



22 June 2015

BIOSECURITY ADVICE 2015/05

Draft report for the review of import conditions for fresh ginger from Fiji

This Biosecurity Advice notifies stakeholders of the release of a draft report for the review of import conditions for fresh ginger from Fiji. The draft report is being issued for a 30 day consultation period. Written comments and submissions are invited by 22 July 2015.

Background

The review of import conditions for fresh ginger from Fiji is being undertaken because the final Import Risk Analysis (IRA) report (January 2013) made a commitment to review the import policy after the first year of trade, including the 'provisional' quarantine status of the nematode *Radopholus similis* (*R. similis*).

During the IRA for fresh ginger from Fiji, preliminary information provided suggested that Fiji may have a strain of *R. similis* which may cause greater damage on ginger than *R. similis* already present in Australia. While scientific information was limited, the IRA took an appropriately cautious approach by listing *R. similis* as a 'provisional' quarantine pest and committed to reviewing this status one year from the start of trade.

Under the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) *Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures* (SPS Agreement), Australia is entitled to put provisional risk management measures in place where relevant scientific information is insufficient. When this occurs, Australia is required to try and obtain additional information and review the measures within a reasonable period of time.

The commencement of the review was announced in Biosecurity Advice 2014/14 on 17 November 2014. The advice also contained the review's terms of reference, details of the review process and key dates.

Consultation

At the announcement of this review, stakeholders were invited to submit relevant additional technical information and nominate scientific experts to assist during the review.

The department received formal submissions from the Australian Ginger Industry Association (AGIA), Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) and the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF). Each of these three key stakeholders also nominated scientific experts to assist during the review. Three nominated scientific experts formed the Technical Expert Panel.

In March 2015 the Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer (ACPPPO) and departmental officers met with AGIA representatives and QDAF officers in Queensland. They visited several ginger farms near Gympie, Eumundi and Yandina to gain insight into the Australian ginger industry's production practices, concerns and issues.

The ACPPO and departmental officers also travelled to Fiji in March 2015 to inspect ginger farms and packing facilities, discuss ginger production practices and hold technical discussions.

Draft report recommendations

The draft review makes two key recommendations.

1. Recommended removal of the phytosanitary measure (mandatory methyl bromide fumigation) applied against the nematode *R. similis*.

Under the rules set by the WTO SPS Agreement and the International Plant Protection Convention, Australia is not allowed to apply phytosanitary measures against non-quarantine pests. There has been insufficient scientific evidence to show that the Fijian strain of the nematode *R. similis* is different to that already found in Australia. As a result it cannot be classified as a quarantine pest and treatment cannot be applied.

2. Recommended introduction of a mandatory methyl bromide fumigation treatment for yam scale, *Aspidiella hartii* (*A. hartii*).

Despite the fact that no live quarantine pests were detected on any of the five consignments of fresh ginger imported from Fiji in late 2014 and early 2015, the department recommends introduction of a mandatory methyl bromide fumigation treatment for yam scale.

This is because dead yam scale (*A. hartii*) was detected on four of the five imported ginger consignments. The import conditions require the ginger to be free from yam scale based on a standard 600 unit inspection. The finding of yam scale indicates that this requirement has not been met. On-arrival inspections and independent testing confirmed that all the yam scales detected were dead. This was an expected consequence from the fumigation with methyl bromide that was undertaken for *R. similis*. With the recommended removal of the fumigation requirement for *R. similis* the department now recommends a mandatory methyl bromide fumigation treatment be introduced for yam scale.

Removal of *R. similis* as a quarantine pest will not change the requirement for importers to fumigate fresh ginger from Fiji with methyl bromide as this is now a requirement for yam scale.

Scientific evidence

The department undertook a comprehensive review of *R. similis* covering: the scientific literature; the historic and current situation of *R. similis* on ginger in both Fiji and Australia; and interceptions on imports of Fiji ginger into Australia over the first (2014-15) season of trade.

The review found that currently, there is not enough scientific evidence that the Fijian strain of *R. similis* is significantly different to the strain already found in Australia. This means *R. similis* does not meet the internationally recognised criteria for a quarantine pest.

Several key factors contributed to this conclusion:

1. The department and Technical Expert Panel agreed that the *R. similis* pathogenicity experiments conducted in Fiji in 2009 and Australia in 2012 were not directly comparable and do not provide scientific proof of a significant difference between Fijian and Australian *R. similis* isolates on ginger.
2. The literature review of *R. similis* did not uncover any additional supporting scientific evidence for the existence of such a strain.
3. There is no evidence that *R. similis* is currently causing damage in ginger fields in Fiji. Ginger production practices in Fiji have been modified so that infestation with *R. similis* is being successfully prevented and managed. Surveys of soil and ginger conducted across ginger farms in seven localities between June and September 2014, including fields that were infested in 2007, detected no *R. similis*. Further sampling of volunteer ginger (regrowth from previous crops) and crowsfoot (a weedy host of *R. similis*) in February 2015 also detected no *R. similis*.

In addition, no *R. similis*, alive or dead, were detected on any of the five consignments of fresh ginger imported from Fiji in late 2014 and early 2015. This includes on-arrival inspections by department biosecurity officers and results of independent laboratory testing of imported Fijian ginger undertaken at the request of the department.

However, the department is prepared to reconsider the quarantine status of *R. similis* if a significant biological difference can be scientifically proven.

Process for finalisation of the review

The draft report is being issued for a 30 day consultation period. Written comments and submissions are invited by 22 July 2015. The department will carefully consider all submissions received during the 30 day consultation period and a final report will be prepared and published. The final report is expected to be published in August or September 2015.

Until the review is finalised Fiji is able to continue to trade fresh ginger under existing import conditions which require mandatory methyl bromide treatment.

The department will review any additional relevant information that may become available.

The draft report and additional documentation are available at
<http://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/risk-analysis/reviews/current-plant>

Dr Kim Ritman
Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer

Contact: Kim Ritman
Telephone: +61 2 6272 4671
Facsimile: +61 2 6272 3307

Lodging a submission

There is no specific format for submissions, but they must be in writing, and identify the relevant technical biosecurity issues being raised with supporting evidence. Preferably, submissions should be in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats and lodged electronically via email, but postal submissions are acceptable. Submissions should be received by the department within the stated comment period and addressed to:

Plant Biosecurity
Australian Government Department of Agriculture
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA

Telephone: +61 2 6272 5094
Facsimile: +61 2 6272 3307
Email: plant@agriculture.gov.au

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