements. So that's where that needs to be addressed at. Unfortunately, we can't implement that post border requirement.

Peter Finnin: Thanks, Kally. Look, just to reassure everyone, it is something that all the States and territories are focused on as well, about understanding how people are using these products and certainly there are awareness campaigns that various jurisdictions have run around the appropriate use of bait materials and certainly we are continuing to have conversations with our state and territory colleagues around labelling for a whole range of reasons including country of origin, and end use. Those conversations will continue.

So *"is the geopolitical environment too fraught and prawns are the sacrificial lamb in Australia China trade?"*, I think that's over interpreting the geopolitical environment. In fact, the biggest importer of uncooked prawns into Australia is actually Vietnam. Certainly, I can reassure everyone that we do not trade away biosecurity for any reason. It's not something that we ever include in free trade agreements. All of our biosecurity requirements are managed on bilateral basis, on the basis of a risk assessment.

The next question *"The ALOP that is being applied at the international border for WSSV is not consistent with the domestic ALOP being applied between Australian States. Why is the department*

not recognising consistency with application of ALOP, as is required under the SPS agreement?”. So, you’re right – we’re are not consistent, and the Commonwealth would certainly support movement of prawns between the jurisdictions on the basis of measures that are consistent with the measures that we apply at the border. That’s not just saying cooking is not inconsistent, it is certainly one of the measures that we apply at the border, but it’s not the only measure. Certainly, we have been talking to various States and territories about other mechanisms for intra State and territory trade that might be consistent with measures that we apply at the border. Cooking, as we say, is certainly one measure that works, there are other measures that we apply at the international border. They’re not, at this point in time, used between state and territory jurisdictions, but certainly the Commonwealth would support the use of those mechanisms, those measures, for trade between States and territories.

“Has there been a shift in bait use (i.e. a reduction in use of green prawns used as bait) as a result of interventions? Are interventions working?” it is a little bit difficult to compare survey to survey, but Kally do you want to have a stab?

Kally Gross: It is hard to compare survey to survey. I think that this most recent survey has shown us that people have shifted more towards using cooked products, and I would just think perhaps a lot of that is a safer product, perhaps. It’s hard to know because obviously we have a lot of cost pressures on people and there are all various reasons why people may or may not change, but we still consider it as a risk because we know it still happens so.

Peter Finnin: A friend of mine, apparently if you want to go after drummer, cooked prawns are the like du jour, right? So, I think it’s also what the local knowledge might tell you about what’s good and what’s catching. But, so certainly, that may be influencing one of the trends that we did see, which is an increased use in cooked prawns, which was unexpected. That wasn’t what we had anticipated we would see as, I say, that might be about bait preference, and the sort of fish that people are chasing and what the local knowledge tells.

“Why did the report take so long?” As I said, it’s been seven years of work with all of you, our key stakeholders, and many others. yes, it has taken a long time, absolutely. One of the reasons for that is we wanted to be sure that our report was thorough, that is considered all the available evidence and as we moved through this process, more information became available. We wanted to ensure that we appropriately considered all of that. Also, there were some other factors that were not necessarily within our control around this, and certainly the former Minister for Agriculture’s decisions was to refer the report to the Scientific Advisory Group, which I think at the end of the day has meant that we’ve got a more robust report, but that was one of the factors that has resulted in the report taking longer to finalise than perhaps we would all desire. But I think what’s important to note is that when we recognise the biosecurity risk that they need to be manage. We didn’t say, oh we can’t do anything about that until we finalise the final report – we acted. So, we acted in 2017 by strengthening the measures when imports resumed, we acted in 2018 when we strengthened the measured around breaded, battered, and crumbed prawns, and we acted again in July 2020 when the information became available about the amount of EHP that was present in the gastro abdominal tract of prawns, and so we acted by requiring deveining.

“Why is there no distinction in assessment of wild vs. farmed prawns risks as there is for finfish IRA?” – did you want to take thing, because I think we’ve got three exposure groups.

Kally Gross: I’m going to assume this question is looking at the risk management measures, so why don’t we have different measures for farmed prawns versus wild prawns? But if I’m wrong please let us know in the chat and I can adjust my response. So, we did consider, we did look at farmed and

wild, but for a lot of the prawn hazards we determined that the potential for there to be hazards present in wild was not necessarily that much different from farmed. So, we considered the risk of them was most likely to be the same. So, we didn't decide that we would put in place separate conditions. The other issue is how we were going to actually monitor that – a wild prawn could be imported under different conditions if a country were to want to have a zone done. So, for example, if someone wants to import wild prawns off the coast of Argentina, they could put that we have considered the zone to ensure that there was freedom for those prawns so they could be imported as a whole product, but we don't have any differences for them. So wild prawns and farm prawns need to meet the exact same import conditions unless we can assess them as being from different disease-free populations. But, please let me know if that's not right.

Peter Finnin: We've run out of time, but I guess just one other comment that I'd make to that question, Kally, I think it's an interesting one and its one of the things that occupies our mind is how do you tell the difference between a wild prawn and a farmed one, or a wild finfish and a farmed finfish – and it's really difficult and so increasingly we are taking the approach we're taking in the prawn review, where we will apply the highest level of risk management to all of that product, when we can't make an obvious distinction.

So, we have run out of time, but there's one more question that's been promoted to us. Wait, sorry the producers are way ahead of me. So, Yvonne has put in the chat 'unfortunately we did not have time to answer all questions, but we will answer these additional questions and they will be published soon'.

So, look, thank you again very much for your attendance today. We appreciate you being there, although we can't see you. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your questions. Shortly after this presentation closes be on the lookout for an email from the team where we'll be providing you with a copy of the report. As I said at the outset, we would please ask that you respect our confidence in delivering that to you a week or so ahead of publication, and all being well about 10 o'clock on Monday morning, it'll be published there on the departmental website and then we would welcome, as we do at any time, any questions, comments, thoughts, feedback, new information that we can consider as we all work together to try and effectively manage the biosecurity risk posed by imports. Whether they be prawns or anything else. Thanks again for your time, we've really appreciated you taking the time, and we'll see you all very soon.

Kally Gross: Thank you.

[Webinar ends]

[End of transcript]

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2023

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights) in this publication is owned by the Commonwealth of Australia (referred to as the Commonwealth).

Webinar for the Review of the biosecurity risks of prawns imported from all countries for human consumption:
final report

All material in this publication is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) except content supplied by third parties, logos and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.

The Australian Government acting through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has exercised due care and skill in preparing and compiling the information and data in this publication. Notwithstanding, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, its employees and advisers disclaim all liability, including liability for negligence and for any loss, damage, injury, expense or cost incurred by any person as a result of accessing, using or relying on any of the information or data in this publication to the maximum extent permitted by law.