



Risk Communication in Biosecurity Discourse or Between Two Absolutes Lies Risk

Sue McKell & Paul De Barro
CRC for National Plant Biosecurity
S.McKell@crcplantbiosecurity.com.au

Biosecurity & Quarantine

- Definition of biosecurity - multiple
 - “Protecting the economy, environment (and human health from the negative impacts of pests, diseases and weeds”
- Biosecurity: Concept
- Quarantine: Action
- Biosecurity continuum

In their own words

- Biosecurity Australia: “Biosecurity Australia provides science-based quarantine assessments and policy advice that protects Australia's favourable pest and disease status and enhances Australia's access to international animal and plant related markets”
- BA – policy and risk assessment
- AQIS: “Australia's first line of defence, reducing the risk to our agriculture industries and environment against exotic pests and diseases.”
- AQIS – implementation

Biosecurity vs Quarantine

- Quarantine is an old familiar term – new context
- Biosecurity is a new term

- Source of confusion wrt communication
- AQIS plauded, BA criticised

Biosecurity vs Quarantine

- AQIS – “public awareness and education activities”
- AQIS – focus on selling an action
- BA – “[support] Biosecurity Australia’s engagement with stakeholders and provides public information”
- BA – suggests less concerned about increasing public awareness, more about supporting BA’s specific activities

Discourse analysis

- Social science methodology – linguistics, cognitive psychology and communication studies
- Close language analysis – latent meaning beyond a text's literal message – grammar, subjectivity & rhetoric
- Explicit vs Implicit information
- “look for” what is only contained in the text
- Seeks to extract the various layers of meaning contained in a text

The Texts

- Differences between BA and AQIS - difficult to locate similar texts – BUT identify similarities in terms of content, audience and communication purpose – textual equivalence
- Chose 1 text from each agency
- Comparison of texts 2004-2007 - representative
- BA – media releases relating to IRAs (7)
- AQIS – media releases relating to incoming passengers (22)
- Two texts provided and that, even though those texts are consistent with others like them, we are not trying to conflate them with the intentions of their authors

The media release

- BA: Distinctly formulaic design – content & structure
- AQIS: Unique information, but very similar discursive messages
- Purpose of the study – highlight the usefulness of DA to the field of biosecurity communication and to identify areas for further analysis
- To identify some of the gaps that might exist between the information that people in “the know” might have compared to what is actually being communicated to (and perhaps being understood by) the public

Voice

- Communication through an intermediary
- AQIS: Aircrew to passengers
- BA: members of the media to their readers
- Information in the text needs to be understood by and then interpreted through the intermediary
- Didactic i.e. contains more information than would be expected if you were communicating directly to the public

- Explains what action is requested of the reader
- Why
- What assistance is available to the reader
- Actual text to be communicated is delineated

IN-FLIGHT QUARANTINE VIDEOS

Under Australian law, all airlines flying to Australia must deliver an approved quarantine message before landing.

AQIS is currently redeveloping the AQIS in-flight quarantine video. The revised video is expected to be available in August 2007.

The new video will be supplied free of charge and in any nominated video and audio format. If you have any questions or would like to order a copy of the video for your airline please contact the Airports Program or phone 02 6272 4143.

To meet legal obligations, airlines need to ensure that their crew make a verbal announcement on flights to Australia while AQIS is producing the new video.

To help airlines comply with this requirement, the English version of the approved quarantine announcement below should be used. Please contact the AQIS Airports Program for a translated version if required.

Approved Verbal Announcement

Approved verbal Announcement (November 2006)

This is an important Quarantine announcement from the Australian Government.

Australia has strict Quarantine controls, backed up by strong penalties for breaking the law, to help minimise the risk to Australia's unique environment, important agricultural industries and human health caused by the introduction of pests and diseases from overseas.

To fulfil Australian Quarantine regulations, you must declare everything you can eat and all other plant or animal material on your Incoming Passenger Card.

This includes all fruit, meat and dairy products, fish and seafood, edible packaged and processed goods; and plant cuttings, seeds, and souvenirs made with wood, plant or animal products such as hides, bones and shells.

Otherwise, you should dispose of these items in the quarantine bins located in the arrival area. Anything edible supplied to you onboard must be left behind.

There is also important human health information in the Been Away? Feel Ok? pamphlet. Please take the time to read this information as it refers to your health.

If you have not received one of these pamphlets, please ask a member of the crew. Australian Quarantine laws require that a senior officer of a ship/aircraft reports certain ill passengers or crew members to a Quarantine officer prior to arrival in Australia. If you are feeling unwell you should bring this to the attention of a crew member.

Please take particular care in completing your Incoming Passenger Card. It is a legal document, and false declarations may result in on-the-spot fines or prosecution.

On arrival your baggage may be x-rayed, inspected or checked by a detector dog team.

DRAFT IMPORT RISK ANALYSIS REPORT FOR APPLES FROM NEW ZEALAND

1 December 2005

Biosecurity Australia has today issued a revised draft import risk analysis report (IRA) assessing an application from New Zealand to export apples to Australia.

The draft IRA report issued today proposes that the importation of apples to Australia from New Zealand could be permitted, subject to the following stringent quarantine risk management conditions:

- mandatory pre-clearance arrangements to occur before proposed export that require Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service officers to be involved in all risk management measures in New Zealand as well as auditing of the systems and processes used by New Zealand to certify exports;
- orchard inspection for freedom from fire blight symptoms – orchards with any visible fire blight symptoms would be disqualified from export;
- use of disinfection treatment (eg chlorine) in packing houses to prevent contamination of apples with fire blight bacteria;
- inspection of orchards during autumn or winter after leaf fall for freedom from European canker disease – orchards with any symptoms of European canker would be disqualified from export;
- inspection in New Zealand of a random sample of 3000 fruit for freedom from apple leaf curling midge – detection of apple leaf curling midge would result in rejection or treatment of fruit; and
- inspection for all other quarantine pests with remedial action.

The draft report proposes that New Zealand apples not be imported to Western Australia. No effective risk management measures have been identified for the disease apple scab, which is currently not endemic to Western Australia. This is consistent with the current practice that prevents apples being moved to Western Australia from eastern Australia, where apple scab is endemic.

Biosecurity Australia undertakes science-based risk analyses to assess the quarantine risks associated with applications to import agricultural and other commodities to Australia.

These analyses provide an important step towards keeping Australia free from pests and diseases that might be present in other countries. Risk management measures can be proposed to manage assessed quarantine risks to provide a high level of quarantine protection for Australia. These arrangements assist in the reduction of quarantine risk to a very low level, consistent with Australia's conservative approach to quarantine.

The *Revised Draft Import Risk Analysis Report for Apples from New Zealand* has been circulated so stakeholders can review the report, be consulted about its content and provide comments and submissions, particularly on scientific and technical issues.

Biosecurity Australia is providing all interested stakeholders with an extended comment period that will close on 30 March 2006. This allows 120 days for stakeholders to submit comments, compared with the usual period of 60 days.

This extended comment period takes account of the need for stakeholders to have sufficient time to absorb and comment on the very substantial and detailed material contained in the report's three volumes.

Biosecurity Australia is also mindful that many stakeholders are engaged in fruit harvesting during this time in both Australia and New Zealand. Biosecurity Australia also wants to ensure that stakeholders are not disadvantaged as a result of the seasonal holidays in both countries.

Biosecurity Australia and the IRA team have given careful consideration to some 200 submissions received on the previous draft report issued in 2004. The release of today's draft report also takes account of recommendations issued by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee, which was finalised in March 2005.

The release of the report also gives effect to a commitment by the Australian Government in late 2004 that Biosecurity Australia would review and re-issue a draft report.

The draft IRA report is not a decision to allow the importation of apples from New Zealand. It is a draft report seeking comment from all interested stakeholders. The import risk analysis is concerned not just with the disease of fire blight, but also with a range of other quarantine pests and diseases that are present in New Zealand, such as European canker and apple leaf curling midge.

All submissions received on this draft IRA report will be taken into account by Biosecurity Australia before being reviewed by an Eminent Scientists Group. A final IRA report, together with recommendations for a quarantine policy determination, will then be provided to Australia's Director of Quarantine for consideration.

The *Revised Draft Import Risk Analysis Report for Apples from New Zealand* is available via the Biosecurity Australia website www.BiosecurityAustralia.gov.au.

Media contact: John Wilson, Biosecurity Australia, 02 6272 3811

- Explains how the information should be interpreted
- Less clear on why and on the level of assistance is available to the reader
- Less clear as to what actions are being requested

Voice

- “stakeholders can review the report, be consulted about its content and provide comment and submission, particularly on scientific and technical issues”
- “[undertaking] science-based risk analyses to assess the quarantine risks associated with applications to important agricultural and other commodities to Australia.”
- “science-based”, “scientific”, “technical”
- “careful consideration”
- “[taking] account of”
- “taken into account by Biosecurity Australia before being reviewed by an Eminent Scientists Group”

Voice

- “substantial and detailed”
- “The draft IRA is not a decision to allow the importation of apples from New Zealand”
- “This extended comment period takes account of the need for stakeholders to have sufficient time to absorb and comment on the substantial and detailed material contained in the report’s three volumes... Biosecurity Australia is also mindful that many stakeholders are engaged in fruit harvesting during this time in both Australia and New Zealand... [and] wants to ensure that stakeholders are not disadvantaged as a result of the seasonal holidays in both countries.”

How is risk communicated?

- Identifying the concept of risk requires first identifying the object or activity that carries the risk
- AQIS – not the actual plant or animal materials
 - Not the actual plant or animal materials
 - Not the person carrying those materials
 - Not the act of bringing them to Australia
 - Is the act of not declaring

How is risk communicated?

- The AQIS text: risk is conceptualised in absolute terms:
- Without declaration or disposal, risk exists and negative consequences are possible;
- With declaration or disposal, risk disappears and, with it, so too the consequences.
- The act of declaration thereby becomes akin to the act of absolution.

How is risk communicated?

- BA text: Conflates the principle risk activity with “an application from New Zealand to export apples to Australia”, rather than with the actual act of exporting apples.
- Shifting the risky activity onto an essentially bureaucratic task
- BA text: No mention of consequence

How is risk communicated?

- AQIS : risk associated with incoming passengers – absolute terms
- BA : “very low” and “variable”
- “[assisting] in the reduction of quarantine risk to a very low level,…”
- “...consistent with Australia’s conservative approach to quarantine.”

How is risk communicated?

- How risk itself is characterised in the two documents is clear: in one, risk is absolute; in the other, risk is seen to be acceptable at “very low levels” and, indeed, capable of being managed to maintain low levels.
- Simple message: present (bad); absent (good). VS
Complex message: allowable and subjective.
- Audience resistance to the complex message.

How is risk communicated?

- The way in which risk is communicated in these texts points to an area of inconsistency in the way in which the concept of biosecurity may be understood or misunderstood by the public, and suggests an important area of opportunity for improving biosecurity communication in the future.