

# Australian focus on biosecurity and market access

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“Maximising Trade - Minimising Risk” was the theme of the Quarantine and Market Access Conference held in Canberra recently. The conference attracted over 250 delegates from around the world to exchange views and listen to Australian and international speakers, including Dr Gretchen Stanton of the World Trade Organisation and our own Dr Steve Hathaway of the NZ Food Safety Authority. Although the conference retains its strong focus on Australia, this biennial forum is attracting increasing international interest.

One of the messages that came across strongly from both industry and government participants was the need to work more closely together on quarantine and market access issues to

make best use of scarce resources. As one State Government speaker put it “Governments don’t trade, bureaucrats don’t trade: businesses trade” and suggested that bureaucrats have to recognise that their role is to create the environment for that to happen.

The social aspects of risk analysis were explored by a number of speakers. These provided interesting insights into how individuals perceive risk, as well as ways in which powerful organisations can manipulate these perceptions. The speakers presented useful guidance on how Government agencies can better communicate with their stakeholders and build trust in decision-making. This is an area where Government agencies have not traditionally focused - preferring to present compelling technical arguments but ignoring the fundamental (and frequently non-technical) basis for peoples’ concerns. Australia has begun to address this, and has a social sciences unit providing

advice to risk analysts.

A wide range of other topics were discussed: issues and challenges for the WTO system; balance between facilitating trade and risk; the future role of GM technology; maximising Australia’s export market access; stakeholder and trading partner perspectives on Australia’s quarantine policy; and supply chain management.

One of the strengths of the Quarantine and Market Access Conference is the balance that is struck between Government, Industry and trading partner viewpoints. This makes the conference more than just a talk-fest: it is a valuable forum for discussion and learning. All of the speaker presentations are publicly available on the conference website. I recommend you take a look.

<http://www.affa.gov.au/content/publications.cfm?ObjectID=5A26F686-09F0-412A-BF9FD14A8BB953B9> (If you have trouble with the link, try <http://www.affa.gov.au> and enter QMAC 2003 in the AFFA search box).



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