

AQIS Where to From Here?

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The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) is a division of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. AQIS employs over 3250 people in a range of inspection, auditing, verification and management roles in more than 90 locations across the country. AQIS's total budget of \$370 million annually is also 55% cost recovered from industry – that is, arrangements where the costs of the services provided by AQIS are recovered from the users of those services.

AQIS provides quarantine inspection of goods and people arriving in Australia, and export certification for Australian goods being exported to other markets. AQIS undertakes quarantine clearance of more than 11 million air passengers and almost 100,000 sea passengers each year, 1.6 million sea cargo containers, 380,000 air cargo containers and 146 million mail items. AQIS also plays a pivotal role in supporting Australia's \$27.7 billion agricultural export trade, registering almost 3000 establishments for exports and issuing over 500,000 permits and certificates annually.

Increasing globalisation, changing trade composition and, growing volumes of trade mean the environment in which AQIS operates is dynamic. To this end, AQIS has put in place a Strategic Planning Framework to develop and implement systems necessary for the future. AQIS has taken a joint approach to the Framework with the Quarantine and Exports Advisory Committee, which helps to reflect the views of industry and the wider business community are incorporated into future plans.

A scan of AQIS's operating environment reveals a number of challenges which the organisation must meet in coming years.

- **Managing risk**: Some of the most significant risks which will need to be addressed include the rapidly increasing pace of change in all aspects of the import and export supply chains. In addition to this, there are also significant risks posed by the ever changing animal and human health status of other countries, driven by a range factors including climate change.
- **Shared Responsibility**: Since 1996 the shared responsibility between AQIS, industry and the community has been recognised as an essential tool for maintaining Australia's quarantine integrity. For this arrangement to continue, AQIS must continue to exchange relevant information with its stakeholders, so that risks can be managed either nationally or internationally in a planned manner.
- **Service Delivery**: Changes in consumer demands will require AQIS to modify the way it provides its services. An additional service delivery challenge will be to balance these changing demands with new and emerging regulatory requirements and decision making processes, to make sure stakeholder requirements are met without compromising quarantine integrity.
- **Workforce**: The increasingly tight labour market means AQIS needs to take an innovative approach to attracting new staff. The ongoing needs of existing staff also need to be satisfied to ensure accumulated corporate knowledge is not lost to the organisation. Strategies to achieve these goals include increasing workplace flexibility and part time working arrangements.
- **Technology**: The rapid pace of technological change requires AQIS to continually review and evaluate the performance of its existing online, electronic and voiced based systems. The provision of electronic certification

by AQIS, and its increasing use by similar agencies offshore, may see electronic systems assume an even greater importance to the organisation. Adopting a whole of government approach between different government agencies also promises to have significant benefits for AQIS and stakeholders, in terms of greater ease of use and the more efficient utilisation of technology resources.

The relationship between AQIS and FIFA represents a solution to many of the challenges mentioned above. Through closer collaboration and improved risk management, the risks posed by the bulk fertiliser importation process have been significantly reduced. The bulk import protocols introduced in 2004 have been very successful to date. Both organisations are continuing to work together to improve the existing protocols so that they deliver the most efficient and least burdensome result for industry, without compromising quarantine integrity. AQIS and FIFA are also looking further afield in an effort to deliver even greater benefits for both parties, which are currently taking shape in the form of new inspection protocols for containerised fertiliser shipments. Modeled on the bulk system, these should extend the benefits to an even larger proportion of Australia's fertiliser import trade.