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GPA demands greater biosecurity action on flower imports

Grain Producers Australia is concerned that the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) is using trade sensitivity as an excuse to not provide transparent information regarding biosecurity non-compliance within Part 2 of their Pest Risk Analysis report.

GPA Deputy Chairman, Mr Barry Large said “The lack of transparency is of concern. The data contained in Part 2 has been de-identified so scrutiny of continued non-compliance from importing countries is difficult. While GPA understands the Department is trying to show sensitivity with regards trade negotiations, continued non-compliance from the same countries is unacceptable.”

“We are talking about a non-essential, recreational product being imported into Australia that consistently fails to meet our biosecurity requirements, putting our multi-billion-dollar agricultural sectors and environment at risk from imported pests. It just doesn’t make sense”, said Mr Large.

“When it comes to biosecurity we all know it is far cheaper to stop things at the border. When assessing the Australian acceptable ‘appropriate levels of protection (ALOP)’ the 25 per cent average compliance levels simply don’t cut it and a number of countries can’t even hit that target.”

The grains sector is the largest individual levy paying member of Plant Health Australia. GPA considers it no longer acceptable to pay the largest proportion of managing biosecurity incidences caused by the importation of products into our country while the importers get off with putting in no contribution at all.

Mr Large said, “This report again highlights the need for a container levy to ensure importers are contributing towards the costs of supporting our biosecurity activities. Containers are a major vector for serious pests coming into Australia. It is no longer acceptable the industries importing products are not funding biosecurity activities.”

Australian plant industries, particularly farmers contribute substantial biosecurity levies. “We also cover the costs imposed on Australian industries by the Department through the fully cost recovered export certification system”, said Mr Large.

The report clearly illustrates the incidence of pest interceptions on imported flowers is still worryingly high. The report contains updated analysis of volumes of imports, countries of origin and detection data. However, due to concerns that countries of origin may take offence at perceived criticism of their inability to adequately meet Australian biosecurity requirements, the Department has chosen to de-identify the country by country data.

Mr Large said “All data regarding interceptions and non-compliance should be a matter of public record and clearly identified within the Part 2 report. It is not acceptable that companies importing cut flowers and foliage from higher risk countries are not being held accountable for the risks and substantial potential costs they are imposing on Australian plant industries and broader agriculture.

“It is unacceptable not to include complete and transparent analysis of the interception and compliance data within the report. Importers should be held accountable and should be paying for all costs incurred in the surveillance, quarantine, management and monitoring of the biosecurity measures.

A lack of transparency inhibits the ability for measures to address the need for increased biosecurity surveillance activities, increased cost recovered biosecurity management activities at import points, increased surveillance of supply chains and distribution of imported flowers and implementation of a compulsory country of origin labelling system to enable consumer choice.

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