



Australian Government  
Department of Agriculture,  
Water and the Environment

# Approved auditor manual

A guide for Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment approved auditors

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March 2021



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## Section 1

# Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the department) is the Commonwealth authority responsible for the regulation of prescribed goods prepared for export as food from Australia. This regulatory oversight contributes towards maintaining the integrity of exported product and Australia's global reputation as a reliable exporter.

To facilitate and maintain access to diverse overseas export markets, the department provides export inspection, audit and certification services to Australian exporters. To support the export certification reform in 2011, it was agreed with industry that the audit of registered establishments preparing fish, eggs, dairy and some meat products for export as food may alternatively be undertaken by persons approved by the department to carry out this activity (i.e. approved auditors).

The department has implemented the 'Approved auditor management system' to approve, manage and verify the performance of persons other than department employees to conduct audits of registered establishments on the department's behalf. The system is based on both legislative requirements and the requirements of the [National Regulatory Food Safety Auditor Guideline and Policy](#) and aims to reduce the duplication of audits for registered establishments.

## Audit of export and domestic requirements

In some jurisdictions, state regulatory authorities (SRAs) are responsible for conducting audits at registered establishments on the department's behalf. Conversely, in some jurisdictions the department may conduct audits of export registered establishments for compliance with both export and domestic requirements on behalf of SRAs.

The department may approve auditors to audit on its behalf in all Commonwealth jurisdictions.

Auditors who also wish to audit domestic requirements must make application to the appropriate food regulator in that jurisdiction for approval.

In order to determine if approval as an auditor is applicable to a specific jurisdiction or a specific commodity (i.e. dairy, eggs, fish and/or meat), reference should be made to the service delivery arrangements information available at: [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/documentation-registration-licensing/audit-arrangements](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/documentation-registration-licensing/audit-arrangements).

It should also be noted that for some commodities, an importing country may place restrictions on who can undertake audits. For example, establishments that prepare or store meat for export to the United States of America may only be audited by an auditor employed by the department.

## Legislative basis for the approval of auditors

### The legislation framework<sup>1</sup>

The framework for the Australian government to regulate prescribed goods for export as food consists of:

- an Act of Parliament: the *Export Control Act 2020*
- legislation made by the Minister: the commodity Rules—including:
  - the Export Control (Eggs and Egg Products) Rules 2021
  - the Export Control (Fish and Fish Products) Rules 2021
  - the Export Control (Milk and Milk Products) Rules 2021
  - the Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Rules 2021

The *Export Control Act 2020* (the Act) is the overarching legislation controlling the export of food and other goods from Australia.

The Act and its associated Rules provide the legal basis for:

- Controlling the export of prescribed goods from Australia
- Setting conditions and restrictions for the export of prescribed goods
- Setting conditions for registering premises for the preparation of goods for export
- Exercising powers of the Secretary and authorised officers to deal with prescribed goods and premises
- Issuing offences and setting maximum penalties for contraventions of the Act.

### Approval of auditors

The export legislative framework, through the associated Rules, also provides the Secretary with the power to approve auditors to conduct audits in accordance with legislative requirements.

Division 3 of Part 1, Chapter 9 of the Act provides the legislative basis for:

- The application and approval process of auditors
- The assessment of auditor competence
- Making decisions to approve (or not approve) auditors
- Setting conditions for auditor approval and revocation of approval
- Establishing the period of auditor approval
- Issuing identity cards (section 306 of the *Export Control Act 2020*)
- Maintaining a register of approved auditors.

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<sup>1</sup> Copies of all legislation cited in this document are available at: [www.legislation.gov.au](http://www.legislation.gov.au)

The Secretary (or their delegate) may approve you as an auditor for the purposes of auditing registered establishments against the requirements of the applicable commodity Rules when the Secretary (or their delegate) is satisfied that:

- you have the necessary knowledge, training, skills and experience to competently carry out audits of the kind for which approval is sought; and
- the audits you conduct will be objective, independent, fair, accurate and complete; and
- you will comply with the requirements of Division 2 of Part 1, Chapter 9 of the applicable commodity Rules; and
- you will comply with documented procedures for the conduct of audits; and
- you are a fit and proper person having regard to the matters specified in section 372 of the *Export Control Act 2020*.

Additionally, the Secretary (or their delegate) may:

- take into account any real or perceived conflict of interest that could arise if you are to be approved
- request that you provide further documents or information
- request that you submit to assessment by interview, audit or written examination, or any combination of those ways
- apply conditions to your approval.

## Section 2

# Purpose and scope

This manual is provided to inform you, as an approved auditor (or seeking to become an approved auditor), of the system that has been implemented to manage the approval process, your activities and performance and the audit process.

Auditors approved under this system may include independent, third party or commercially employed auditors, but due to potential conflicts of interest, may not include persons in the direct employ of the registered establishment subject to the audit.

## Definitions

In this document, the terms below have the following meanings:

- **Approved auditor:** an auditor approved by the Secretary (or delegate of) under Division 3 of Part 1, Chapter 9 of the Export Control commodity Rules.
- **Audit Management System (AMS):** the department's electronic system that manages all aspects of audits.
- **Approved arrangement (AA):** the food safety management system in place at a registered establishment, which is approved by the department for the identification, control, monitoring, review and reporting of food safety hazards and compliance with legislative and importing country requirements.
- **Registered establishment:** an export registered establishment engaged in the preparation (including storage, handling and loading) of prescribed goods for export.
- **Occupier:** the individual, corporation or other legal entity (or any combination of these) in whose name a registered establishment is registered.
- **State Regulatory Authority (SRA):** the state or territory authority responsible for food safety in that jurisdiction.

## Introduction to the approved auditor management system

The department has developed and implemented the approved auditor management system to:

- Approve, manage and verify the performance of approved auditors
- Approve registered establishments to engage the services of an approved auditor
- Manage the regulatory audit process.

The responsibility for activity in the regulatory audit process is shared between the department, you as the approved auditor conducting regulatory audits and the registered establishments that require your services.

## The role and responsibility of the department

As part of effectively demonstrating compliance with legislative and National Food Safety Auditor Policy requirements, the department has systems in place to approve, manage and verify the activities of authorised officers and approved auditors, to approve registered establishments to operate under the department's approved auditor management system and, where applicable, respond to audit findings and results of verification activities.

Within this system, the department maintains responsibility for any enforcement action that needs to be taken in response to audit outcomes.

## The role and responsibilities of approved auditors

As an approved auditor, your role is to conduct regulatory audits of a registered establishment's compliance with:

- The applicable requirements of the Act and the commodity Rules.
- The requirements of the establishment's approved arrangement (AA) (i.e. food safety management system) including any conditions that may apply.
- The applicable importing country requirements identified in the establishment's AA, for all aspects of the preparation (including storage, handling and loading) of the commodity or commodities for export as food that falls within the scope of the your conditions of approval and commodity risk classification.

You are responsible for ensuring that:

- You maintain the necessary knowledge, training, skills and experience required to conduct audits, including any competencies or qualifications specified in the approval criteria
- Audits you conduct are objective, independent, fair, accurate and complete
- You conduct audits as expeditiously as possible and in a way that causes as little interference as possible to the operations being audited
- You comply with any additional documented procedures provided by the department in relation to the conduct of audits
- You comply with the approved auditor code of conduct
- You inform the department immediately of any circumstances that may affect your approval with regards to criminal activity or real or perceived conflicts of interest
- Your current approved auditor identity card can be presented on request.

Failure to competently undertake these responsibilities, which will be verified by the department, may result in your approval being revoked or you being required to take agreed corrective action which may include, but is not limited to, completing

additional training.

## The role and responsibilities of the occupier/registered establishment

The occupier of a registered establishment must ensure compliance with legislative requirements through the effective implementation and maintenance of their approved arrangement.

The occupier of a registered establishment is responsible for ensuring that:

- They do not engage you to audit their establishment without prior approval to do so from the department
- Their premises and approved arrangement is audited at the frequency outlined in the applicable department guideline
- You have the appropriate scope of approval, including the appropriate commodity risk classification, to conduct the required audit
- As per the requirements of the legislation<sup>2</sup>, all necessary assistance is provided to you as is reasonably necessary to enable you to perform the audit of their operations. This may include, but is not limited to:
  - The provision of information, documents, translations and demonstrations of equipment.
  - Allowing you to interview their employees, agents or contractors and export permit issuers.
  - Allowing the observation of their procedures.
  - Allowing you to use their equipment for the purposes of accessing, examining, testing, sampling, recording or reproducing any documents or thing at their premises.
  - Allowing you bring any equipment required to perform the audit onto the premises.
- Any corrective action agreed to be taken to address audit findings is implemented and reviewed for effectiveness within the timeframes specified in the audit report.
- The Department is advised should the occupier choose to return to audits by the department.
- You and the occupier are jointly responsible for organising and managing the audit process. The department is not involved in any contract negotiations or agreement between you and the occupier.
- Failure to comply with these requirements may result in the department giving a direction to the occupier to comply, or revoking approval for the occupier to engage your services. Where this approval has been revoked, audits of the establishment will be conducted by the department.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 271 of the *Export Control Act 2020*.

## Section 3

# Approval of approved auditors

If you are seeking to become an approved auditor, you must apply to the department and demonstrate that you meet the approval criteria described in this section.

## Fee

There is an administrative charge for the [initial application](#) and [annual renewal](#) of auditor approvals. This is subject to change and it is your responsibility to monitor the department website at [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors) for updates.

## Duration of auditor approvals

Your approval with the department is valid for 12 months from the date of initial approval, unless revoked. You must undergo an annual renewal process to maintain your approved auditor status.

## Approval process and criteria for approved auditors

If you are seeking to become an approved auditor with the department, you must apply by completing and submitting the [approved auditor application form](#) available from the department website at [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors).

## The approved auditor approval process

The approval process consists of the following six steps:

### Step 1—Submit application to the department

You will be required to submit a completed application form and supporting documentation that includes:

- Evidence of your approval to work in Australia if not an Australian citizen (certified copies of valid passport/current working/permanent residency visa if applicable)
- Standard passport photographs (x4)
- *Details of your qualifications*—Statements of Attainment/technical qualifications (certified copies to be supplied) applicable to the commodity risk classification being applied for
- Certified copy of your professional indemnity insurance certificate
- Certified copy of an Australian Federal Police National Police Check
- Certified copies of documents sufficient for a 100-point identification check (examples of appropriate documents are included in the application form for reference)
- Attachments that provide further details against any relevant section of the application form, as applicable.

In the application form, you will need to identify the commodity risk classification, commodity experience and region of operation that you are applying for.

#### Commodity risk classification

The department uses the risk classification system defined in Table 1 for commodities and processes to determine:

- The qualifications and experience you would require as an approved auditor to effectively conduct audits for particular commodities
- The frequency of auditing of the approved arrangements implemented by the registered establishments.

In your application, you must indicate both the commodity and risk classification for which you are applying and ensure that you have the appropriate qualifications and commodity experience.

#### Low risk

Low risk classification is not commodity specific. If you are approved to audit low risk processes, you may audit any commodity/process classified as 'low risk'. Storage operations across any commodity are classified as low risk, which includes dry, cool and frozen storage.

#### Medium risk

Medium risk processes include all processes not specifically noted as low or high. It includes processes that produce a product that will be subject to further processing or is intended to be cooked by the consumer prior to consumption. Medium risk classification is not applicable to milk or egg products.

### High risk

High risk processes include:

- Heat treatment processes where the product is retorted or pasteurised with a nominated refrigerated shelf life and commercially sterile, shelf stable product
- Cook/chill processes where minimally heat processed foods are distributed as chilled products with a defined shelf life
- Ready-to eat-fish, egg, dairy and meat processes not included in the definition of heat treatment or cook/chill that result in a ready-to-eat product
- Processing of bivalve molluscs where in-shore harvesting is included in the process to be audited.

#### Note:

- If you have been approved for a medium or high risk commodity classification, approval is automatically acknowledged for the lower levels of risk but only for the approved commodities:
- Medium risk classification includes approval to audit low risk processes
- High risk classification includes approval to audit both low and medium risk processes.

**TABLE 1** Commodity risk classification

Risk	Fish	Eggs	Milk	Meat
<b>Low</b>	Storage, packing live fish	Storage, packing of whole eggs	Storage	Storage
<b>Medium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Products to be further processed</li> <li>• Products intended to be cooked</li> </ul>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heat treatment processes</li> <li>• Ready-to-eat</li> <li>• Cook/chill processes</li> <li>• Bivalves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heat treatment processes</li> <li>• Ready-to-eat</li> <li>• Cook/chill processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heat treatment processes</li> <li>• Ready-to-eat</li> <li>• Cook/chill processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heat treatment processes</li> <li>• Ready-to-eat meat products</li> <li>• Cook/chill processes</li> </ul>

### **Commodity experience**

If you are applying for medium and/or high commodity risk classifications, you must be able to demonstrate recent commodity experience, such as relevant qualifications, industry experience and/or audit experience. Minimum qualification requirements are detailed in step 2.

### **Regions of operation**

If approved, you will be authorised to conduct audits within all state and territory jurisdictions. However, the approved auditor application form requires you to nominate which state/s and/or territory/s) you wish to operate in. This will assist registered establishments in locating and engaging an approved auditor within their state or territory.

You may choose to select multiple jurisdictions, however consideration should be given to SRA requirements (see introduction).

### **Conflicts of interest**

You are required to provide details of any conflicts of interests (real or perceived) that may exist, or may be likely to arise, if you are appointed as an approved auditor. You must provide details of any relationships or positions of management or control that may have been offered, are currently held or have previously been held, in regard to the operations carried out in any registered establishment.

Payment to an auditor for carrying out the functions of an auditor does not constitute a direct or indirect interest in a registered establishment.

Additional information in relation to what may constitute a real or perceived conflict of interest is provided at Appendix 1—Approved auditor code of conduct.

### **Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment approved auditor manual**

You are required to acknowledge that they have read, understood and agree to comply with the requirements of this manual.

The current version of the approved auditor manual is available on the department website at [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors).

### **Approved auditor code of conduct**

You are required to acknowledge that you have read, understood and agree to comply with the requirements of the approved auditor code of conduct.

Where an allegation is made that an approved auditor has breached the code of conduct, the department will investigate the breach and, if confirmed, may revoke the auditor's approval.

## Step 2—Application assessed by the department in accordance with approval criteria

In addition to meeting the requirements detailed in step 1, applications will be assessed to ensure that the minimum approval criteria are met.

You must demonstrate achievement of the required competencies, qualifications and commodity experience applicable to the scope of your application before the application can be progressed.

It is a requirement of the National Regulatory Food Safety Auditor Guideline that you maintain the required units of competency from the FBP – Food, Beverage and Pharmaceutical (Release 5.1) Training Package (supersedes FDF10 Food Processing) or superseded and equivalent units as detailed at: FBP Training Package Details.

Statements of Attainment for the following units of competency issued by a registered training organisation (RTO) under the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF):

### Low risk

- FBPAUD4001—Assess compliance with food safety program
- FBPAUD4002—Communicate and negotiate to conduct food safety audits
- FBPAUD4003—Conduct food safety audits
- FBPAUD4004—Identify, evaluate and control food safety hazards.

### Medium risk

In addition to the above listed units of competency, if you are approved for the medium classification, you must hold a Certificate IV or higher in food science or related field (including 40 hours of food microbiology) or equivalent skill set.

### High risk

If you are applying for approval to audit high risk processes, you must have the following high risk units of competency (where applicable to the commodity and process being audited) in addition to the above medium risk requirements:

- FBPAUD5002—Audit a cook chill process
- FBPAUD5003—Audit a heat treatment process (retort and pasteurisation)
- FBPAUD5004—Audit manufacturing of ready-to-eat meat products
- FBPAUD5001—Audit bivalve mollusc growing and harvesting operations.

If you apply for approval to audit processes that result in ready-to-eat fish, egg or dairy products, you will be required to provide evidence of experience with both commodity and process.

### **Exemplar Global certification (formerly known as RABQSA) equivalence**

The following units of competency (NFS 1-4) will be accepted as equivalent to the four nationally recognised units of competency for auditing where an auditor has applied for either low or medium risk commodity risk classification:

- NFS-1: Assess compliance of food safety programs
- NFS-2: Communicate and negotiate to conduct food safety audits
- NFS-3: Conduct food safety audits
- NFS-4: Identify, evaluate and control food safety hazards

If you are seeking high risk commodity approval, you must provide evidence of having obtained the applicable AQTF pre-requisite and high risk units of competency as listed above.

### **Units of competency**

Additional information on training packages, units of competency and details of registered training organisations (RTOs) able to provide Statements of Attainment in the above listed units of competency can be found on the National training Information Services website at [www.training.gov.au](http://www.training.gov.au).

The department may occasionally alter the required qualifications of approved auditors. You will be notified in writing of any changes to the requirements.

### **Declarations**

If investigation reveals that any information that you provide in your application is intentionally false or misleading, it may result in your application being questioned or rejected outright. If investigation following your approval reveals that substantial false and misleading statements have been made, your approval will be revoked.

## **Step 3—Access provided to training in the department's legislative requirements**

Once the initial approval criteria has been met, you will be contacted in writing and provided with a personal log-in to an online learning management system where training in the department's legislative requirements is provided. This training must be successfully completed, and you need to advise the department when you successfully complete this training.

## **Step 4—Assessment**

On successful completion of the online training at step 3, you will be required to undergo an on-site assessment or 'witness audit'. This assessment will assess your skills and knowledge, your understanding of the Act and applicable commodity Rules, and will verify that you can appropriately interpret and apply the applicable legislation.

The assessment will be carried out by a department officer who holds appropriate auditing competencies, technical and educational qualifications and specialised endorsements. The assessment(s) will be conducted to the highest commodity risk classification that you have applied for.

If you wish to change or upgrade your scope of approval, you must re-apply to the department and may be subject to additional assessment.

## Step 5—Notice of approval and identity card

On successful completion of the assessment activities in step 4, you will receive notice of your approval and be issued with an identity card:

### Notice of approval

You will receive a notice of approval which specifies your responsibilities to the department while undertaking your duties as an approved auditor. The notice of approval will include:

- Your name
- Date of approval
- Conditions of approval including:
  - Commodity risk classification
  - Scope of approval
  - Code of conduct.

The scope of your approval will be restricted to the requirements of the legislation and commodity risk classification that you have been assessed and approved against. You must not conduct audits outside of your scope of approval.

### Identity card

Once approved, you will be issued with an identity card. You must formally acknowledge receipt of the card by notifying the department.

Your identity card will be dated and is valid for 12 months. A new card will be issued upon successful application for renewal of your approval.

If your identity card is lost or stolen, you must notify the department immediately. A new card will be issued, and a fee may apply (the decision to charge a card replacement fee is at the discretion of the department).

The identity card remains the property of the department. If your approval is revoked or expires, you must return the card immediately to the department.

## Step 6—Listing on the approved auditor register

### Approved auditor register

The department maintains a register of approved auditors. This register is publicly available on the department website at [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors/registerofapprovedauditors](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors/registerofapprovedauditors) and will be updated as required. It is your responsibility to ensure that the information you supply for the register is accurate and updated as necessary.

The following information, collected from your application form, is the minimum information that will be listed on the approved auditor register:

- Your name
- Contact details (phone number and e-mail contact only)
- Commodity risk classification
- Operating regions.

Once an identity card has been issued and you have been listed on the approved auditor register, you may commence audits in your approved commodity/risk sectors. You cannot conduct any audits of registered establishments on the department's behalf at any time prior to receiving your identity card and being listed on the approved auditor register.

### Review of decisions relating to approvals

At this time, all decisions relating to approvals will be made by the department. If the decision is made not to approve the applicant, the applicant will be advised of the decision and the reasons for the decision in writing. Unsuccessful applicants may seek a review of the decision under section 383 of the *Export Control Act 2020*.

## Section 4

# Managing the approved auditor

The following section provides details of both the department's requirements and your responsibilities with regard to management of your performance as an approved auditor.

## Verification system

The verification system used to check for compliance to set standards, systems and legislative requirements enables the department to assess and monitor the competence and performance of approved auditors.

Verification activities may be scheduled or triggered by complaints, system reviews, trends, audit reports or requests by registered establishments.

## Scheduled verification activities

The department will conduct scheduled verification activities based upon your commodity risk classification. Outcomes of verification activities may result in requests for corrective action, re-training or revocation of approval, if poor auditor performance is identified.

Scheduled verification activities may include:

- an examination of reports that you make in the course of auditing operations at registered establishments
- an audit of at least one operation that you audited under the applicable commodity Order or Orders within the previous six months; and/or
- observing you while you are conducting an audit.

## Review of audit reports

Audit reports will be reviewed by the department to ensure compliance with reporting requirements. The following may be included in the review:

- audit duration
- classification of non-compliances issued
- compliance with timeliness of report submission
- notification of audit failure or non-completion
- notification of critical non-compliances
- relevance of non-compliances issued
- review of the content of the audit report; clarity of findings.

You will be notified in writing of any findings of the review of audit reports. This may take the form of advice or information, or it may result in the issuing of a corrective action request.

## Refresher training

The department will provide refresher training where required by changes to legislative requirements or procedures. You may also be required to undertake refresher training as a result of verification findings.

## Changes in requirements and procedures

You will be advised of any changes in requirements and procedures through updates on the department website at [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors). Approved auditors are required to subscribe to the automatic e-mail notification function available to ensure access to current requirements.

## Maintaining the requirements for approval

You are responsible for maintaining the currency of the applicable competencies/technical qualification and annual renewal of approval.

## Renewal of approval

You are responsible for applying for renewal of your approval prior to the expiration date detailed in the notice of approval. You must not perform audits without a current approval. You should apply for renewal at least 30 days prior to the expiry of your approval to allow sufficient time for your renewal application to be processed.

Applications for renewal are available on the department website at: [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/from-australia/approved-auditors)

## Surrender of approval

You may request that your approval be cancelled should you decide not to continue working as an approved auditor on behalf of the department. It is your responsibility to ensure that you do not market your services as meeting the department's requirements once you have surrendered your approval.

## Notification

You must, during the term of your approval, immediately notify the department of any event or information which relates to or may affect the department's satisfaction that you are a suitable person to be appointed as an approved auditor including:

- Unintentional or suspected breach of the approved auditor code of conduct
- Conviction of an offence against the *Crimes Act 1914*, or another law of the *Commonwealth* or a state or territory
- Threats, intimidation, bribery against you
- Complaints against you in your role
- Conflict of interests (real or perceived).

## Confidentiality

The approved auditor code of conduct requires that you must not disclose certain confidential information.

The approved auditor code of conduct states that you must keep all commercially sensitive and official information confidential. If you disclose such information without appropriate consent, your approval may be revoked.

## Revocation or variation of approval

Should the department find reason to vary the conditions of or revoke your approval, the department will notify you in writing. On receipt of that notice, you will have an opportunity to make submissions to the department for a review of the decision.

## Complaints system

The department's complaints system is accessible by registered establishments, approved auditors, other jurisdictions and the general public. Complaints may be made via the website, email, phone, or by letter. The complainant may remain anonymous if they wish.

Procedures for making complaints are detailed on the website at:

[www.agriculture.gov.au/about/commitment/suggestions-compliments-complaints](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/about/commitment/suggestions-compliments-complaints).

## Section 5

# Approval of registered establishments to engage an approved auditor

Registered establishments must seek approval from the department to engage an approved auditor. Granting approval is contingent on several factors including consideration of the service delivery arrangements that may be in place within the establishments' state or territory jurisdiction.

When approved, the establishment will be provided with written notification from the department that details their approval and the commodity risk classification/s of their establishment.

This will enable the occupier of a registered establishment to access the approved auditor register and contact an approved auditor within their local area that has the commodity risk classification/s required to conduct an audit of their establishment.

## Section 6

# Managing the audit process

The department has developed procedures for managing the audit process where audits are undertaken by approved auditors.

The following section provides details of your duties and the overarching procedures that you must comply with when conducting regulatory audits of registered establishments.

Where the audit of specific commodities requires additional procedures, you will be provided with documented procedures by the commodity program. Additional procedures may be required for:

- determining the frequency of audit where frequency may be based on risk
- audit reports and reporting (including provision of department audit report templates).

## Duties of approved auditors

You have the following duties when conducting audits of registered establishments on behalf of the department:

- Carrying out audits of the approved arrangement approved and in place at the registered establishment
- Carrying out any necessary follow-up action, including further audits, to determine whether action has been taken to correct any non-compliances identified in an audit
- Auditing and reporting in accordance with legislation and the department's requirements.

## Scheduling the audit

Prior to scheduling the audit, you must ensure that the occupier of the registered establishment has written approval from the department to engage you as an approved auditor.

It is the responsibility of the occupier to engage an approved auditor with the appropriate commodity risk classification to conduct their regulatory audit. You and the registered establishment are then jointly responsible for organising and managing the audit process.

Together you must ensure that audit frequencies determined by the department as applicable to the establishment being audited are met, taking into consideration that audit frequency may vary dependent on audit findings.

## Observation of processes

Audits must be scheduled to coincide with production to enable actual processing operations to be observed. However, if the establishment to be audited is a vessel where processing occurs at sea, audits should be scheduled where possible to coincide with vessel unloads to provide access to product and crew.

## Auditing of multi-sited businesses

Irrespective of whether an occupier operates from many sites, each site is an individual registered establishment. Each site must therefore maintain their own approved arrangement and records and be audited against that establishment's approved arrangement.

The approved arrangement used on site must accurately reflect how export requirements and food safety issues are being managed on that specific site.

## Audit teams

There may be instances where teams of approved auditors, rather than individual approved auditors, are required to carry out regulatory audits. Under these circumstances the lead auditor of the audit team must ensure that all auditors undertaking work as part of the audit team are approved auditors and have the appropriate commodity risk classification to conduct such audits.

## Planning the audit

### Audit criteria

All audits of registered establishments must be conducted against the appropriate audit criteria. This includes the requirements of the Act, the applicable commodity Rules and, where applicable, the Australian Standards as referenced in the commodity Rules. Audit criteria can include the approved arrangement as the system to ensure compliance with the requirements of the legislation. Criteria may also include applicable importing country requirements where identified in the establishment's approved arrangement.

You can use the department's audit report templates to select and indicate the applicable criteria for the audit you are conducting.

You should ensure that you have access to all relevant legislation applicable to the type of registered establishment that is to be audited. Copies of this legislation and any applicable Australian Standards and the department guidelines should be on hand during the audit for easy reference.

See Appendix 2 for a list of legislation, Australian standards and department guidelines and where to access the documents.

## Audit scope

The department audit report templates detail the scope of the audit in the form of a list of elements that are to be audited. You can use these templates to identify the specific elements that are actually audited at a given audit.

It is a department requirement that, regardless of the frequency of audit, all elements are audited within a 12-month period. It is your responsibility to ensure that this requirement is met through effective audit planning and consideration of audit frequency and elements previously audited.

Where an establishment's hazard analysis identifies critical control points (CCPs), the hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) element must be audited at each audit.

## Documentation review

If you require documents for review prior to the on-site audit, you must make the request directly to the occupier (or their agreed representative) of the establishment to be audited. The department does not provide copies of AAs or HACCP plans directly to approved auditors.

As part of the audit preparation or entry meeting, you must obtain and review copies of the previous audit report/s including any corrective action requests.

The establishment's Certificate of Registration provides details of the commodities and operations that the establishment is approved by the department to prepare and undertake. The Certificate of Registration also provides details of the persons listed by the department as being in management and control at the establishment and may include details of importing country listings. This document should be available and reviewed for currency at each audit.

## Conducting the audit

All audits must be conducted at the registered establishment to be audited.

The time taken to perform the audit is not predetermined. An audit shall continue until you are satisfied that all required elements of scope have been audited effectively.

Table 2 outlines the minimum requirements that you must ensure are met when conducting a regulatory audit of a registered establishment.

**TABLE 2** Minimum requirements for conducting an audit of a registered establishment

Audit activity	Minimum requirements
<b>Entry meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When requested, your current identity card is presented</li> <li>• Appropriate management is present and recorded</li> <li>• You have detailed the audit criteria and the scope of the audit</li> <li>• Previous audit report/s are reviewed and discussed</li> <li>• Where required, outstanding non-compliances are discussed, including reviewing evidence and verification that corrective action taken has been effective</li> <li>• Current department-issued Certificate of Registration is available and reviewed for accuracy</li> <li>• Approved arrangement is available and on site</li> <li>• Monitoring records and any other documents applicable to the audit are available, current and on site</li> <li>• Any changes to activities, products or processes conducted at the registered establishment that may affect the establishment's food safety risk and/or compliance with legislative requirements are reviewed.</li> </ul>
<b>Conducting the audit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit of approved arrangement including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– review of amendments to AA</li> <li>– review of audit elements as specified on department audit report template</li> <li>– review of HACCP plan</li> <li>– inspection of the registered establishment and observation of processing</li> <li>– trace back of export eligible product transferred to another establishment or exported to source/supplier to determine effective identification and traceability procedures</li> <li>– review of export documentation (where applicable, this may include a review of procedures for the completion/validation of export documentation)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review objective evidence to identify and classify any non-compliances</li> <li>• Document non-compliance/s identified</li> <li>• Where a non-compliance identified is to be classified as critical, the department is contacted immediately. An authorised officer may need to give a direction to the occupier to cease processing for export.</li> </ul>
<b>Exit meeting—conducted at completion of the audit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate management is present and recorded</li> <li>• Audit findings are presented including details of any non-compliances identified</li> <li>• Agree on appropriate corrective action/s, including the evidence to be presented and the timeframes required for closure of any corrective action requests (CARs) issued as a result of non-compliances identified. You and the occupier are jointly responsible for ensuring that all non-compliances are actioned and CARs are closed out within the agreed timeframes</li> <li>• Overall audit outcome is presented and discussed. If a critical non-compliance has been identified, the occupier is informed that they will be contacted by the department regarding the action to be taken</li> <li>• Date of next audit is confirmed</li> <li>• Copies of completed, acknowledged audit reports and non-compliance reports/CARs are provided to both the occupier and the department within 14 days of the date of audit</li> </ul>

## Audit findings

Audit reports must clearly state the audit findings, that is:

- Whether in your opinion the audit was satisfactorily completed or was terminated prior to completion
- Whether in your opinion the following have been complied with and the reasons for your opinions:
  - The applicable requirements of the Act and the applicable commodity Rules
  - The requirements of the approved arrangement and its conditions
  - The applicable importing country requirements
  - For all aspects of the operations in relation to the commodity for export as food covered under operations.

You must act on non-compliances observed during the audit by classifying and documenting them as CARs or non-compliance reports.

## Classification of non-compliances

The department requires the classification of all non-compliances identified at audit as critical, major or minor non-compliances. Critical non-compliance:

Section 9-4 of the meat commodity Rules, and section 9-5 of the fish, milk and egg commodity Rules requires that, should you identify a failure (or a combination of failures) that amounts to a critical non-compliance, you must notify the department as soon as practicable.

A **critical non-compliance** is a failure (or a combination of failures) to comply with any of the following:

- A requirement of the Act or the Rules
- The requirements of any applicable approval, including an approval of an approved arrangement
- The applicable importing country requirements.

This non-compliance results in, or is likely to result in, the preparation or export of food that:

- is not fit for human consumption or has compromised integrity; or
- does not comply with an importing country requirement; or
- results in, or is likely to result in, the issue or giving of an export permit or government certificate that is inaccurate or incomplete; or
- prevents an accurate assessment being made as to the above.

Under no circumstances can an approved auditor take enforcement action or act as a department authorised officer. At any time where you feel that enforcement action is necessary, they must contact the department immediately.

A **non-compliance on-compliance** can be any negligence or activity that:

- Results in a requirement of the legislation not being addressed; or
- Is in direct contravention of the legislation; or
- Is in direct contravention of a procedure and could have a significant effect on product or legislative compliance.

A **non-compliance** may be an isolated incident of a non-compliance with a system or procedural requirement with no direct consequential effect on product or legislative compliance.

## Observations/advisory findings

Where an observation or advisory finding is made, sufficient detail must be provided to clearly determine that the finding is an observation only and could not be considered as a non-compliance under the definitions provided.

## Corrective actions

The corrective action to be taken to address non-compliances identified at audit is to be determined by the occupier of the establishment (or their representative) and detailed on the CAR/non-compliance report. Corrective actions that must be taken to prevent recurrence of the non-compliance are to be agreed between you and the occupier. Corrective actions must include actions that will effectively address both the immediate and long term (systemic) issues.

CARs should include details of the evidence that the occupier will be required to provide to you to demonstrate that effective corrective action has been taken.

## Audit outcomes

Audit outcomes are reported as either 'acceptable' or, if a critical non-compliance is identified, as 'unacceptable'.

## Non-compliant

The department may require additional audit/s of the establishment by a department authorised officer.

The purpose of these additional audits by the department is to provide evidence that the establishment has taken steps to comply with their export requirements and has sustained compliance over a period of time.

If the registered establishment continues to not comply, appropriate enforcement action will be taken by a department authorised officer.

Copies of enforcement action must be produced by the registered establishment at their next audit.

## Audit frequency

Specific commodity audit frequencies are detailed at: ['Department audit regime'](#) on the department website:

- [Audits of fish export establishments.](#)
- [Audits of egg export establishments.](#)
- [Audits of dairy export establishments.](#)

## Audit reporting

You will be provided with department templates to be used for the documenting of CARs/non-compliance reports and the audit report.

Completed reports are to be e-mailed to the Department and will be uploaded into the department's AMS system.

Finalised audit reports, including details of agreed corrective actions and timeframes for action, must be acknowledged by the occupier of the establishment audited.

Copies of audit reports and CARs/non-compliance reports must be provided to both the occupier and the department within 14 days of the audit.

It is your responsibility to confirm agreed corrective actions, receive acknowledgement from the occupier and provide copies to the department within the required 14 day timeframe.

## Finalisation/closure of CARs/non-compliance reports

It is your responsibility to:

- Carry out any necessary follow-up action, including further audits if necessary, to determine whether the agreed corrective action has been taken to address the non-compliances identified at audit within the required timeframes
- Provide the department and the occupier with copies of finalised CARs/non-compliance reports within 14 days of completion
- Immediately advise the department when agreed timeframes for the corrective action to be taken have not been met and issue an additional CAR for failure to take action

## Escalation policy

Where a registered establishment fails to rectify a non-compliance within the required timeframe, you are responsible for escalating the matter by:

- Issuing an additional CAR for failure to take corrective action, and
- Reporting the issuing of the CAR to the department with a maximum timeframe for action of 14 days.

The department will manage the failure to take correction action within agreed timeframes.

## Records

You must use the audit report templates provided by the department to develop audit records.

These documents must be filled in completely and accurately, including:

- All relevant dates (recorded as DD/MM/YY) Establishment numbers, where indicated on forms
- References to the name of the company, which must be the registered occupier name and not a trading name
- Names of persons from the establishment who were involved in the audit

All handwritten notes must be clear and legible.

It is important that you have a filing and record keeping system for all documents that is consistent and enables accurate identification and timely retrieval of files.

All handwritten notes, checklists and digital documents may be required by the department at short notice. This may be in response to a Freedom of Information request, a Ministerial directive or as part of the department's verification program.

## Appendix 1

# Approved auditor code of conduct

Your approval by the department as an approved auditor is subject to you agreeing to abide by the approved auditor code of conduct (the code).

The following table outlines the requirements of the code that you must comply with as an approved auditor undertaking audits on behalf of the department.

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### Approved auditor code of conduct

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The code requires that an approved auditor must:

- behave honestly and with integrity
  - act with care, diligence and professionalism
  - treat everyone with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
  - comply with all applicable Australian laws
  - maintain appropriate confidentiality about client dealings
  - disclose, and take reasonable steps to avoid, any conflict of interest (real or perceived) in connection with their role as an approved auditor
  - not provide false or misleading information to clients or the department
  - not make improper use of:
    - commercially sensitive information
    - the approved auditor's duties, status, power or authority, in order to gain, or seek to gain, a benefit or advantage for the approved auditor or for any other person
  - behave in a way that upholds the integrity and good reputation of the department
  - comply with any other conduct requirement that is prescribed in the department's approved auditor manual.
- 

The following provides guidance and explanation of your obligations and expected standards of behaviour as an approved auditor.

## Purpose and application of the code of conduct

This code applies to all auditors approved by the department to conduct audits of registered establishments. You are expected to conduct yourself with integrity, professionalism and accountability. The code sets out the minimum standard of behaviour expected of you.

You should:

- familiarise yourself with this code
- familiarise yourself and comply with all legislation concerning auditors and audit performance, and the legislation against which you are auditing.

Failing to comply with this code may result in your approval being revoked by the department.

## Definitions

**Real conflicts of interest** occur when the department would conclude that your ability to conduct an audit has been compromised by your private or interests in the client's business.

**Perceived conflicts of interest** occur when the department would be inclined to consider that your private or commercial interests may interfere with, unduly benefit, or disadvantage your ability to conduct a fair audit of a registered establishment.

**Commercially sensitive information means information:**

- provided to you by a registered establishment during an audit, where disclosure of such information may impact the establishment's commercial interests
- provided by someone else other than the registered establishment concerning some aspect of the registered establishment's commercial interests, where, upon receipt of the information, you have been requested not to disclose the information.

**Gifts means any item or benefit offered by:**

- an employee of a registered establishment
- any other person acting on behalf of a registered establishment or in the interests of a registered establishment
- to solicit favourable treatment during an audit or offered to you in response to a finding of non-compliance during an audit.

## Conduct provisions

You must:

- Maintain your competencies and qualifications as specified in the department approved auditor manual
- Only conduct regulatory audits of registered establishments once approved by the department
- Not audit registered establishments outside your scope of approval and commodity risk classification
- Conduct audits expeditiously and in a way that causes as little interference as possible to the operations which may be the subject of the audit
- Comply with reporting requirements, including timeframes for the provision of audit reports, to both the occupier of the registered establishment being audited and the department

- As soon as practicable, inform the department of any critical non-compliances identified during audits, in accordance with procedures dictated in the department approved auditor manual
- Comply with any additional documented procedures provided by the department in relation to the conduct of an audit
- Assist with enforcement activity taken by the department as a result of your auditing activities including, but not limited to, providing statements of evidence for matters concerning legal prosecutions
- Not seek or accept recompense from any client for failure to implement appropriate action in relation to a finding of non-compliance detected during an audit. This includes, but is not limited to, non-compliance of a legislative nature
- Maintain records relating to audits conducted and make them available upon request to the department.

## Identification

You must produce your approved auditor identity card when requested.

## Obligations

The following provides further explanation of the code:

### Respect for persons

You must behave in a fair manner and without undue favouritism, patronage or prejudice displayed toward any person associated with a registered establishment.

You must not let your personal beliefs influence the outcomes of audits you perform. You must not use abusive, obscene or threatening language or behaviour towards any person associated with the registered establishment.

### Natural justice

You are to follow the principles of procedural fairness (natural justice) when making decisions. The principles of procedural fairness require you to:

- Provide opportunity for both sides of an issue to be heard and considered before decisions are made
- Not allow any personal interest associated with an audit or a person associated with a registered establishment to influence an audit outcome
- Act in good faith while conducting audits
- Provide sound reasons to support decisions made whilst conducting audits.

### Health, welfare and safety concerns

You must comply with all aspects of relevant Australian work health and safety legislation, including the health and safety policies of registered establishments being audited. You are required to respect the health, safety and welfare of all persons and/or animals associated with a registered establishment while conducting audits, while also ensuring your own health, safety and welfare is not unlawfully put at risk while conducting audits.

## Discrimination

You must not unlawfully discriminate against any employee of a registered establishment, or other person associated with a registered establishment, or member of the general public while conducting regulatory audits. Unlawful discrimination may relate to discrimination based on sex, colour, race, religious or other personal beliefs or other characteristics identified in Commonwealth anti-discrimination legislation. Discrimination does not include making recommendations to an employee of a registered establishment concerning the employee's health should they be afflicted with a condition or illness capable of affecting food safety.

## Workplace harassment

You must not behave in a manner considered by employees or other persons associated with a registered establishment, or any member of the general public, as offensive, abusive, obscene, threatening, belittling or sexual. This requirement applies to behaviours both of a verbal and physical nature. Making objective statements about the consequences of not implementing advice concerning non-compliances is not regarded as threatening behaviour.

## Behaviour and attitude

You are expected to display the following behaviours and attributes during audits:

- Conduct yourself in a positive manner with a positive attitude to policies and directions provided by the department
- Maintain an open and honest approach with all parties involved in audits, and maintain thorough communication whilst conducting audits or dealing with audit outcomes
- Conduct audits objectively, independently, fairly and accurately and, unless otherwise stated in the audit report, completely
- Treat audit participants fairly, equitably and consistently, and follow criteria, policies and processes when making decisions concerning audit findings
- Respect all persons when conducting audits, irrespective of their ideas and/or modes of operation
- Conduct audits with diligence, professionalism and integrity
- Avoid inappropriate behaviour when conducting audits; this includes behaviour perceived to be intimidating, hostile, sexual or offensive. Remember that the recipient of the behaviour is the person defining the behaviour
- Do not respond in kind to intimidating or threatening behaviour displayed during an audit. In the event of such behaviour, you should immediately suspend the audit and advise the Department.

## Dress standards

You must conform to a dress standard appropriate for the work to be undertaken. You should dress respectably and respectfully (appropriate to religious beliefs). Your appearance should be clean and tidy, and your dress standards should not compromise the reputation of the department.

You must also comply with industry specific or client specific dress requirements while conducting audits on registered establishments. This includes compliance with any required biosecurity protocols and the use of personal protective equipment while on site.

## Use of alcohol and drugs

Whilst performing your role, you must not:

- Smoke on the premises of a registered establishment in any area other than that deemed by the occupier of the establishment to be a smoking area
- Consume any substance (e.g. alcohol or illegal drugs) capable of altering your behaviour or your ability to competently conduct regulatory audits.
- Use legal drugs obtained by prescription or direct purchase in any way other than in direct compliance with the direction of the prescribing doctor or manufacturer.

## Conflicts of interest

You must, at all times, avoid conflicts of interest. In the event of learning that a real or perceived conflict of interest exists, you must immediately inform the department. After investigation, the department will advise whether you may continue to audit the registered establishment. Following this, you must detail the matter in writing to the department.

Examples of situations that are considered to constitute a real or perceived conflict of interest include:

- Auditing a business where you have provided specific direction to the business in how to manage food safety risks associated with its food safety program. This may or may not include drafting the establishment's approved arrangement or food safety management system. Situations where you have provided general food safety advice to the occupier of a registered establishment or their representative, where this advice does not include or give specific direction to the establishment in how to manage a food safety risk associated with its food safety program or approved arrangement is not considered a conflict of interest
- Arranging food safety training or participating as a food safety trainer in sessions where company specific solutions to food safety risks associated with a company's food safety program are discussed or provided. Discussing non-compliances identified during an audit is not considered a conflict of interest
- Auditing a registered establishment where you have a direct financial interest. Remuneration provided to you for auditing a registered establishment does not constitute a conflict of interest
- Preferential treatment of a person, organisation or interest (including but not limited to pecuniary, commercial, political or religious interests) during a regulatory audit as a result of your previous association with that person, organisation or interest
- Where you, or one of your close family members or associates, has a direct relationship with a direct competitor of the registered establishment being audited. In this situation, the proprietor of the registered establishment should be notified of the relationship, and allowed to decide whether you may continue the audit of their business. If the proprietor refuses your services, you should inform the department, who will then decide on an appropriate course of action.

## Acceptance of gifts

If you are found to have accepted gifts in the course of your auditing activities, you will be subject to immediate investigation by the department that may lead to revocation of your approval. The investigation may also lead to criminal prosecutions being commenced against you.

This does not include refreshments such as tea and coffee or basic meals such as sandwiches provided to you while conducting an audit of a registered establishment.

Any attempt made by a client to offer a gift, where the intent of offering the gift may reasonably be perceived to be an attempt to influence an audit outcome and/or a response to a non-compliance finding, must be reported to the department as soon as possible.

## Confidential information and public comment

You must maintain strict confidentiality concerning the nature of processes and practices (and complaints arising from these practices) relating to food produced at registered establishments they have been requested to audit.

Commercially sensitive information and Commonwealth confidential information that you receive must not be used to gain advantage for yourself, another person or organisation.

You must not make public statements or be interviewed by the media on matters concerning audits, clients, the department or other government bodies associated with the department's activity, unless provided with express written permission by the department.

## Falsification of results

If you are found on investigation by the department to be deliberately providing false information on audit reports, your approval will be immediately revoked.

## Failure to comply

Failure to comply with this code may result in the immediate revocation of your approval.

## Acknowledgement

When making an application to the department for approval, you are required to acknowledge that you have read, understood and will comply with all aspects of the approved auditor code of conduct when undertaking your duties as an approved auditor.

## Appendix 2

# Legislation, Australian standards and the department's guidelines

The following is a list of the legislation, Australian standards, guidelines and industry notices applicable to the auditing of registered establishments that you are required to have access to and knowledge of prior to undertaking an audit.

Web links are provided to ensure currency of information and it remains your responsibility to maintain your knowledge of current legislation and relevant guidelines.

### All commodities

- Export Control Act 2020.
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) Food Standards Code  
[www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/Pages/default.aspx).

### Fish

- Export Control (Fish and Fish Products) Rules 2021  
[www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export).

### Eggs

- Export Control (Eggs and Egg Products) Rules 2021  
[www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export).

### Milk

- Export Control (Milk and Milk Products) Rules 2021  
[www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export).

### Meat

- Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Rules 2021  
[www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/legislation/export).
- Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption, (AS 4696:2002)
- Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment Meat Notices
- Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment guidelines  
[www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/meat/elmer-3](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/meat/elmer-3).





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Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment  
General inquiry 1800 900 090



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