



Department of
**AGRICULTURE
FISHERIES &
FORESTRY -
AUSTRALIA**



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ANIMAL BIOSECURITY POLICY MEMORANDUM 2002/14

INTERIM BIOSECURITY MEASURES FOR PILCHARDS AND MACKEREL

This Animal Biosecurity Policy Memorandum (ABPM) seeks stakeholder comment by 26 April 2002 on proposed interim measures for pilchards, mackerel and closely related species. The interim measures are consistent with other existing finfish policies and involves classifying these fish as 'specified' species with associated additional import controls.

To address risks associated with sourcing fish from unsurveyed populations, from today, the importation of finfish (both 'specified' and 'non-specified') intended for direct introduction into the aquatic environment will only be approved from populations with a known health status acceptable to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS). Transitional arrangements will apply for those sources of fish for which permits have already been issued.

In December 2001, Biosecurity Australia notified stakeholders of the start of a review of biosecurity policies for importing pilchards, mackerel and closely related species after Viral Haemorrhagic Septicaemia Virus (VHSV) was identified in pilchards and mackerel from Californian waters (ABPM 2001/36). Subsequently, Biosecurity Australia sent a technical brief to stakeholders and convened a public meeting in Adelaide on 20 February (ABPM 2002/01 and ABPM 2002/04). A summary of submissions and stakeholder feedback provided through the Adelaide workshop is attached.

After considering available scientific information and reviewing all stakeholder responses to ABPM 2001/36 and ABPM 2002/04 and comments made at the Adelaide meeting, it is clear this issue is complex and it will not be possible to fully consider all the key issues in the short term. Our consultations with stakeholders and scientific experts highlighted several areas where there were important information gaps and conflicting interpretations of data, such as the prevalence of infection in source fish populations, the importance of the oral route of virus transmission and the degree of virus inactivation caused by the freezing and thawing of product.

The lack of specific scientific information is in common with many of the risk assessments that are made by quarantine/biosecurity agencies around the world. Biosecurity Australia agrees with the view expressed at the Adelaide meeting and in several stakeholder submissions that further research would help in assessing risks.

Preliminary conclusions

Biosecurity Australia's preliminary assessment took into account stakeholder submissions, international guidelines for trade regarding VHSV, the 1999 Import Risk Analysis (IRA) of marine finfish and the volume of recent imports of pilchard and mackerel for use as bait and feed fish. The assessment indicates that the overall

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risk from marine strains of VHSV through whole frozen pilchard and mackerel imports is less than “high”, but still sufficient to warrant risk management; unrestricted importation would not be within Australia’s appropriate level of protection (ALOP). Biosecurity Australia has therefore decided to undertake a more detailed risk assessment than earlier envisaged, and to propose interim measures until completion of a more comprehensive review of Australia’s policy for VHSV in the context of imported finfish intended for direct introduction into the aquatic environment.

Interim import controls

Biosecurity Australia proposes introduction of interim measures consistent with the 1999 IRA on non-viable salmonids and non-salmonid marine finfish. This would require that all species of the genera *Sardinops* and *Scomber* be listed as ‘specified species’ and subject to the additional import controls described in AQPM 1999/79. This policy is expected to be implemented from 1 May 2002, though transitional arrangements would apply for product “on the water” at that time.

The proposed interim measures would mean that whole round fish imports of *Sardinops* spp. and *Scomber* spp. are not permitted importation unless:

- . the importer can make a compelling case that the use of the product in Australia can be controlled with a high degree of certainty and
- . that this use does not pose an unacceptable risk. AQIS, in consultation with Biosecurity Australia, may consider similar arrangements to those applied to herring (*Clupea* spp.), also based on VHSV related risk, or other risk management proposals.

Importers seeking to import whole round pilchards, mackerel and closely related species would need to make a science-based submission to AQIS supporting their application for a permit. The application would need to provide details of the product to be imported; its intended end-use; and other information required by AQIS to make an informed assessment of the quarantine risk presented by the proposal.

Biosecurity Australia is aware of issues relating to the validity of current temperature-based end-use controls applied to imported herring. Biosecurity Australia proposes that existing controls are maintained and this matter will be addressed in the VHSV review.

The proposed interim measures would be in addition to current import controls on whole, round finfish of non-specified species. These controls require that consignments are accompanied by health certification stating:

- . the source of the fish; the fish are wild-caught (ie not farmed);
- . the consignment does not contain any other species;
- . the fish were processed in premises approved by and under the control of the overseas certifying authority; and
- . the product is free from visible lesions associated with infectious disease.

Importation of fish from unsurveyed populations

Biosecurity Australia also acknowledges general concerns about the risks from VHSV and other diseases and pests from importing fish from unsurveyed source populations. Therefore, with effect from today, all finfish (both “specified” and “non-specified”) imports intended for direct introduction into the aquatic environment (eg as bait/burley or aquaculture feed) will be sourced only from populations with a known acceptable health status.

- . the health status and level of surveillance of each source population of fish and the ability of Competent Authorities in relevant countries to provide ongoing health certification will need to be assessed.
- . to minimise disruption to existing trade, permits will be issued for existing sources pending their health status review.
 - for species of *Scomber* and *Sardinops*, additional VHSV related interim measures, if adopted, would also apply from 1 May 2002
- . permits for the importation of finfish from new sources will not be issued before a health assessment has been successfully completed.

Next Steps

Biosecurity Australia would appreciate your comments on the approach proposed above, including the interim import control measures, by close of business 26 April 2002.

Confidentiality

Respondents are advised that, subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* and the *Privacy Act 1988*, all submissions received in response to Animal Biosecurity Policy Memoranda will be publicly available. Comments may be listed or referred to in any papers or reports prepared on the subject matter of the Memoranda.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to reveal the identity of a respondent unless a request for anonymity accompanies the submission. Where a request for anonymity does not accompany the submission the respondent will be taken to have consented to the disclosure of his or her identity for the purposes of Information Privacy Principle 11 of the Privacy Act.

The contents of the submission will not be treated as confidential unless they are marked ‘confidential’ and they are capable of being classified as such in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

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