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Quarantine and Inspection Services

John Landos

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Quarantine and Inspection Services

Case study presentation

JOHN LANDOS

My company commenced operations in 1996 following my retirement from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service where from 1990-1994 I held the position of head of Australia's animal and plant quarantine service. One might think my qualifications are in science but in fact they are in economics, although I have a very healthy respect for scientists built into my psyche.

Over the past five years the company has undertaken a wide range of quarantine and food regulatory assignments throughout Asia and the Pacific, including:

- Developing the content of a web site which was subsequently translated into Bahasa, and delivering training to prospective Indonesian food exporters and relevant Government officials on the quarantine and imported food requirements for accessing Australia's food market;
- Advising the Lao PDR Government on the steps that need to be taken in relation to the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement in order to gain accession to the WTO; and
- Advising thirteen Pacific Forum Island Countries of steps they need to consider in order to improve the operation of their quarantine services both to assist subsistence and cash crop growers and to facilitate exports of primary products.

MR JOHN LANDOS, Principal, Quarantine and Inspection Resources Pty Ltd, Canberra, successfully established his specialist consulting company in 1996. The company has undertaken a wide range of assignments both within Australia and the neighbouring Pacific and Asian regions.

From 1982 John held a range of Senior Executive Service positions with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and its predecessor organisations. In the early 1980s he contributed strongly to re-establishing the integrity of Australia's meat export inspection and certification system with the USA in the light of the kangaroo meat substitution incidents and subsequent Royal Commission.

From 1990 to 1994 John was head of Australia's Animal and Plant Quarantine Service, and in that capacity he was responsible for all policy, operational and management aspects of the Service.

The Indonesian project resulted from problems Indonesian food exporters were having in accessing the Australian market. Typically they were running into problems with Holding Orders, which are part of the mechanism that Australia uses to ensure that imported foods meet the labelling and food standards provisions of our Food Standards Code. The issue of a 'Holding Order' in respect of a particular product in practice meant delay, cost and at times total destruction of product. There was considerable feeling from Indonesian food exporters that Holding Orders were just another trade barrier, and this feeling was regularly conveyed in Government-to-Government meetings through to Ministerial level.

In reality most of the difficulties were labelling problems that could have been easily avoided given the manufacturer understood the provisions of the Australian Food Standards Code.

To help overcome these problems I set out to develop the content for web site that would contain a plain English explanation of Australian

quarantine and imported food requirements. This content was then translated into Bahasa and mounted on the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA) web site (<http://www.affa.gov.au/>). Arrangements were then made for a one-week training course to be delivered to Ministry of Agriculture officials and private sector representatives in Jakarta. Subsequently via the Indonesia Australia Specialised Training Program an additional training course of two weeks was held in Jakarta, this one attracting Ministry of Industry and Trade officials as well as representatives of manufacturers.

The courses were well received and subsequent feedback through Ministerial meetings has been very positive; a further course was delivered in August 2001. This particular project has contributed in a substantive manner to improving the understanding of key Indonesian officials and representatives of the manufacturing sector of the underlying reasons for Australia maintaining strong quarantine and food safety controls. In doing so it has provided Indonesian food and forestry products exporters with the opportunity to improve their access to the Australian market. It is also significant that rural producers have a part in this growth as they are supplying the raw ingredients for food manufacturers.

The Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) project was a very different one from the Indonesian one. Indonesia is a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) whereas Lao PDR is not, but like its near neighbour Vietnam it is now seeking accession as it can see substantive benefits arising from increased trade with other countries via membership of the WTO.

The difficulties in gaining WTO accession for Lao PDR are quite similar to those of many developing countries. Typically their agricultural infrastructure, in particular the animal/plant health and quarantine infrastructure, is not strong, and my role was to advise on how best to strengthen this infrastructure so as have the capacity to meet the requirements of the WTO sanitary and phytosanitary agreement (SPS). They have a much more difficult task to maintain a favourable animal and plant health status than, for example, does Australia, as Lao PDR is a nation with land borders with five other countries: Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, China and Thailand.

The WTO SPS agreement is a particularly daunting agreement for developing countries as it effectively requires a level of animal and plant health infrastructure that will take some time to build. However, while this particular project was funded by UNDP, there are other agencies with a substantive presence in Lao PDR which are sympathetic to the objective of WTO accession, and capable of assisting in the process required to provide the necessary underpinning.

We have left in Lao PDR a blueprint which, if followed, will lead to a substantive strengthening of animal and plant health infrastructure. This in turn will impact positively on poor rural producers by enabling them to tap into growing domestic and international markets.

Typically the countries I have worked in are developing countries, with much of the population dependent on subsistence or cash cropping. Most of these countries have been slow to recognise the importance of quarantine in its broadest sense as a subset of animal and plant health. More importantly, they have been slow to recognise the economic and social benefits which a favourable animal and plant health status can offer.

Even development assistance agencies have been slow to come to terms with the need for developing countries to have appropriate animal and plant health infrastructural arrangements in place, prior to embarking on major rural development projects. There are signs that this is changing, however, as we see agricultural production and trade becoming of increasing interest to developing countries. Some of course have recently seen the impact of exotic pest and disease incursions that have impacted heavily on their subsistence and cash crop farming:

- Samoa's taro production was around 37 000 tonnes in 1993 and zero the following year due to the introduction of the then exotic taro leaf blight;
- Palau is now attempting to raise about AUD \$2 million in order to attempt to eradicate oriental fruit fly, a recent introduction and one that effectively means that traditional fruits such as mango can be produced only if individual fruits are wrapped in paper.

In broad terms the assignments I have undertaken have stimulated:

- Examination of how animal/plant health and quarantine are integrated into the structure of the Ministry of Agriculture: that is the institutional arrangements;
- An upgrading of animal and plant health and an understanding of the links that these functions should have with subsistence and cash crop farmers;
- Closer links between extension services and plant/animal health and quarantine;
- The potential use of village gardeners in a passive surveillance capacity;
- The use of information available on the Internet to facilitate trade and maintain a favourable animal and plant health status; and
- Providing trade policy officers with a better understanding of how animal and plant health are integral to market access.

The benefits that have flowed or will flow to these countries include:

- Fewer pest and disease concerns for subsistence and cash crop farmers, and less reliance on agricultural chemicals;
- Encouragement of exporters of agricultural products to establish and maintain closer links with scientists and technical officers responsible for seeking market access;
- Quarantine generally gaining a higher profile amongst key policy makers; and
- An improved understanding by nationals travelling overseas of the need to observe quarantine requirements.

The benefits to Australia are also significant:

- Many of the countries either have direct or near-direct air links with Australia. Improving their animal/plant health status reduces our risk of an unwanted exotic pest or disease incursion;
- An improved understanding amongst key policy makers as to the reasons behind Australia's quarantine and food safety requirements;
- An increasing awareness of the essentiality of sound institutional arrangements in the areas of animal and plant health, in the context of development assistance projects in the agricultural area; and
- Many of the projects designed to assist Asian countries will provide opportunities for Australian animal and plant health specialists to gain experience in the diagnosis and management of serious pest and diseases which may well be exotic to Australia today, but no guarantee is possible that this will be the case tomorrow.

I will close with a mention of pitfalls associated with our efforts to improve the livelihood of the rural poor. In the early 1970s my position as an organisational development officer with the then Public Service Board taught me the value of sound organisational arrangements and a merit-based Public Service. These are matters we almost take for granted in Australia. In the context of developing countries and their capacity to improve their agricultural sector, sound organisational or institutional arrangements and a merit-based Public Service are absolutely essential.