PROPOSED CHANGES TO IMPORT HEALTH STANDARD BNZ-COFP-IMPRT: COCO PEAT AND COIR FIBRE PRODUCTS

The import health standard (IHS) for Coco Peat and Coir Fibre Products was issued on 15 August 2008. A date was listed for a general review of the IHS before 31 August 2009 and for the removal of the registered glasshouse scheme by 31 July 2009. A proposed amendment to the standard is now available for public consultation.

BACKGROUND

There are two major pathways for coco peat products – nursery and hydroponic. For the nursery pathway, which includes products intended for retail sale, the existing IHS includes the requirement for a government sampled grow test in the exporting country and a visual inspection on arrival in NZ. While this has been possible to some extent, there have been a few implementation delays with sampling for grow-out tests in the main source country, Sri Lanka. These delays are being overcome.

However, importers have expressed concerns about the waiting time for grow out test results, preferring to have the material sampled and shipped ahead of results with a basic phytosanitary certificate (first part of the additional declaration only) and held on arrival pending the results. This arrangement involves holding and linking of paperwork, and an understanding by the importer that there is still the risk of rejection of a consignment.

A further complication with the current IHS is that MAFBNZ has been unable to arrange for grow out tests in other countries e.g. India. Grow out testing of all material in NZ on arrival is not possible because facilities are limited. A proposed option will allow for some grow out tests in NZ where this is not possible in exporting countries. A phytosanitary certificate will still be required which includes inspection for pests and contaminants.

Under the hydroponic use pathway, the current import health standard allows for importing into MAFBNZ-registered glasshouses without inspection on arrival. Preliminary results after 3 months from an implanted seed trial in glasshouse use show a decline in seed viability, with some variability between species in the trial. Furthermore, MAFBNZ is aware that there have been no observances of germination of exotic weeds from used material from glasshouses since material has been used in NZ. A decision has been made that glasshouse hydroponic material can be given a biosecurity clearance if records show it has been used as intended for a minimum of nine months. Continuance of the glasshouse registration scheme is now included as an option for consultation.

MAFBNZ still encourages suppliers to investigate the incorporation of a seed devitalising technique into their factories to achieve the cleanest product.

PROPOSED CHANGES

The options outlined in the revised IHS maintain the existing requirements with the exception of the following changes:

1. The glasshouse registration scheme (Option A) will be continued. A phytosanitary certificate will be required, but no grow out tests and inspection on arrival will be necessary. MAFBNZ are satisfied that products on this pathway are considered to be of low biosecurity risk.
Although the glasshouse scheme was introduced as a temporary measure, the option has proven to be viable for importers. The requirement for a grow out test for products intended for glasshouse use was included in the current IHS in the likely event that the scheme was removed. The justification for continuing with this option is to enable glasshouse hydroponic growers to order material with little uncertainty about delivery times, while also ensuring that a level of post-entry control was maintained to satisfy any biosecurity concerns. Growers will be required to identify products according to the date when the product was first used or where material is still in the first nine months of use. The option also reduces the volume of material that would otherwise require grow out testing under the alternative options.

2. The option for an offshore grow out test (Option D) is still available from Sri Lanka and potentially other exporting countries. If desired, material can be shipped ahead of the grow out test result. A phytosanitary certificate is required and grow out test results must be referenced to the phytosanitary certificate. Under this proposed option, as with Option E, no inspection on arrival will be required. No inspection on arrival is proposed because there is considered to be minimal benefit from these inspections given the resource required. Inspections of consignments on arrival since the commencement of the current import health standard in August 2008 have not identified any regulated seed or other contaminants. MAFBNZ is also confident that the mandatory inspection undertaken prior to export is operating satisfactorily and is valuable in identifying any contaminants.

3. Inclusion of an additional option to allow for grow out tests on arrival (Option E) for material from countries other than Sri Lanka. A phytosanitary certificate is required. On arrival consignments will be directed to transitional facilities to be sampled by a MAFBNZ inspector and held pending results from the grow out test. As for Option D, no inspection on arrival is required, but if anything is detected during the sampling process, actions will be taken. Interceptions of other pests are considered unlikely, based on no reports since importation began and the nature of preparation of the material. The importer will be responsible for all costs associated with the sampling and grow out test on arrival, which include sampling by a MAFBNZ officer, a grow out test cost of $150, and costs associated with delivery of the sample to the grow out test provider. All technical information and results associated with the grow out testing will be held on file by MAFBNZ.

PENALTIES FOR INTERCEPTIONS OF CONTAMINANTS

Under the proposed amendment, the IHS will state that there will be penalties if seedlings are found from grow out tests or there are post border reports of exotic weeds. If there are multiple interception or post-border reports of seedlings from a particular importer or supplier, all permits related to the importer or supplier will be revoked.