



28/04/2017

Inspector General of Biosecurity Review
GPO Box 657
MASCOT NSW 1460

RE: Submission for the 'Review of the circumstances leading to the 2017 suspension of uncooked prawn imports into Australia and the biosecurity considerations relevant to future trade in uncooked prawns'

The Spencer Gulf and West Coast Prawn Fishermen's Association (SGWCPFA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the review. The SGWCPFA represents 39 licence holders in the Spencer Gulf Prawn fishery and 3 licence holders in the West Coast prawn fishery in South Australia. While the members have been distressed by the recent outbreak of White Spot Disease (WSD) in Queensland, they are prepared to work constructively with the Government, in addition to the importers and food service industry sectors to contribute to developing a solution to the current biosecurity problem.

It should be noted the SGWCPFA supports the sentiment detailed in the Australian Council of Prawn Fishery's submission. The SGWCPFA would like to reinforce the issues raised. This letter has taking into account the terms of reference for this review.

The SGWCPFA's members believe there has been a change in the risks posed by importing green prawns and other crustaceans over the past seven years to warrant a full review of the 2009 Import Risk Assessment (IRA) for the importation of green crustacean product.

The SGWCPFA's members are anxious in the apparent breakdown in Australia's biosecurity system. They have been distressed to follow the failure of the system, which has led to the WSD incursion in prawn farms juxtaposed to the Logan River, Queensland. Of inordinate concern is the subsequent detection of White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV) in wild-catch prawns from the Logan River and the inshore areas of Queensland's Moreton Bay. Also there is incredulity with imported prawn products carrying the WSSV being sold in Australian supermarkets. The recent events provide evidence there is a major failure in either the IRA of importation of green prawn product or there has been a failure in the operations of biosecurity.

The SGWCPFA is aware an IRA for importation of green prawns was developed in 2009 and released for implementation in 2010. The purpose of the IRA was to inform the development of a risk-based biosecurity framework, which would minimise the risk of disease incursions, in particular, WSSV and Yellow Head Virus (YHV) from imported prawns to Australia. It is understood there are other emerging diseases that now need to be considered.

This has not been the first instance of WSSV infected product being detected. It is clear that the controls implemented in response to the IRA were not appropriate for the documented high risk in that they:

1. were functionally insufficient to control the biosecurity risk.
2. were prone to human failure/abuse and not properly implemented at each step equating to a significant biosecurity breach exceeding the Acceptable Level Of Protection (ALOP).

3. did not contain prescribed post-border controls as are practiced for other commodities, and
4. allowed high risk uncooked prawns entry into a disease free environment via more than one pathway for an unknown period of time.

Summary of recommendations

The SGWCPFA supports the ACPF recommendations the current bio-security regime for prawns and other crustaceans be reviewed as a matter of urgency. The process should include a review of (i) altered risks in currently identified pathways, (ii) the implementation of the bio-security framework, and (iii) importation protocols. Consideration should cover but not be limited to:

1. prawn and crustacean diseases that have emerged since 2009 and methods to proactively include emerging diseases in importation protocols, rather than responding retrospectively.
2. the increase in both the production of farmed prawns from countries with WSSV and international trade of farmed prawns from countries with WSSV increasing Australia's disease exposure.
3. documented changes in consumer behaviour in purchasing and using green imported prawns (eg for bait) increasing the risk of disease along pathways previously underrated.
4. the definition of a 'highly processed prawn' given the evidence that such processing does not deactivate disease, provides a loophole to avoid border testing, and does not prevent product diversion from this pathway to the aquatic environment.
5. pre-border surveillance measures to ensure the sanitary status of the exporting country given the importance of country of origin in biosecurity measures.
6. proficiency test of laboratories used to assess the status of import products to ensure a consistent methodology is being undertaken to reduce risks of variability in testing techniques.
7. post-border biosecurity control measures to strengthen disincentives for product substitution and mislabelling that place greater onus on importing entities to adhere to biosecurity regulations. This is in light that the majority of product sold in retail stores is not labelled with "human consumption only, not to be used as bait" as is required with imported product labelling.
8. recognition that, based on 100% negative tests results for WSSV and YHV (or any emerging diseases) in NATA-approved laboratories, Australian prawns processed overseas and reimported for sale on the Australian domestic market are a **low-risk** disease pathway, but must be subject to the same level of biosecurity scrutiny as other prawn imports to ensure there is no product substitution or cross-contamination risks.
9. options to improve on-farm bio-security to mitigate disease risks to wild-catch crustacean populations.

10. The need for an agreed, transparent process and timeline for amending the biosecurity protocols and/or the IRA if and when risk ratings change and/or new risks emerge.

Outputs from the review must result in amendments to the current biosecurity regime and implementation protocols for importation of prawns that:

1. are risk-management based, robust, testable and enforceable;
2. are consistent with WTO principles and
3. protect Australia's waterways, fisheries and prawn farms from risk of exotic disease incursions as far as practical.

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE 1 & 2

- 1) **The effectiveness of biosecurity controls and their implementation for managing the biosecurity risks of importation of uncooked prawns and prawn meat into Australia, and**
- 2) **The effectiveness of post-entry surveillance measures and 'end use' import conditions for uncooked prawns and prawn meat into Australia**

The management of pre-border and border biosecurity risks associated with the importation of uncooked prawns into Australia is the responsibility of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (the Department). The risks posed by importing green prawns and other crustaceans are driven by the activities of the import sector.

Since implementation of the IRA for uncooked prawn imports the Department has recorded a number of infringements, including:

1. inadvertent release by the Department of a consignment of prawns, which tested positive to WSSV. This release was the subject of a review (Interim Inspector General of Biosecurity, 2010) and a number of recommendations were made to strengthen biosecurity.
2. a number of consignments of uncooked prawns which were improperly or inadequately marinated and therefore were reassigned to be either tested, cooked, re-exported or destroyed.
3. in late December 2016, the Department found high levels of retail availability of WSSV-infected prawns, and evidence that WSSV-infected prawns were being used as bait by recreational fishers on the Logan River.
4. the Director of Biosecurity suspended the importation of uncooked prawns, including Australian wild caught prawns processed offshore and reimported for sale on the domestic market, for a period of six months from 6 January 2017. Marinated prawns were also removed from the category of 'highly processed' prawns, which meant that their importation was also suspended.
5. the failure in the biosecurity regime to prevent WSSV entering Australia is further demonstrated by advice to ACPF from the DAWR Prawn Liaison Officer on 3rd March which stated **38 of 68** batches tested under the enhanced biosecurity regime were refused release due to detection of WSSV.

The 2016 WSD/WSSV outbreak indicates the IRA associated operations and controls (including the overall bio-security regime developed in response to the 2009 IRA) are not appropriate for the documented high risk.

The risks identified in the development of the IRA have altered significantly since 2009. Since 2008/09 imported prawn product almost doubled. New risks are driven by the increased prawn

aquaculture production from countries with WSSV and increased international trade of aquaculture prawns from those countries. The variation in the value of green prawn product for human consumption, relative to other bait products, has contributed to a change in the risk pathways.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest the agreed risk management strategies have not been implemented as intended. Clearly, this had led to a breakdown in the robustness of the prawn importation bio-security regime which has resulted in uncooked prawn biosecurity breaches. These events are the result of a combination of process, policy and resourcing weaknesses that need to be addressed.

After assessing risks of introducing high risk diseases in 2009, the IRA proposed each measure, or a combination of measures, that were deemed to reduce the overall risk of introducing the exotic disease to 'very low' or lower. The IRA recommendations agreed by the Panel (referred to in Biosecurity Australia Advice 2010/11 Prawns and Prawn Imports) were believed to have addressed the risks. The likely effectiveness of those measures hinged on whether they would be properly implemented and would deliver the desired effect.

The advice from the Landos (2017)¹ report is the current IRA does not achieve an ALOP that is acceptable for animal and plant products with lesser or comparable viral or fungal risks associated with the commodities. Landos states that the risk of disease introduction in other animal products (pork and chicken) was deemed so high that importation protocols are much more stringent preventing potentially infected products into disease introduction pathways.

In hindsight, it is clear the controls implemented in response to the IRA do not appear to be appropriate for the documented high risk in that they;

1. were functionally insufficient to control the biosecurity risk;
2. were prone to human failure/abuse and not properly implemented at each step equating to a significant biosecurity breach exceeding the ALOP;
3. did not contain prescribed post-border controls as are practiced for other commodities, and
4. allowed high risk uncooked prawns entry into a disease free environment via more than one pathway for an unknown period of time.

While imported green prawn product is required to be labeled "not to be used as bait" or "human consumption only", there is a gap in the process where defrosted product is sold through deli departments in supermarkets. There are generally no warnings associated with the sale of this product in the described situation. This reduces the effectiveness of the measure put in place to reduce the risk posed by potentially diseased product. The labeling requirement becomes effectively redundant, unless it was to be required at all points and levels of retail sales.

RESPONSE TO TERM OF REFERENCE 3

3) Areas for improvement in the biosecurity risk management framework and its implementation for future trade in prawns and related seafood

Noting the IRA documented evidence of similar disease introduction pathway into Darwin in 2000 as has occurred into the Logan River in 2016, Biosecurity Australia cannot simply allow 'more of the same' to continue with an undertaking to "do better next time".

¹ Landos (2017) "Assessing compliance and efficacy of import conditions for uncooked prawn in relation to White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV)" for Australian Prawn Farmers Association, FRDC project 2016/066 (2017)

Biosecurity Australia **must** redress the failure of the current biosecurity system to protect Australia from disease and develop a more robust approach to future bio-security that will protect Australian waterways, fisheries and farms from disease incursions. There are no second chances.

The SGWCPFA supports the ACPF's recommendations the current bio-security regime for prawns and crustacea is reviewed as a matter of urgency. This process should include a review of (i) altered risks in currently identified pathways; (ii) the implementation of the bio-security framework; and (iii) importation protocols. Consideration should cover but not be limited to:

1. prawn and crustacean diseases that have emerged since 2009 and methods to proactively include emerging diseases in importation protocols rather than responding retrospectively.
2. the increase in both the production of farmed prawns from countries with WSSV and international trade of farmed prawns from countries with WSSV increasing Australia's disease exposure.
3. changing consumer behaviours when purchasing and using green imported prawns (eg for bait) increasing the risk of disease along pathways previously underrated.
4. the definition of a 'highly processed prawn' given the evidence that such processing does not deactivate disease, provides a loophole to avoid border testing, and does not prevent product diversion from this pathway to the aquatic environment.
5. pre-border surveillance measures to ensure the sanitary status of the exporting country given the importance of country of origin in biosecurity measures.
6. proficiency test of the laboratories (on shore and off shore) used to assess the status of import products to ensure a consistent methodology is being undertaken to reduce risks.
7. post-border biosecurity control measures to strengthen disincentives for product substitution and mislabelling that place greater onus on importing entities to adhere to biosecurity regulations.
8. recognition that, based on 100% of negative tests results for WSSV and YHV in NATA-approved laboratories, Australian prawns processed overseas and reimported for sale on the Australian domestic market are a low-risk disease pathway but must be subject to the same level of biosecurity scrutiny as other prawn imports to ensure there are no product substitution or cross-contamination risks.
9. options to improve on-farm bio-security to mitigate disease risks to wild-catch crustacean populations.
10. the need for an agreed process and timeline for amending the biosecurity protocols and/or the IRA if and when risk ratings change and/or new risks emerge.

Outputs from the review must result in amendments to the current biosecurity regime and implementation protocols for importation of prawns that are risk-management based, robust and enforceable, consistent with WTO principles and protect Australia's waterways, fisheries and prawn farms from exotic disease incursion as far as practical.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Simon Clark
Executive Officer