



## Biosecurity Fact Sheet #2: Fresh date fruit from the Middle East and North Africa region

January 2017



### Key points

- Australia is assessing the biosecurity risks of importing fresh dates – with more than 30 per cent moisture content, see (a) and (b) below – from countries/territories in the Middle East and North Africa region.
- Australia currently allows imports of semi-dried and dried dates (with 30 per cent or less moisture content) from all countries.
- Australia already allows imports of fresh dates (with more than 30 per cent moisture content) from California (USA).
- A draft report of the review of biosecurity risks is scheduled to be published around September 2017 for stakeholder comment (60 calendar days). The review is expected to be finalised at the end of 2017.

### Date production

Dates are mainly grown in dry, arid regions of the world. Many date cultivars are available for commercial production. Dates for human consumption are classified into a number of different styles which correspond to different stages of development:

- **(a) Khalaal or fresh dates** – the first ripened stage, 45-75 per cent moisture, firm and crunchy (*included in this review*)
- **(b) Rutab or ripe dates** – 30-45 per cent moisture, high sugar (*included in this review*)
- **(c) Tamar or cured dates** – 10-15 per cent moisture, very high sugar, very long shelf life (*not included as trade from all countries is already allowed*).



The Middle East and North African region is the main date producing region of the world, producing some 7 million tonnes of dates in 2013 (FAOSTAT). The harvesting period for the Middle East and North Africa region is June to December.

The Australian date industry is small, with fewer than 25 growers producing around 13 tonnes of dates annually (RIRDC, 2011). The industry exported 205kg of fresh dates in 2014-15. Production is mainly centred in South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. The main harvesting period is between February and April, although it can extend into June.

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## Rationale for the review

The Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (the department) is reviewing the biosecurity import requirements for fresh dates from the Middle East and North Africa region in response to market access requests for fresh dates (with more than 30 per cent moisture content) from Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and more recently, Saudi Arabia.

A regional review is being undertaken covering the Middle East and North Africa region instead of individual country reviews given pest status is similar across the region. For the purpose of this analysis, the region includes Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE and Yemen.

A preliminary pest assessment for fresh dates from the Middle East and North Africa region has shown Australia has risk management measures established for almost all of the potential pests and diseases of concern identified. The risk analysis is therefore being progressed as a review of biosecurity import requirements rather than a biosecurity import risk analysis.

If new information about pests and diseases of fresh dates in this region comes to light as the review progresses then this will be considered.

## Australia's trading obligations

The Department applies rigorous science to assess applications from our trading partners to gain access to the Australian market. As a member of the World Trade Organization, Australia bases its import policies on the same scientific principles our export markets must use when assessing Australian commodities.

## Process for the review

The objective of the review is to ensure that any fresh dates imported into Australia are free from unwanted pests and diseases.

The department's technical specialists are identifying any exotic pests and diseases that might be found on fresh date fruit from the Middle East and North Africa region that are not present in Australia. They are assessing the risk of pests and diseases being brought in on fresh date fruit and will recommend risk management measures if required.

Department staff are liaising with relevant overseas and state/territory agriculture authorities as well as industry representatives to gather stakeholder input to ensure the department has all available scientific information relevant to this review.

Stakeholders are invited to register their interest in the review so they can receive regular updates and contribute to the development of the draft report. Registration is via the department's website at <http://agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/risk-analysis/stakeholder>.

A draft report is now scheduled to be published around September 2017. Stakeholders will then be able to provide comments on the report during a 60 calendar day consultation period. The review is expected to be finalised by the end of 2017. The timeline for finalisation has been extended due to a delay in conducting a site visit to the Middle East to verify harvest and production practices – the next harvesting period is not expected to commence until June 2017.

## Further information

Further information on the review can be found in the Biosecurity Advice and Announcement Information Paper available at <http://agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/risk-analysis/plant/fresh-date-middle-east-north-africa>. The department will share information and answer questions relating to this review at any time during the process. New scientific information will also be considered at any time.

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