

PAEC Inquiry into the 2017-18 Budget Estimates – Additional information in response to questions asked during the hearing

Minister Pulford, Agriculture, Thursday 1 June 2017

Excerpt 1 (Taken from Page 16 of the Agriculture portfolio hearing)

Ms PATTEN --- Given that we will no longer be catching bait or sardines in Port Phillip Bay, we will be required to import our bait, so I am wondering what provisions you have put in place to ensure that the bait is disease-free and we will not see outbreaks like we have seen in other jurisdictions of fish pests and fish infections.

Further information provided in response to Excerpt 1

Victoria has fantastic fisheries that are the envy of Australia, including our vibrant bait Fisheries.

With regard to pilchards, the bait fisher operating in Port Phillip Bay is continuing to operate and produce over 160ton's of Pilchards for Victorian fishers. This may continue up until 2022. There is also a Victorian based fisher operating from Lakes Entrance harvesting over 1,000 tons a year of pilchards which will be ongoing.

With regard to bait or berley that is currently imported or may be imported in the future, the use of berley that contains mammal blood or offal is prohibited in Victoria. Live noxious fish (including carp and goldfish), fish ova or any form of uncooked trout or salmon are also not permitted to be used as bait in Victoria.

A risk assessment was undertaken relating to the transmission of disease through bait and berley movements within Australia as a Fisheries Research and Development Corporation project in 2009. This research identified that there were some risks associated with the domestic movement of bait and berley. To address this risk National Bait Translocation Policy Guidelines were developed and finalised in May 2015.

If an emergency animal disease occurs interstate, Victoria undertakes a risk assessment and evaluates the measures imposed by the affected state or territory to control and prevent the spread of disease. If the Victorian Government is not satisfied with the measures being imposed, movement restrictions can be imposed quickly for any risk commodities entering Victoria.

Restrictions can be also applied if an emergency animal disease is detected in Victoria. An example of this is the temporary Fisheries Notice that was issued during the abalone viral ganglioneuritis incident in 2006, which prohibited the use of abalone viscera as fish bait.

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) plays a crucial role in managing at – border disease risks. The recent white spot disease outbreak in prawns in Queensland highlights the need for strict controls to be implemented across all parts of the import chain. Following a finding of the virus causing white spot disease in imported raw prawns destined for human consumption two approaches were taken:

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1. The banning of imported uncooked prawns under variation of the *Biosecurity (Suspended goods – uncooked prawns) Determination 2017*, under subsection 182(5) of the Commonwealth *Biosecurity Act 2015*.
2. A national and local campaign to educate the public to not use prawns intended for human consumption as bait. The use of human 'eating' prawns for bait has been widely undertaken due to the price differential between cheaper 'eating' prawns from major supermarket chains and the niche product of bait prawns. Soon after declaring the recent outbreak of white spot disease in farmed prawns in Queensland, effective restrictions on the movement of potentially infected bait were imposed in the affected area. This has meant that no bait prawns from Queensland have entered the interjurisdictional bait market since very early in the outbreak. A qualitative risk assessment conducted within the CVO Unit provided further comfort that this potential route of transmission of the highly pathogenic virus to Victoria was removed.

From July 6, 2017 the import suspension on uncooked prawns lapsed. New, more stringent biosecurity conditions required for the importation of prawns have been established including:

- Consolidating all uncooked, marinated and Australian prawns processed overseas into one class 'uncooked' prawns.
- Prawns sourced from a country/zone/compartiment recognised to be disease – free for diseases of concern.
- Processed, inspected and graded in an approved premise in the exporting country
- Free of visible signs of infected disease.
- Packaging marked with the words 'for human consumption only'.
- Product from each batch found post – processing to be free of specified diseases based on a sampling and testing method recognised by the OIE for demonstrating absence from specified diseases.
- Post arrival, each batch is subject to seals - intact inspection for white spot disease at an approved screening laboratory.

The recent outbreak of white spot disease in Queensland has led to a range of communication materials with clear bait biosecurity messages being developed and broadcast to recreational fishers through the appropriate channels.

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Excerpt 2 (Taken from Page 16 of the Agriculture portfolio hearing)

Ms PATTEN --- I just want to turn quickly to the demand for organic farm produce. Certainly we are all seeing significant growth in that area. The licensing for organic farm produce is generally the stumbling or the delay point for many farmers. Has the government made moves to streamline some of the organic farming licensing in Victoria? I note some of your measures are about streamlining licensing.

Further information provided in response to Excerpt 2

The Victorian Government does not licence organic farms or regulate organic certification, therefore is not directly considering streamlining licencing.

Organic certification is an industry-led arrangement. There are a range of Australian and international standards for organic farming and products. There are also multiple certifying bodies. Further information on certifying bodies can be found at the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources website: agriculture.gov.au/about/contactus/phone/aco

Organic production is a small but growing segment of Australia's agricultural production. 23 per cent of Australia's certified organic businesses are located in Victoria.