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

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ANIMAL BIOSECURITY POLICY MEMORANDUM 2003/15

IMPORTATION OF PILCHARDS, MACKEREL AND CLOSELY RELATED SPECIES

DRAFT REPORT OF THE POLICY REVIEW OF VHSV

This Animal Biosecurity Policy Memorandum (ABPM) advises stakeholders of the release of the draft report on the policy review of viral haemorrhagic septicaemia virus (VHSV) in the context of imports of whole frozen pilchards and mackerel for use as aquaculture feed or fishing bait. The draft report concludes that the risk is *very low* and therefore does not support additional risk management measures beyond those established by the 1999 import risk analysis (IRA). We would appreciate comments by 14 July 2003.

Following the discovery of VHSV in Californian pilchards and mackerel and subsequent stakeholder consultation, the Director of Quarantine approved interim quarantine measures in May 2002 pending completion of a detailed policy review by Biosecurity Australia. These measures were additional to those determined by the 1999 IRA for the importation of pilchards.

A draft report of the policy review is now completed and indicates the VHSV risk associated with importation of frozen pilchards and mackerel for use as bait or feedfish, under conditions similar to the original 1999 import conditions applied to lower risk (or 'non-specified') species, would be acceptable in terms of Australia's appropriate level of protection (ALOP). These 1999 conditions allow for the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) to generally grant import permits for 'non-specified' species on the basis of minimum requirements including health certification attesting:

- the identification of fish species in the consignment;
- that the fish were wild caught and not grown or harvested in an aquaculture system at any stage;
- that the consignment does not contain other fish species;
- that the fish were processed in premises approved by and under the control of the competent authority;
- that the fish were inspected under the supervision of the competent authority; and
- that the product is free from visible lesions associated with infectious disease.

The draft report therefore supports lifting of the interim controls for managing VHSV risk currently applied to frozen pilchards, mackerel and closely related species, i.e. species belonging to the genera *Sardinops* and *Scomber*). Recognising current commercial practices, the policy review was based on the importation of frozen fish.

Biosecurity Australia has taken a cautious approach in assessing the risks, particularly in areas where data is lacking. Several scientists with a range of expertise, including fish virology, fish disease epidemiology, risk assessment and industry practices were consulted in preparing this document. Each provided input, based on their professional experience/judgment, that went toward addressing some of the uncertainties or data gaps in the assessment. Biosecurity Australia also sought input during various stages of the review from a range of government, industry and other stakeholders, both in Australia and overseas.

The draft report is available on the Department's web site at www.affa.gov.au/BiosecurityAustralia, then follow the links to scientific/policy reviews. A hard copy of the document can be obtained from the contact officer nominated below.

Next Steps

We would welcome your technical comments on the draft report, supported by published references where available, by cob 14 July 2003. Biosecurity Australia will consider stakeholder comments as it finalises the policy review. The interim measures will remain until the review is finalised.

Please pass this notice to other interested parties. If those parties wish to be included in future communications on this matter they should get in touch with the contact officer.

Confidentiality

Respondents are advised that, subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* and the *Privacy Act 1988*, all submissions received in response to ABPMs 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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