

AQIS REQUIREMENTS for Offshore Pre-clearance Inspection of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

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1. INTRODUCTION

Preclearance quarantine inspection of fresh produce has for several years been an accepted import option for certain products imported into Australia. One of the main criteria in a preclearance arrangement is the emphasis on quality systems, either undertaken by the overseas certifying body or a specific industry body. The quality systems required to be in place in preclearance arrangements must provide Australia with a level of confidence that all its quarantine concerns have been adequately addressed. Direct (end point) inspection of product by the certifying authority, prior to AQIS preclearance inspection, is also an option where quality systems are not in place.

Preclearance (or off-shore) inspection is consistent with Australia's quarantine policy of maintaining pest and disease risks off shore. Exporters benefit from a more efficient use of AQIS resources than would be achieved by on-arrival inspection. The exporting industry benefits further in that product that does not meet Australia's quarantine requirements can be removed during the early stages of the export process rather than at a later stage after much cost has been added to the product.

AQIS expects the industry requesting quarantine preclearance to take a responsible and measurable form of process control (homogeneity) to meet with the quarantine requirements of that product for Australia. Systems are then designed to ensure integrity of produce during all stages of storage, transportation, (treatments if necessary) loading and certification in accordance with AQIS requirements.

AQIS requires the overseas export industry and certification authority to perform functions which will enable homogeneity to be built into the lots that AQIS are required to preclear, so that random sampling of the larger lots have some meaningful statistical significance.

2. SCOPE

This document is limited to the phytosanitary (preclearance) inspection of fresh fruits and vegetables destined for import into Australia in countries where appropriate process controls are in place that ensure Australia's quarantine requirements are met.

3. DEFINITIONS

AQIS:	Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
HOMOGENEOUS:	An identifiable lot of produce which has been produced in accordance with one or more pathways which are designed to ensure uniformity relating to levels of pest and disease infestation/infection.
PRECLEARANCE:	An AQIS quarantine inspection arrangement performed in the country of origin prior to export, which is equivalent in all intents and purposes to the quarantine inspection performed on goods on arrival in Australia.
LOT:	A defined quantity of homogeneous product presented for AQIS preclearance inspection at one place at one time. An inspection lot may consist of product from 1 or more growers.
NATIONAL PLANT PROTECTION ORGANISATION (NPPO)	
	The government body responsible for certifying compliance with Australia's plant health (quarantine) requirements.
QUALITY SYSTEM:	All of the defined, and documented, responsibilities and procedures (process control) that are necessary to ensure homogeneity of finished product.
CERTIFIED:	Product that has been inspected for phytosanitary purposes and declared as meeting Australia's import requirements by NPPO in the exporting country.
CERTIFIABLE:	Product that has been produced under a quality system which is subject to mandatory and regular monitoring (auditing) by the NPPO and for which the NPPO is able to provide assurance that the product meets Australia's import requirements.

4. PESTS AND DISEASES

- 4.1 The exporting country NPPO must provide to AQIS complete lists of all pests and diseases associated with each specific type of product for which preclearance is requested, together with details of pest management practises for pests of economic or quarantine significance.
- 4.2 Product will only be considered for preclearance to Australia once an Import Risk Analysis has been undertaken and AQIS is satisfied that appropriate pest and disease management practices are in place in the exporting country to address Australia's quarantine concerns.
- 4.3 Should pests other than those listed be found during preclearance inspections (or during random product monitoring on arrival in Australia), such pests will be deemed quarantinable until a full identification is provided to AQIS to enable the pest to be categorised according to its quarantine status.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities and duties of key personnel (industry and NPPO) involved in the preclearance of produce for Australia must be defined and documented. This specifically relates to all areas or duties that impact on the phytosanitary status of precleared product.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS

- 6.1 All requests for provision of an AQIS preclearance officer must be made through the NPPO, and must be received by AQIS at least 1 month prior to the required commencement of inspection duties.
- 6.2 The terms and conditions of each preclearance arrangement will be agreed in writing between AQIS and the exporting country NPPO prior to the commencement of each export season, and will be subject to annual review.
- 6.3 All costs associated with the provision of AQIS preclearance services will be borne by the exporting country as defined in the agreed terms and conditions.

7. HOMOGENEITY OF PRODUCE

- 7.1 The exporting country must have a documented system (or systems) in place that provides assurance that produce destined for Australia is produced in the exporting country and is homogenous at the time of the AQIS preclearance inspection.
- 7.2 Appropriate means of monitoring homogeneity requirements must be defined and regular monitoring checks documented and retained for perusal by preclearance officers if required.
- 7.3 The documented system must provide for traceback of product to individual growers.
- 7.4 The complete documented systems (ie workplans and procedures) and monitoring process must be submitted to AQIS for approval prior to the commencement of any preclearance arrangement.
- 7.5 The NPPO must define arrangements and time frames for reporting all amendments to the documented systems to AQIS.

8. PRODUCT IDENTIFICATION

The documented workplans or procedures must define how product requiring AQIS preclearance inspection, and any product which has passed AQIS preclearance inspection, will be identified at all times throughout the entire export process.

9. PRODUCT SEGREGATION

The documented workplans or procedures must define how packed product requiring AQIS preclearance inspection will be kept segregated from product destined for other countries or domestic sale and unpacked product. The degree of segregation will be dependent upon the types (and quarantine status) of insects and diseases prevalent in the exporting country, and must ensure that product cannot be cross infested.

10. PEST EXCLUSION

The documented workplans or procedures must specify the means by which all quarantine pests and diseases are excluded from packed product destined for Australia. Workplans and procedures must designate responsibilities of transporters and freight forwarders to exclude reinfestation of passed products.

11. INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS

11.1 AQIS's minimum requirements for conducting preclearance inspections are:

- Inspection bench - white topped (minimum 2 x 1.2 metres)
- Minimum of 600 lux lighting directly over the work area
- Maggie lamp and power source
- Inspection area to be away from any heavy traffic areas
- The inspection area to be kept clean and free from other material or equipment
- Access to photocopy facilities
- Any other equipment necessary for the detection of quarantine pests

11.2 The documented workplans or procedures must specify how a consignment is to be defined (identified) and what constitutes product certified or certifiable for AQIS preclearance inspection.

11.3 The sample size for AQIS preclearance inspection will be agreed between the exporting country NPPO and AQIS.

11.4 The sample size for AQIS preclearance inspection will reflect the level of industry inspection defined in the quality system and/or the level of inspection undertaken by the NPPO in certifying the product fit for AQIS preclearance inspection.

11.5 The method of inspection undertaken by industry or NPPO must be appropriate to address the level of quarantine risk of the pests/diseases associated with the product, and must be capable of detecting all stages of infestation. Preclearance inspection methods will be determined by AQIS, but will involve consultation with the plant health certification authority.

12. PEST IDENTIFICATION

The NPPO must be able to provide pest and disease identifications to species level for all pests and diseases known to occur on products approved under a preclearance arrangement. The use of contract services is acceptable provided the level of proficiency is proven and timely.

13. NON CONFORMING PRODUCT

The documented workplans or procedures must clearly define the process for identifying and rejecting non conforming product.

14. EXPORT CERTIFICATION

- 14.1 Only the NPPO will be authorised to provide phytosanitary certification for product passed under a preclearance arrangement.
- 14.2 The NPPO will ensure that only certified or certifiable product is presented for AQIS preclearance inspection and issued with export certification in accordance with Australia's import requirements.

15. COMMITMENT

- 15.1 AQIS expect that all parties involved in its preclearance programs show commitment to exporting product that meets Australia's import requirements.
- 15.2 The exporting country is required to detail policy on dealing with recurring breaches of the preclearance arrangement.

16. CONTINGENCIES

- 16.1 AQIS reserve the right to terminate or modify any preclearance arrangement (in consultation with the exporting country's NPPO) should serious faults be found in the preclearance process or documented procedures.
- 16.2 Any precleared product arriving in Australia which is deemed to have had its precleared status compromised will be subject to appropriate remedial action as determined by AQIS.
- 16.3 Any new pests found to be associated with a precleared product (either introduced or previously undetected) that AQIS determine to be of critical quarantine concern will result in immediate suspension of a preclearance arrangement until appropriate pest management options are approved by AQIS.