

The New Containerised Fertiliser Importation and Inspection Protocols

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The close working relationship between the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and the Fertilizer Industry Federation of Australia (FIFA) is a good example of the shared responsibility which both government and industry have for protecting Australia's favourable quarantine status.

The successful implementation of the existing bulk fertilizer import protocol recognises the significant achievement by industry in reducing risk and incidences of product contamination by embracing partnerships with its suppliers through offshore quality controls.

Building on this success, FIFA approached AQIS on behalf of the containerised fertiliser import industry with a view to expanding the systems management approach used for bulk imports to a wider variety of import types. Both organisations commenced work on expanding the protocol to cover containerised imports in early 2006. The project built directly on knowledge about risk assessment and classification gained through the development of the bulk import protocol. This included:

- Identification of all potential sources of contamination in the manufacture and import pathway (covering the point of manufacture, port, vessel and voyage for each consignment),
- Development of contamination management strategies that would address the potential sources of contamination, and
- The development of a toolkit for industry to use, with a view to providing AQIS with a level of assurance that contamination has been managed.

The end result of the project's work has been the development of a protocol which is very similar in approach to the existing one applying to bulk fertilizer. The containerised protocol contains a three level classification system.

Level 3:

- Consignments will be classified at Level 3 if there is insufficient evidence of contamination control for one or more stages of the recognised supply chain. This might include where the manufacturer/load port has not been AQIS audited, or where the vessel has carried actionable cargo within the last six voyages.
- In these cases, consignments will be sent for a full unpack at a Quarantine Approved Premises (QAP) and all fertilizer will be inspected by AQIS officers. The empty containers will also be inspected after unloading.

Level 2

- For a consignment to be recognised as Level 2, at least some evidence of contamination control is required for all stages of the recognised supply chain. Manufacturers and load ports wishing to be recognised as part of the Level 2 category must undergo a desk audit by AQIS, which is used to confirm that the processes in place are potentially sufficient to ensure the quarantine integrity of the product. To maintain a level 2 rating, manufacturer/load ports must undergo an AQIS audit every three years.

- In terms of inspection requirements for level 2 consignments, documents such as manufacturer declarations are first checked to verify compliance with import permit conditions. The containers are then moved to a QAP for unpacking and a proportion of the consignment will undergo inspection by AQIS officers

Level 1

- For a consignment to be classified as a Level 1, the full suite of recognised contamination management strategies must be in place across the supply chain from the point of manufacture through to the vessel's voyage. The manufacturer or load port of the consignment must be desk audited and site audited by AQIS, and a document trail must exist which can be used to confirm that proper procedures and practices have been followed. The manufacturer or load port must also be audited annually by a third party, in order to confirm that the manufacturing processes, transport operations, storage facilities and the wharf operations have not changed, or that any changes do not impact on the ongoing quarantine integrity of the product.
- With regard to inspection processes and requirements, after documentation for Level 1 consignments is checked by AQIS, they are moved to a QAP for unpacking, where less intensive or "surveillance" inspections are undertaken by AQIS officers.