



# Stakeholder update: imported cut flowers and foliage

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment had planned to hold a forum on 17 March 2020 to update stakeholders on its work since the last face-to-face forum on 5 April 2019.

With the forum cancelled following industry concerns about the COVID-19 situation, the department has instead prepared this update on the progress and its plans for further reducing biosecurity risk associated with cut flower imports. This update also shares the key findings and data from the PRA Part 2\*.

*\*As of 2 April 2020, PRA Part 2 is undergoing clearance to be released*

## Background

Fresh cut flowers have been imported into Australia for almost half a century. Initially, small volumes and a limited number of export countries enabled any potential biosecurity risk to be effectively managed at Australia's border.

Since trade commenced, patterns of imported cut flower and foliage arriving into Australia have changed significantly. More recently, Australia has seen a combination of increased import volumes, changes in countries of origin, and a high rate of live pests of biosecurity concern arriving in Australia. In 2019, there were 7,415 consignments imported, three times the volume imported in 2009.

These factors have contributed to a change in biosecurity risk associated with this import pathway, and have led to the department's decision to change the [import conditions](#) in March 2018 and conduct a [pest risk analysis \(PRA\)](#).

The changed import conditions emphasised greater responsibility for managing biosecurity risk and reducing live pest loads in the country of export before flowers are shipped to Australia. This requires the exporting country to use [accepted pest management methods](#) and provide pest-freedom certification prior to export. In addition, the department inspects all consignments arriving in Australia. If live pests of biosecurity concern are detected, the consignment is either fumigated prior to release, or exported or destroyed.

Because this new approach has resulted in a significant amount of change for the cut flower import sector, the department has worked closely with domestic stakeholders and international trading partners to transition from onshore to offshore risk management and to drive down the volume of pests on imported consignments.

The department is intending to adapt this approach, where risks are managed offshore, for other historically traded commodities in the future.

The department has also been undertaking a pest risk analysis (PRA) to verify the pests of biosecurity concern to Australia associated with imported fresh cut flowers and foliage and whether the revised import conditions are managing these risks to achieve the [appropriate level of protection \(ALOP\)](#) for Australia. This is the first PRA the department has conducted for an historical pathway of its kind.

The department also completed work which found that the species of *Tetranychus* mites arriving on cut flowers and foliage from Colombia, Ecuador and Kenya are not pests of biosecurity concern for Australia,



reducing the burden to identify these non-biosecurity risks and facilitating the clearance of compliant consignments.

## Update on compliance performance

The department has seen non-compliance improve as a result of ongoing work by the exporting countries and the import sector to meet the import conditions.

Non-compliance has continued to improve since the introduction of [import permits](#) on 1 September 2019 for highly non-compliant and high volume exporting countries, with countries such as Colombia, Ecuador and Kenya reducing the number of live pests arriving in Australia on cut flowers and foliage by up to 57 per cent.

There has also been a significant reduction in the total number and diversity of arthropod pests being intercepted at the Australian border. Thrips, mites and aphids continue to be the main pest group intercepted on imported cut flowers and foliage.

The department continues to work closely with Colombia, Ecuador, Kenya and importers to improve supply chains and offshore risk management measures to ensure they continue to reduce their non-compliance. The department has also been providing monthly interception reports to these countries' National Plant Protection Organisations (NPPOs) and their Australian importers so that they can continue to review their systems and processes and make any necessary improvements to reduce non-compliance.

While we have targeted countries with high non-compliance and high export volumes, we have been monitoring and reporting the compliance rates of all other countries from which Australia imports cut flowers and foliage.

We will continue to monitor the compliance rates of all exporting countries. We will also continue to provide three monthly reports to their NPPOs, outlining the import volumes and compliance performance of their country. These reports are intended to be used by the NPPO to inform any adjustments the countries should consider to improve the management of pests and meet Australia's import requirements.

For countries that export high trade volumes to Australia, where our monitoring shows that a country's non-compliance is increasing, we will engage with that country to see what improvements can be made. If after allowing some time for any improvements to take effect, non-compliance is still high, we will move to implement import permits for that country.

The requirement for import permits has proved to be a successful regulatory approach to reducing the approach rate of biosecurity risks, enabling the department to work with industry to quickly target issues and reduce import non-compliance. The import permit assessment process includes analysis of importer compliance under previous permits. Where there are no additional supply chain actions taken and/or significant improvement in non-compliance the department will refuse to re-issue permits.

## Update on the PRA

The department is finalising [Part 2 of the PRA](#) to determine the pests of biosecurity concern to Australia associated with fresh cut flower and foliage imports and whether the revised import conditions are effectively managing the biosecurity risks to achieve the ALOP for Australia.

Part 1 of the PRA that assessed the mites, thrips and aphids on this pathway was finalised in June 2019. Part 2 of the PRA has considered the other arthropod pests associated with imported fresh cut flowers and foliage. These are beetles (Insecta: Coleoptera), flies (Insecta: Diptera), bugs (Insecta: Hemiptera (other than



aphids, which were assessed in [part 1 of the PRA](#)), wasps, bees and ants (Insecta: Hymenoptera) and moths and butterflies (Insecta: Lepidoptera).

We expect to publish the draft report in April 2020 for a period of public consultation. To be notified, [subscribe to the plant stakeholder register](#).

## Findings

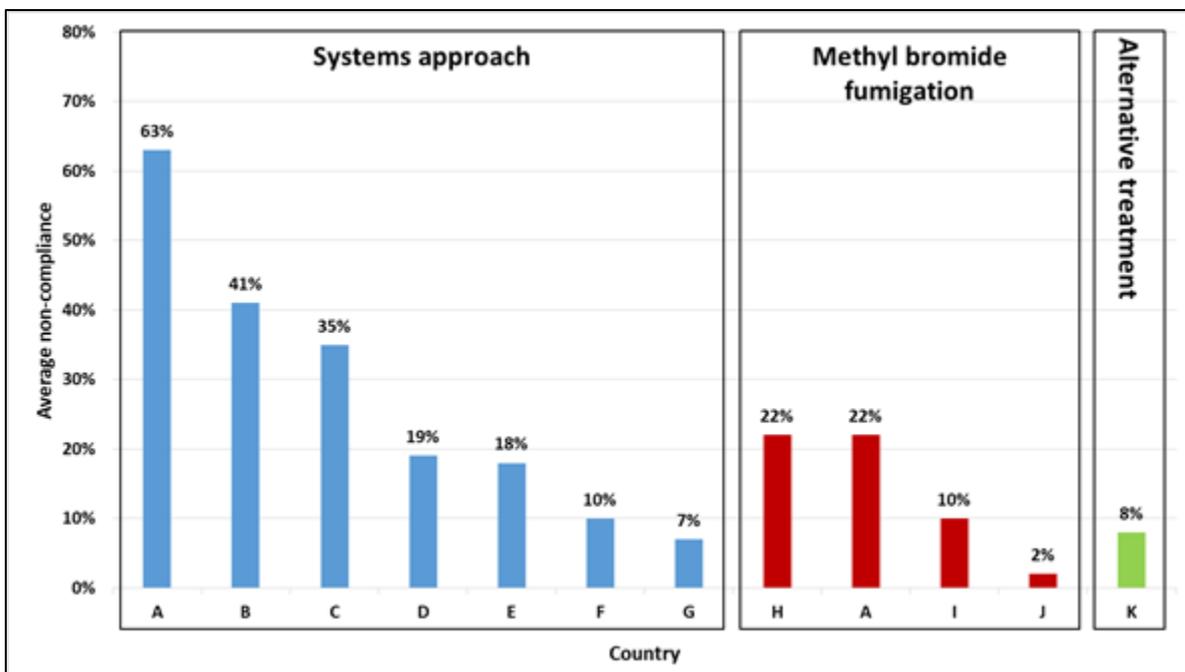
The following are key findings from Part 2 of the PRA.

### 1. The revised import conditions introduced on 1 March 2018 have resulted in an overall decrease in the rates of arrival of live pests of biosecurity concern.

The department has compared the effectiveness of the three [accepted pre-export methods of managing pests](#) used by 11 countries that export cut flowers and foliage to Australia, including countries requiring import permits (Figure 1). The countries listed in Figure 1 are the same as those reported in Part 1 of the PRA.

Figure 1 shows that all measures have the potential to reduce pest loads, and that some countries have more success than others with particular measures. In comparison with the same analysis presented in Part 1 of the PRA, there are also overall improvements in non-compliance rates. In these most recent results, only one country has a higher than 50% non-compliance rate, whereas the previous results showed three countries above 50%.

Figure 1 Consignment non-compliance by import measure: September 2019 to January 2020



Source: Departmental interception data.

Note: Each bar represents one country. Country A is represented twice, as consignments were certified under two measures—the systems approach and methyl bromide fumigation.

### 2. The revised import conditions have had a varying effect on the volume of non-compliant shipments.



The department has also compared the rates of non-compliance of cut flower imports for January 2019 and January 2020, for each of the same 11 countries listed in Figure 1 (Figure 2). By comparing the same month one year apart, we can make a direct comparison as well as take into account any seasonal effect on pest load.

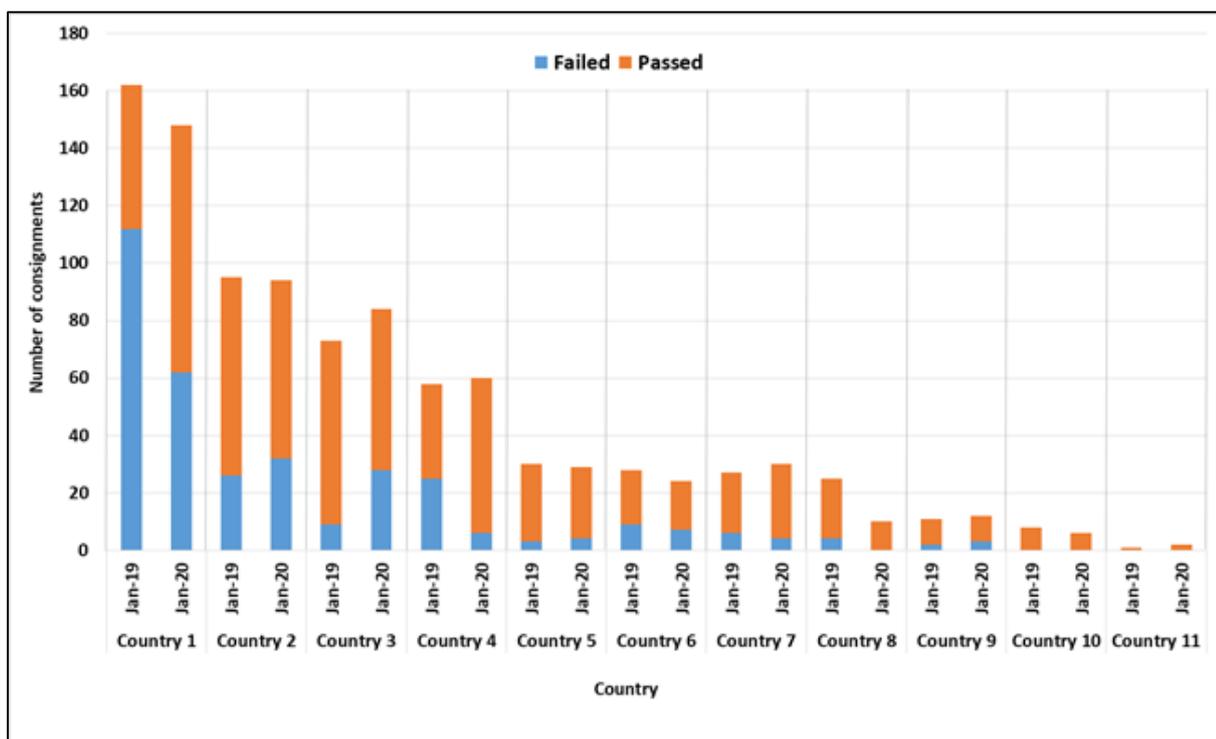
Firstly, you will see in Figure 2 the variation in volumes of imports between countries. Countries 1 to 4 are the countries from which Australia sources the largest volumes of flowers for importing to supply the Australian market. It is also these countries that have demonstrated the largest rates of non-compliance.

Countries 1 and 4 have shown a marked improvement in non-compliance with fewer ‘failed’ consignments in January 2020 than in January 2019. This is despite a reduction in the number of consignments arriving at the border for country 1.

Countries 2 and 3 have not shown an improvement in non-compliance with the number of ‘failed’ consignments increasing in January 2020. The department is reviewing this information to determine what other regulatory options should be put in place to improve non-compliance, e.g. implementing the requirement for import permits or refusing to issue further permits. High volume non-compliance increases the likelihood of entry of pests of biosecurity concern.

Countries 5 to 11 have continued to maintain very low levels of non-compliance. All arriving consignments are subject to border procedures, and if live arthropods of biosecurity concern are detected the consignments is either fumigated (where appropriate) prior to release, exported or destroyed.

*Figure 2 Consignment non-compliance by country: January 2019 and January 2020*



**Source:** Departmental non-compliance data.



**3. A number of Coleoptera, Diptera, Hemiptera, and Lepidoptera pest species associated with the importation of cut flowers and foliage were identified as pests of biosecurity concern and will require specific risk management measures.**

The department assessed 582 species of arthropod pests in Part 2 of the PRA. Of these species, 357 species are quarantine pests, and a further four species are classified as potential regulated articles<sup>1</sup> because they can transmit pathogens that are of biosecurity concern for Australia.

The quarantine arthropod pests include:

- 71 species of beetles (Coleoptera)
- 38 species of flies (Diptera)
- 138 species of bugs (Hemiptera; other than aphids)
- 110 species of moths and butterflies (Lepidoptera)

The potential regulated articles include:

- 3 species of beetles (Coleoptera)

The biosecurity risks posed by these 361 arthropod pest species does not achieve the appropriate level of protection for Australia. Therefore risk management measures are required to manage the risk.

The risk management measures proposed in the draft report are the same as those detailed in [Part 1 of the PRA](#).

**4. Eight species of beetles (Coleoptera), 17 species of flies (Diptera), three species of bugs (Hemiptera) and 13 species of bees, wasps and ants (Hymenoptera) are of biosecurity concern.**

Part 2 of the PRA also found a number of arthropod pest species that are of biosecurity concern for Australia for other reasons:

- they have the potential to be predators or parasites
- they are able to transmit human and animal pathogens
- they are nuisance pests.

Because of these reasons, these arthropod pests will be regulated at the Australian border.

**5. An additional 17 species of bees, wasps and ants (Hymenoptera) were classified as pests of biosecurity concern during the pest characterisation stage of the PRA, and are regulated at the Australian border.**

There are 17 species of bees, wasps and ants that the PRA identified as being of biosecurity concern for Australia but based on our interception data are rarely intercepted at the border.

At this stage we have not undertaken a full risk assessment of these pest species as our interception data shows that they are arriving in extremely low numbers. If detected at the border, these species will be managed by methyl bromide fumigation, or the consignment will be exported or destroyed.

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<sup>1</sup> A regulated article is any plant, plant product, storage place, packaging, conveyance, container, soil and any other organism, object or material capable of harbouring or spreading pests, deemed to require phytosanitary measures, particularly where international transportation is involved (FAO 2019).



However, we will continue to monitor this situation and if an arthropod pest is found that has not yet been determined to be (or not be) a pest of biosecurity concern, including a contaminant pest, we will undertake a pest risk assessment to determine whether additional phytosanitary measures are required.

#### **6. The draft report recommends phytosanitary measures to manage the risks associated with Coleoptera, Diptera, Hemiptera and Lepidoptera species to achieve Australia's ALOP.**

The measures proposed in Part 2 of the PRA are the same as those recommended in Part 1 of the PRA which support the revised import conditions and subsequent introduction of import permits.

The risk management measures proposed include:

1. The use of one of three arthropod pest management options by the exporting country before the flowers are exported:
  - NPPO-approved systems approach
  - Pre-export methyl bromide fumigation
  - NPPO-approved alternative pre-export disinfestation treatment.
2. The requirement of the exporting country's NPPO to verify that the cut flowers and foliage for export are free from live regulated pests.
3. The requirement, in certain circumstances, for import permits to import cut flowers and foliage from certain countries.
4. The requirement for imported cut flowers and foliage to be inspected at the Australian border and treated if live arthropod pests are found to be of biosecurity concern (including quarantine pests and regulated articles).

The proposed measures when applied correctly, will reduce the biosecurity risks posed by these pests and achieve the appropriate level of protection for Australia.

### Stay updated

Get information and updates on cut flowers and foliage imports by subscribing to our online [subscription](#) service. By subscribing to 'Biosecurity Risk Analysis Plant' you will receive Biosecurity Advices and other notifications relating to plant biosecurity policy.

### Contact us

If you are an importer, exporter or grower of cut flowers and foliage for export to Australia and you have a question about Australia's import conditions, you can contact us on [Imports](#). Please allow up to 10 working days for a response. You can also call us on:

- 1800 900 090 (from within Australia)
- +61 3 8318 6700 (from outside Australia).