



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

Guide to scheduling arrangements for imported cargo inspections: consultation draft



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Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone 1800 900 090

Web agriculture.gov.au

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to invite industry to make a submission on the revised scheduling arrangements for imported cargo inspections. While the scheduling arrangements detailed in this paper are not new, they have been revised to ensure the department:

- adheres to the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) to ensure it manages public resources appropriately
- implements a nationally consistent approach to the scheduling of departmental officers to third-party sites to undertake inspections
- formally establishes the types of inspection appointments available to industry based on the volume of consignments handled.

To meet the obligations under section 15 of the PGPA Act, the department must govern in a way that promotes the:

- proper use and management of public resources for which the accountable authority is responsible
- achievement of the purposes of the entity
- financial sustainability of the entity.

We invite you to provide your feedback on this paper and answer the Have Your Say survey. Questions 9 to 21 in the survey also appear at the end of the relevant chapters in this discussion paper.

1 Overview to scheduling

The department has established scheduling arrangements based on the volume and type of cargo that an approved arrangement or third-party premises (site) may handle. The department ensures that the scheduling of departmental officers for the purposes of undertaking cargo and imported food inspections is compliant with the definition of ‘proper’ as per the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*. The scheduling arrangements utilised by the department are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Overview of scheduling arrangements

Category	Description
1) Standard appointment	Single appointment for an individual consignment.
2) Group appointment	Single appointment covering multiple consignments or inspection types. Currently available for limited commodities only.
3) Recurring appointment (formerly manned depots and permanent arrangements)	Regularly scheduled appointment for multiple consignments. A voluntary arrangement with regularly scheduled appointments that may be available for entities handling significant volumes of consignments. Appointment frequency may range from a weekly, full or part-day attendance to the allocation of multiple departmental officers on one or multiple days per week.

Have your say

Question 9 Is the purpose of establishing the scheduling arrangements for imported cargo inspections policy clear to you?

Question 10 (conditional) Please detail what is not clear and provide suggestions on how this could be improved?

Question 11 Do you understand the 3 appointment types described in the draft policy?

Question 12 How satisfied are you with the 3 appointment options?

Question 13 Please share any suggestions for improvements or changes that can be made?

2 Standard appointments

A standard appointment is a single appointment for an individual consignment.

Unless otherwise arranged, inspections will be scheduled as a standard appointment. Each appointment will cover an individual consignment only.

Availability of goods for inspection

Once you have received advice that an inspection is required, you may notify the department when the goods will be available for inspection by submitting a [request for inspection](#).

Requests for appointments in advance

For some commodities or inspection types, the department may permit importers to request an appointment prior to receiving notification that an inspection will be required.

Currently the department is only considering requests for the following consignment types where an airway bill has already been issued:

- live aquarium fish
- fresh produce arriving as air cargo
- nursery stock arriving as air cargo
- fresh flowers arriving as air cargo.

Requests must reference a valid airway bill number.

Have your say

Question 14 How do you usually request a standard appointment for inspection?

Question 15 (conditional) Why don't you use the Biosecurity Portal?

Question 16 (conditional) How satisfied are you with the current booking process in the Biosecurity Portal for a cargo inspection?

Question 17 (conditional) What improvements could be made to enhance your overall experience?

3 Group appointments

A group appointment is a single appointment covering multiple consignments or inspection types.

Group appointments are currently available for limited commodities only.

The department will accommodate group appointments where it is safe, efficient and subject to the availability of departmental officers.

Requests for group appointments

Group appointment requests can be made via the Biosecurity Portal where supported or by emailing the [request for inspection](#) form to the appropriate state-based address.

Have your say

Question 18 Have you ever requested a group or bulk appointment?

Question 19 Would you consider requesting a group appointment for an inspection in the future?

Question 20 A group appointment will enable entities to request a single appointment for multiple consignments. Currently group appointments are only available for a limited number of consignment types. What types of consignments would you like to be able to request a group appointment for?

Question 21 What are your thoughts on transitioning bulk or group booking inspection requests via email to a digital process, either through the Biosecurity Portal or another digital platform?

4 Recurring appointments

Recurring appointments (formerly manned depots and permanent arrangements) are a voluntary arrangement available for entities handling significant volumes of consignments on a regular basis. Appointment frequency may involve one or more departmental officers attending:

- on a weekly, full-day or part-day basis
- for one or more days per week.

In addition to holding a recurring appointment arrangement, an entity can request standard appointments for any goods where necessary.

Recurring appointments increase efficiency by maximising the number of inspections conducted per appointment.

A recurring appointment can be requested by:

- operators of biosecurity entry points
- operators of approved arrangement sites (AA sites)
- importers
- brokers/freight forwarders.

Entities using third-party AA sites must seek permission from the site before applying for a recurring appointment. This ensures the site can service the needs of the entity.

Eligibility

Requests for recurring appointments are assessed against:

- inspection type
- efficiency for both the department and the entity
- minimum volume threshold
- commitment of resources (resource availability)
- impact on other stakeholders
- working conditions for the departmental officer at the site
- proposed schedule.

Acceptable inspection types

Only agreed upon inspection types will be undertaken at appointments. Inspection eligibility will depend on the availability of departmental officers and their accreditations. The number of departmental officers at locations across the country will vary, due to the volume of imports and the operational needs of the department.

To ensure fairness, we will assess applications against the availability of scheduling arrangements for all entities within the same industry groups in a local area. Any inspection type that has been approved for other entities within the local area will be deemed acceptable. If the number of entities seeking a recurring appointment for an inspection type exceeds department resources, we will reassess all recurring appointments covering that inspection type within the local area.

An inspection type will not be considered acceptable if:

- the time it takes to complete a single inspection, including travel to the site, would prevent more than one inspection being completed per attendance
- insufficient biosecurity officers or authorised officers are available to be assigned to the appointment.

The department may determine some inspection types as ineligible for a recurring appointment where there are suitable alternative options available.

A recurring appointment may include more than one type of inspection providing:

- each inspection type will be undertaken at most appointments
- number of inspection types do not exceed the accreditation limits of officers within the local area.

Efficiency and minimum volume threshold

Recurring appointments will only be implemented where they result in an efficiency for both the entity and the department by reducing:

- number of attendances by departmental officers
- travel time
- booking and administrative effort for both the entity and the department.

To ensure recurring appointments are only utilised where efficient, the site, or importer needs to be handling a significant volume of goods requiring inspection on an ongoing basis. The minimum volume thresholds are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Minimum volume threshold

Consignment type	Weekly threshold
Full import declarations (FID)	5 to 9 inspections of at least 10 hrs inspection time 10 to 14 inspections of at least 6 hrs inspection time, or 15 plus inspections.
Self-assessed clearances (SAC)	10 consignments, or 1 hour of inspections.
Unaccompanied personal affects (UPE)	10 or more consignments.
Cargo action list (CAL)	5 hours of inspections.

Sufficient inspectors available to be allocated to the appointment

There must be a sufficient number of departmental officers with the relevant accreditations available to be allocated to the appointment. Where an inspection type has been declined based on the availability of biosecurity or authorised officers the request will be reviewed every 3 months for the next 12 months from the date of the assessment. This will be undertaken to determine if an arrangement can be established.

Impact on other entities

A recurring appointment must not unreasonably inhibit other entities from obtaining an appointment for inspection. For a request to be approved there must be sufficient departmental staff available to service standard appointments for other entities.

To meet operational demands and facilitate or support other recurring appointment arrangements the department may make amendments to existing arrangements when required. The relevant entity will be notified of the amendments to an existing recurring appointment arrangement.

Suitable working conditions

The working conditions at an inspection site must be safe for departmental officers. Accommodation requirements for departmental officers are set out in the relevant class conditions for approved arrangements and biosecurity entry points.

Suitable schedule

The schedule pattern for a recurring appointment will be based over a week. Suitable options will vary depending on the regional location. When determining a schedule, the department will consider:

- efficient utilisation of departmental staff
- minimising of impact on other entities seeking standard appointments
- non-peak inspection times of the day
- close to either end of the day to maximise usable time for other appointments
- flexible (e.g. adjustable start time to fit around other appointments; or operational capacity of the department), or
- other suitable times as identified by the department.

To ensure an efficient utilisation of departmental officers Table 3 outlines the parameters to determine the number of appointments per week that an entity may be eligible for.

Table 3 Scheduling criteria

Consignment type	Volume of inspections per week	Eligibility per week
Full import declarations (FID) and unaccompanied personal affects (UPE)	Less than 6 hours	1 appointment
	6 hours	2 appointments
	15 hours	3 appointments
	20 hours	4 appointments
	25 hours	5 appointments

Consignment type	Volume of inspections per week	Eligibility per week
Self-assessed clearances (SAC)	N/A	Minimum inspection length 1 hour
Cargo action list (CAL)	5 hours	1 appointment
	10 hours	2 appointments
	15 hours	3 appointments
	20 hours	4 appointments
	25 hours	5 appointments

Have your say

Question 25 Do you think your company will meet the NEW criteria proposed for a recurring appointment arrangement?

Question 26 (conditional) Which criteria do you think your site may not meet?

Question 27 (conditional) Would you consider applying for a recurring appointment with the department?

Question 28 (conditional) How many consignments do you think you would be able to present per appointment.

Question 29 (conditional) Why would you not be interested in applying for a recurring appointment?

Question 31 Please share your thoughts of the recurring appointment arrangements outlined in the draft policy.

Question 32 Are there any other circumstances that should be included in the assessment criteria for a recurring appointment?

Applying for a recurring appointment

To apply for a recurring appointment, email the completed application form to TBA@aff.gov.au.

The department will endeavour to assess and provide written notification on the outcome of the application within 20 business days.

Ongoing review

Recurring appointments will be reviewed biannually by the department. Where it is determined that departmental officers are not being fully utilised for the entire duration of the allotted time, the arrangement may be modified or cancelled.

Entities holding a recurring appointment arrangement will be notified of the upcoming biannual review approximately 6 weeks prior to commencement. Entities will be able to notify the department of any change in circumstance or any additional information or data for consideration in the review.

Review of decision

Where a request for a recurring appointment has been declined or a decision has been made by the department to cancel or modify an existing appointment, the applicant/appointment holder may seek a review of the decision if it is not satisfied with the reasoning provided.

A request for review must be made in writing within 20 business days of the notification of the decision being issued. If required, the entity may request additional time by writing to TBA@aff.gov.au, the reference number should be provided.

Requests for review

Requests for review should be addressed to the Director of Cargo Operations. The request should outline:

- reason for seeking the reassessment
- data that supports the reasoning
- any other information that supports the request for review.

Departments action

Upon receiving a request for review the department will:

- contact the applicant to discuss the department's initial decisions and ascertain the reason for the request if required
- refer the request to the Director of Cargo Operations for review
- notify the applicant of the outcome of the review.

General provisions

A recurring appointment commits the attendance of departmental officers in line with the department's [client service standards](#). To meet operational demands and facilitate or support other recurring appointment arrangements the department may make amendments from time to time. The relevant entity will be notified prior to any amendments being made to an existing recurring appointment.

The department or the entity requesting the appointment may cancel the arrangement at any time if:

- the arrangement is no longer needed because the volume of goods handled by the entity has reduced
- departmental officers are not being utilised for the full length of the appointment
- working conditions at the inspection site continue to be unsafe (no remedy undertaken by the operator)
- other entities are being impacted due to the unavailability of departmental officers.

The department will provide 24 hours' notice prior to a cancellation taking affect in relation to unsafe working conditions. For all other reasons the department will provide 5 business days' notice prior to a cancellation taking affect.

Appointment amendments and variations

Ad hoc requests to modify the length of a recurring appointment or to add additional inspection types are not permitted. Requests for additional appointments or inspection types not approved under the recurring appointment may be made by booking a standard appointment. Cancellations should be emailed at least 2 business days in advance to the relevant office (Table 4).

Table 4 Contact details for cancelling an appointment

Location	Contact details
Australia Capital Territory	ImportsRFIACT@agriculture.gov.au
Darwin and Cairns	ImportsRFI@agriculture.gov.au
New South Wales	ImportsRFINSW@agriculture.gov.au
South Australia	ImportsRFI@agriculture.gov.au
Victoria	ImportsRFIVIC@agriculture.gov.au
Western Australia	ImportsRFIWA@agriculture.gov.au

Where an entity requires a permanent increase to the allocated time to an existing appointment, the entity must submit a new request for a recurring appointment. The entity must specify the additional time required and the potential volume of cargo that will require inspection. The assessment will be conducted against the criteria outlined in this document.

The recurring appointment policy will be reviewed as required or within 3 years following its approval. Consultation with entities and internal stakeholders will be conducted where major amendments are needed to be made. Entities will be provided the opportunity to make submissions to the department on the identified issues or major amendments to the policy. Where there are minor amendments that do not impact the overall administration of the policy, entities will be notified of the minor amendment.

Have your say

Question 30 What are your thoughts on enabling the ability to manage recurring appointments (including cancelling or modifying) directly through the Biosecurity Portal?

Question 33 Do you have any final concerns or suggestions about this draft policy that you would like to share?

Privacy

Information on recurring appointment arrangements held by entities will not be made publicly available by the department. All personal information will be managed in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the department's [Privacy Policy](#).

5 Overview to inspections

When an inspection is required

Once it has been determined that an inspection is required, the department will provide notification to the importer and or their agent. The notification will be in one of the following forms:

- **Biosecurity** – A biosecurity direction or notice stating that the goods will be inspected
- **Imported food** – A valid food control certificate, stipulating an inspection.

Where a consignment requires inspection for both biosecurity and imported food purposes, the imported food inspection will not be able to occur until the consignment has been released from biosecurity control.

Import inspector

In some cases, a biosecurity inspection may be undertaken by an industry participant operating under an approved arrangement. Where an inspection can be undertaken by an industry participant this will be stated on the inspection advice. Inspections undertaken by industry participants should be booked directly with the operating entity. All other biosecurity inspections and all imported food inspections must be undertaken by a departmental officer.

Have your say

Question 5 Do you know which inspections can be undertaken by a biosecurity industry participant operating under an approved arrangement?

Question 6 Do you ever use biosecurity industry participants operating under an approved arrangement for imported cargo inspections?

Request for inspection

If the inspection has not already been scheduled, you can notify the department when the goods will be available by submitting a [request for inspection](#) to enable the inspection to be scheduled.

Inspection location

Biosecurity inspections will need to be undertaken at either an [approved arrangement site](#) (AA site) or [biosecurity entry point](#) approved to handle the type of goods. The appropriate class of locations can be determined by referring to [BICON](#).

Importers may apply for departmental approval for a biosecurity inspection to occur at a non-AA site by completing the [Request for biosecurity inspection at non-AA site](#) form and emailing it to the regional Biosecurity office in the state/territory that the cargo is requested to be inspected.

Exceptions also apply for full container loads (FCL) selected as part of the [Cargo Compliance Verification Scheme](#), which may also be performed at an importers premise or other freight depot. The nominated inspection location will be stated on the biosecurity direction.

Imported food inspections may be performed at either a freight depot or an importers premise.

When nominating an inspection location, it is the responsibility of the importer to confirm with the operator of the site that they are willing and able to handle the consignment. All costs and arrangements associated with the transport, handling and storage of the consignment are the responsibility of the importer.

Ordinary hours of operations

The department's ordinary hours of operation for inspections are 6:30 am to 6:30 pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.

An entity may request the attendance of a departmental officer outside of the department's ordinary hours of operation however, appointments will be subject to the availability of departmental officers. In addition, some inspection types may only be performed during day light hours e.g. where adequate lighting is available. Scheduling of standard appointments outside of the department's ordinary hours of operation will vary depending on the location and the resource availability of departmental staff.

Fee for service

A fee for service will be applied for biosecurity and imported food inspections conducted by departmental officers in accordance with the [Biosecurity Regulations 2016](#) and [Imported Food Control Regulations 2019](#).

Inspections conducted outside of the department's ordinary hours of operation will incur additional fees.

Accommodation requirements for departmental officers

Operators of approved arrangement sites should check their class conditions as accommodation requirements for departmental officers may vary depending on the level of attendance of departmental officers to that site.

Workplace health and safety

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is committed to providing a workplace that protects the physical and mental health, safety and wellbeing of our staff. Where the department determines that the working conditions at a 3rd party site are unsafe, including exposure of staff to bullying, harassment and intimidation, inspections at that site will be unable to be performed until the safety risks and hazards have been rectified.

Departmental officers will verify safe working procedures prior to starting an inspection. Where goods are required to be placed on [stands or hoists](#) for inspections Officers may request to view safety certification prior to commencing an inspection.

Residuals from chemical treatments applied to cargo can be harmful. Prior to inspecting cargo, the department must request presentation of safety data sheets (SDS) or certification from a certified pest controller to confirm that the goods are safe to be inspected. It is the responsibility of the importer and or the site to arrange certification where required.

Assistance at inspection

The owner of the goods or their representative must be present at the inspection to provide assistance.

It is the responsibility of the owner and their representative to present the goods for inspection including, but not limited to, arranging access to the consignment, unpacking the consignment, opening boxes and crates, removing wrapping, opening container doors and moving or lifting items for inspection. They must also ensure the inspection area is safe prior to presenting goods for inspection.

It is also the responsibility of the owner and their representative to repack consignments post inspection.

Contacts

For more information, email cargooperationssurvey@aff.gov.au.

Have your say

Question 33 Do you have any final concerns or suggestions about this draft policy that you would like to share?

Glossary

Term	Definition
Approved arrangement site	A site covered by an arrangement for which an approval is in force under the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> to allow specified biosecurity activities to occur.
Biosecurity direction	A direction issued by a biosecurity officer requiring certain measures to be undertaken.
Biosecurity entry point	Is an area of a port designated under the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> , as a biosecurity entry point for specified class of goods.
Biosecurity industry participant	A person who is the holder of the approval of an approved arrangement in force under the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> .
Biosecurity inspection	An inspection undertaken under the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> to assess the level of biosecurity risks associated with goods subject to biosecurity control.
Biosecurity Portal	An online portal gives import clients the ability to make and manage inspection booking requests, view direction information and lodge Approved Arrangement Class 14.4 inspection outcomes at any time.
Food control certificate	A certificate issued under the <i>Imported Food Control Act 1991</i> to advise when inspection, testing or further action is required.
Group appointment	Single appointment to allow for the inspection of multiple consignments or inspection types. Currently available for limited commodities only.
Imported food inspection	An inspection undertaken by an authorised officer under the <i>Imported Food Control Act 1991</i> to determine the compliance of food imported into Australia with food standards and the requirements of public health and safety.
Recurring appointment	Regularly scheduled appointment that allows for the inspection of multiple consignments. A voluntary arrangement with regularly scheduled appointments that may be available for entities handling significant volumes of consignments. Appointment frequency may range from a weekly, full or part-day attendance to the allocation of multiple departmental officers on one or multiple days per week.
Standard appointment	Single appointment for the inspection of an individual consignment.