



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

INTERIM INSPECTOR GENERAL OF BIOSECURITY

Equine Pre-export Procedures in Singapore

INTERIM INSPECTOR GENERAL OF BIOSECURITY
AUDIT REPORT
July 2010

No: 2009-10/7

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Note:

For the public release of this report personal information will be removed in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1998*.

Summary

The objective of this audit was to observe the operations and procedures in Singapore for pre-export quarantine (PEQ) for horses for export to Australia. The audit focused on the facilities and procedures at the Singapore Turf Club (STC), an Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS)¹ approved PEQ facility and as well, procedures for transporting the horses from the STC to Changi Airport and loading in to the air stalls in preparation for loading onto the aircraft.

The Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity (IIGB) found that the STC facilities and operations are generally of a high standard and comply with AQIS import conditions.

The AQIS import requirements for horses are well developed for appropriate risk management of equine health threats associated with Singapore.

High biosecurity standards apply and are being met throughout the pre-export quarantine, ground transport and aircraft preparation stages. This gives suitable assurance that the Australian import requirements for horses are being met.

Relative to the reported biosecurity statuses of other Asian countries, Singapore could be considered lower risk as a source country for animal and plant health commodities.

Overall, the findings outlined in this report demonstrate a low biosecurity risk with procedures of export of horses from Singapore to Australia and the recommendations are therefore those that consolidate a better practice approach.

Introduction

As part of the Australian Government's response to the 2008 Report of the Equine Influenza Inquiry, inspections of pre-export quarantine facilities in Ireland, Germany, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America were undertaken by the Interim Inspector General of Horse Importation in 2009. The role of the Interim Inspector General of Horse Inspection has since been subsumed into that of the Inspector General of Biosecurity (IIGB) as part of the Australian Government's preliminary response to the Beale Review.

Under ongoing commitments to the Australian Government's response to the 2008 Report of the Equine Influenza Inquiry, the IIGB continues to undertake periodic audits of operations and procedures that are applied to the importation of horses to Australia. This audit was undertaken as part of the IIGB audit work program for 2009-10.

This audit examined the compliance of Singapore's facilities and procedures with Australia's import conditions for live horses.

¹ Note that in July 2009, AQIS was integrated into the new Biosecurity Services Group (BSG) in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. AQIS branding is still used in association with import conditions and procedures for horses. Therefore to save confusion the term 'AQIS' is used in this document.

It is important to note that this report provides the IIGB's advice to AQIS and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry based on observations during this audit. The IIGB does not have the authority to confirm Singapore's compliance or direct Singapore to undertake corrective actions to achieve compliance with Australia's import conditions for horses from Singapore. Any formal notifications can only come from AQIS.

Audit objectives

The objective of this audit was to observe the operations and procedures in Singapore for PEQ for horses for export to Australia. The timing of the audit coincided with the final stage of the PEQ for a consignment of horses being exported to Australia. The audit focused on the facilities and procedures at the STC, an AQIS approved PEQ facility, as well as procedures for transporting the horses from the STC to Changi Airport and loading in to the air stalls in preparation to loading onto the aircraft.

Dr Kevin Dunn, IIGB, conducted the audit in June 2010, when seven horses scheduled for export to Australia were undertaking PEQ at the STC. The audit was undertaken with the kind cooperation of the STC and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) of Singapore.

The IIGB also visited the AVA's Animal and Plant Health Laboratories. This facility was not included in this audit, however, observations from this visit where relevant are included in this report.

Background and context

Horse import conditions

The requirements that must be met to import horses from Singapore to Australia are set by the AQIS and are described in the following documents²:

- Horses (for racing) - Live - Singapore
- Horses (re-importation) - Live - Singapore
- Horses - Live - Singapore.

In summary, all horses intended for import to Australia must undergo a 21 day pre-export quarantine (PEQ) period in a premises approved by AQIS and the Official Veterinarian authorised by the Veterinary Administration of the Government of Singapore. The import conditions outline the physical facilities and operational requirements (including health checks and disease testing) for premises when operating as a PEQ facility.

A separate veterinary certificate for each animal must be provided by the Official Veterinarian of the Government Veterinary Administration.

The horses must be transported to Australia by a route approved by AQIS and once in Australia must undergo post-arrival quarantine (PAQ) in a government animal quarantine station or other approved quarantine station for 14-21 days.

² Available from ICON (Imports Conditions database) accessible from the department's website.

PEQ arrangements in Singapore

Horses undertake PEQ at the STC. The STC is a privately-operated facility however, the relevant government authority, the AVA, has a high level of interaction and oversight of the facility.

The AVA is the competent authority in Singapore for export certification and for approvals of PEQ facilities. It provides laboratory export testing for issuance of export health certificates and permits.

All STC veterinarians treating, testing or examining horses during PEQ are approved by the AVA.

Previous assessment of operations and procedures in Singapore

The STC facilities are generally of a high standard and comply with AQIS import conditions. AQIS last inspected the STC in April 2008 at which time it was recommended that the facility and operations met the requirements for approval as a PEQ. The facility was given full AQIS approval as a PEQ facility on 3 September 2008. The STC is one of five PEQ facilities world-wide that have been issued a full pass by AQIS.

Biosecurity Australia visited the STC in September 2008 to observe activities from the time horses enter into PEQ until arriving in Australia to identify any biosecurity risks and, if required, consequently recommend changes to the import conditions. At that time the facility met Australia's Biosecurity requirements. Overall, Biosecurity Australia has a high level of confidence in the management of this PEQ facility

Fieldwork conducted

Fieldwork was conducted on 23-24 June 2010 at the Singapore Turf Club, 1 Turf Club Avenue, Singapore Racecourse, Singapore. On 25 June 2010, fieldwork was conducted at Changi Airport, Singapore.

As part of the field work the IIGB:

- held discussions with Singapore AVA's veterinary officials and STC official (operators of the PEQ facility) covering the individual aspects of the Australian import requirements for horses
- inspected the facility where the horses in the current consignment were held in PEQ
- inspected the ground transport and airport handling operations for the current consignment of horses at the end of the PEQ period
- examined relevant documentation including:
 - operational procedures manual for the PEQ facility
 - horse health records during the PEQ period
 - identification of horses (horse passports)
 - validation documents regarding vaccination status and health status of premises and country of origin
 - laboratory test results
 - copies of export health certificates for this and recent horse shipments to Australia.

Recommendations and advice

The AQIS import requirements for horses are well developed for appropriate risk management of equine health threats associated with Singapore.

Singapore has sound legislative and organisational frameworks to enable levels of biosecurity risk management in equine health that meet Australian expectations. Supporting these is the Singapore Government's laboratory services, which are modern, well resourced and operate to international standards of testing.

High biosecurity standards apply and are being met throughout the pre-export quarantine, ground transport and aircraft preparation stages. This gives suitable assurance that the Australian import requirements for horses are being met.

The findings during this audit, in conjunction with outcomes from previous audit activities, provide justification for lower audit intensity of pre-export quarantine for horses in Singapore to be applied by Australian authorities in future in comparison to other exporting countries. Further, government biosecurity services in Singapore have attained high international standards. This potentially gives Singapore suitable strategic value as a safe potential source of exports of a range of animal and plant commodities for Australia. Relative to the reported biosecurity statuses of other Asian countries, Singapore could be considered lower risk as a source country for animal and plant health commodities.

Specific findings

Operational management of pre-export quarantine of horses is vested in the STC. The STC is a modern and well-run premises. The biosecurity operations and procedures that are undertaken by the STC veterinary and stables departments and oversighted by the AVA were found to be generally of good standard in all aspects.

The STC has taken initial steps to produce an operational manual for pre-export quarantine for Australia based on HACCP principles. The AVA will assist in this undertaking.

The PEQ facilities are located within the Turf Club site on which approximately 1000 resident horses are also managed. At audit, the potential for conflict of interest to jeopardise biosecurity outcomes for horses intended for export to Australia was examined throughout the pre-export quarantine processes. Singapore Government veterinary oversight of these processes was shown to be suitably effective to obviate potential risks in this area.

The well appointed Animal and Plant Health Laboratories of the AVA perform the export testing with the exception of surra that is done in Australia.

Minor deficiencies were found relating to the performance of nasopharyngeal swabbing for equine influenza testing and to the completion of documented operating procedures.

Operations and procedures associated with the ground transportation and airport handling, including the loading of horses for export from Singapore to Australia were found to be efficiently carried out and sound from a biosecurity viewpoint.

A minor improvement to the export certification process involving attestation of cleaning and disinfection of the aircraft/aircraft fittings associated with the horses by the AVA official at the airport is recommended.

Overall, these findings demonstrate a low biosecurity risk with procedures of export of horses from Singapore to Australia and the recommendations are therefore those that consolidate a better practice approach.

Table of recommendations

Rec #:	Recommendations
1	BSG/AQIS should clarify with the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore the need for nasopharyngeal swabbing (not nasal swabbing as is practised by the authorised veterinarians) of horses for equine influenza testing.
2	It is recommended that BSG/AQIS request an attestation by the attending para-veterinarian of the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore responsible for inspection of the aircraft/aircraft fittings associated with the export horses be included as an attachment to the export health certificates. This situation also applies in some other countries that export horses to Australia.
3	It is recommended that the Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity write to Singapore Turf Club and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) of Singapore providing an overview of the audit findings and advising that AQIS will advise, and be in contact directly, if any formal action is required in response to this audit.

Signed

Dr Kevin Dunn
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