

MediaRelease

New Zealand
PORK

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Independent Panel tells MAF to start again on pork import standard

An independent expert panel has given twenty-nine recommendations for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) to correct deficiencies in both the process and conclusions drawn during its development of provisional import health standards for pig meat and pig meat products from EU, Canada, USA, and Sonora State of Mexico.

“This is vindication for the pork industry” says Sam Mclvor CEO of New Zealand Pork. “We have been continually raising our concerns around exotic disease risks with MAF over a four year process and have had to spend over \$600,000 of pig farmers’ hard earned money to get to this point”

The panel’s report raises serious concerns about; process, transparency, methodology, definitions, evidence, consistency, treatment of uncertainty, and use of independent experts by MAF. “The panel members appointed by MAF were all highly respected internationally in their fields, but carefully selected for their independence” says Mclvor. “The contents in the report leaves the reader in no doubt that MAF has considerable work to do before it will be in a position to release revised import health standards and in fact one of the recommendations is that MAF needs to start again by revising its import risk assessment.”

“From a pork industry perspective we just want the right answer. Our farmers have been through one exotic disease outbreak and they certainly don’t deserve to have another one”. Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) is the main concern. “It’s the world’s No1 pig disease and its effects are devastating to pigs and equally devastating to the staff who have to care for sick and dying pigs. Critics have said that the pork industry has been focused on stopping pork imports as some sort of trade protection. The panel’s report shows that criticism is way off the mark and that we have raised legitimate issues and acted with integrity throughout this four year long process”, says Mclvor.

The report also notes that MAF needs to improve its working relationship with industry. “This is something we’ve been striving for right through this process”, says Mclvor. “We’re hopeful that this report provides a clear foundation and direction on how this could be done”. MAF has invited key stakeholders to meet on Friday for an update. “We’re looking forward to discussing how we can work together to see these 29 recommendations implemented.”

Ends

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Background Information

Import Health Standards and Import Risk Analysis:

Importation of meat into New Zealand requires a careful assessment of disease and other risks involved and how these can be managed. Guidelines are provided by the World Health Organisation Sanitary and Phytosanitary agreement (WTO SPS) for establishing international trading standards.

An IRA (Import risk analysis) is the first step in the process of developing an IHS (import health standard), which is the document issued under section 22 of the Biosecurity Act specifying the requirements to be met for the effective management of risk associated with the importation of risk goods before they can be imported or given a Biosecurity clearance. The IRA is the formal analysis of risk and is thus the analysis on which an IHS is based.

An IRA involves the following steps:

- Hazard analysis
- Risk assessment
- Risk management

Porcine Reproductive & Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS)

PRRS (porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome) is an RNA virus, and the original virus (which appeared without explanation in the 1980s) has subsequently mutated into numerous different strains. It is highly infectious and has spread rapidly throughout pork producing countries, with very few countries, including New Zealand and Australia, now being free of it. PRRS is referred to as the Number One enemy of pork producers internationally, given its very significant on-farm impact in relation to both the breeding herd and the growing herd. For example, during the acute phase, piglet mortality pre-weaning can peak at 70 per cent, and another 12-15 per cent will die post weaning. Vaccination is of limited value given the wide range of strains already identified and continuing to evolve.

The Independent Review Panel:

In 2008, an amendment to the Biosecurity Act enabled the establishment of an independent review panel to review whether MAF had given sufficient regard to the scientific evidence in developing import health standards, where MAF accepted a request from any persons consulted. This process is the only step in the whole import health standard development process where there is any independent scrutiny of MAF's process and analysis. The independent review on the pig meat standards is the first review conducted under this recently introduced amendment.

Link to the independent panel report:

<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/files/ihs/provisional/panel-report-pig-ihs-0310.pdf>