

# Protecting Australia from bio security threats.

By Senator the HON. BRIDGET MCKENZIE, Deputy Leader of the Nationals / Minister for Agriculture

With its devastating sweep through Asia, African swine fever (ASF) is a reminder that Australia's world-class biosecurity system is more vital than ever in our more connected world, as new threats press constantly at our border.

How we confront ASF and similar challenges is a collective test of our determination to ensure our biosecurity protections remain world-leading and affordable into the future.

If pests and diseases, not currently present in Australia, arrive here they could up-end our ambition to grow agriculture into a \$100 billion sector by 2030.

A disease like foot and mouth, if it gained a foothold, could cost farmers and the Australian community \$52 billion over a decade.

ASF has no cure, is cutting a swathe through swineherds it infects, and is devastating the livelihoods of millions of people who rely on the pork industry. It's potentially the most damaging animal disease event the world has seen.

While not harmful to humans, the disease kills about 80 per cent of pigs it infects. China's pig population is expected to halve by the end of the year—that's a quarter of the world's pigs, gone.

That grim toll is putting pressure on global food security, reducing pork's availability and lifting prices for other protein sources like chicken and beef. ASF has jumped from China to the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Vietnam and elsewhere, easily bypassing less than the most rigorous border and quarantine checks.

Its trajectory towards Australia overlaps with the approach of the busy festive season, when demand peaks for pork and

ham. It's also when Australians and tourists alike plan their celebrations and gift giving and purchase items from overseas.

The disease's global impact will add to uncertainties already concerning multilateral agreements like those underpinning the global trading system. How can we rekindle confidence in the important work of reducing the trade barriers that create better economic opportunities for everyone?

It is vital we keep ASF out of Australia, not only to safeguard the jobs of our 2700 pig producers and the 36,000 jobs that depend on them, but for our broader economy and the hard-won international reputation of our \$60 billion agriculture industries who are a safe and reliable exporter of choice.

Our government has acted, ramping up inspections of people, cargo and mail arriving from countries affected by ASF. Four travellers have recently been removed from Australia for contravening biosecurity laws, including two carrying undeclared pork products that would have risked our \$5.3 billion pork industry. We have also suspended trade of high-risk pig products from affected countries.

Yet the challenge is growing across all import pathways.

The number of passengers arriving on flights departing from ASF risk countries has increased about 6,000 per cent since July last year due to the spread of the disease to multiple new countries. Passenger numbers are now at 22.5 million and are projected to increase by five per cent annually to 32 million by 2027.

Overseas parcels and mail have increased by a staggering 172 per cent since 2010. Despite ASF concern, our biosecurity staff last month intercepted an entire piglet posted from overseas. Last financial year 145 million articles of mail arrived in Australia as well as 50 million air cargo consignments, made up predominantly of personal online purchases.



David Scott (FTA Member Representative - Sea Freight / Commercial Freight & Logistics), Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie (Deputy Leader of the Nationals / Minister for Agriculture) and Paul Zalai (FTA / APSA)

And shipping cargo volumes have risen by more than 30 per cent in nine years. Last financial year 5.5 million sea cargo consignments arrived. Much as we can pride ourselves on our reputation as an exporting nation, we rely on our trading partners to provide us a range of goods—all new farm and mining machinery is imported.

Sea cargo biosecurity risks extend beyond the risks posed by the imported product and include the risks of hitchhiker pests and diseases associated with vessels and containers; where they have come from, which routes brought them here and where are they going in Australia? There are over 80,000 individual permutations when it comes to managing the risks from different import pathways. But imports are critically important to Australia.

That's why we're investing in technologies that evaluate the mode of arrival, like the work underway to develop underwater drones to manage marine pests for the shipping and cargo sector to check the outside of vessels for biofouling.

We're exploring technologies to help manage hitchhiking pests or contaminants on shipping containers and have

developed new scent lures to help train detector dogs to sniff out cargo pests, like crop-ravaging brown marmorated stink bugs.

These stink bugs can conceal themselves in trucks, automobiles, tractor-trailers, freight containers and anything else that moves, feeding on more than 300 different plant species. It is a constant threat to Australia's horticulture industry—valued at more than \$9 billion—as well as our fruit and nut industry—valued at over \$4 billion. Australia last year recorded more than 300 detections of the bugs, 64 of which occurred onshore.

We need to keep pace with the growing size and complexity of the task. While we benefit from increased travel, tourism and trade, Australia's pest and disease-free status will only be sustained by the combined efforts of governments, industry and the community.

The Department of Agriculture has recently consulted widely with freight forwarders, importers, ports, stevedores, shipping and customs brokers, as well as agriculture and resource firms, taking advice on how best to share the rising cost of biosecurity verification, risk mitigation and

enforcement. The work of the Biosecurity Imports Levy Industry Steering Committee provided options for consideration and that work informs our next steps.

With effective collaboration and using a staged and considered approach, we can streamline our biosecurity procedures, while upholding the security of the system. Together we will explore ways government and industry can work together to lift our preparedness and to ensure a sustainable funding base for our biosecurity programs.

This approach will safeguard the broader operation of our national biosecurity system and ensure it is affordable. The benefits for our agricultural industries, our rural and urban communities, our businesses, our environment and our national lifestyle heavily outweigh the impost.

## SWIFT CONTAINER SERVICES



### Are you in need of upgrading your current transport service provider ?

At Swift Container Services we offer a service level unmatched by any other wharf carrier in Sydney. A service level that has seen us grow to become Sydney's largest direct to client container service provider.

Commitment to service and constant communication with our clientele is also what separates us from the rest. We have the ability to deliver your container via skel trailer, drop trailer, B Double, sideloader and our HML accredited fleet.

Our HML fleet allows us to legally deliver overweight containers directly to your client and avoiding costly via yard, unpack and redelivery charges.

When you require the job done right the first time, every time, on time and on budget, please contact us today and get in front of your competitors.



P: (02) 9642 1549  
E: michael@swiftrans.com.au  
www.swiftrans.com.au

