



REVIEW OF AVA'S FOOD SAFETY & BIOSECURITY PROGRAMMES – 4TH INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS (IAC) MEETING

AVA's International Advisory Committee of Experts (IAC) has concluded its fourth review of AVA's food safety and biosecurity programmes. The review took place on 20 and 21 August 2008 and considered a range of issues including AVA's risk management approach to the control of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) or bird flu, rabies and plant pests and diseases. The IAC also considered AVA's policies and plans in ensuring food safety for processed food as well as fast-tracking approval for import of gourmet meat products.

Findings and Recommendations of the IAC

2 The IAC concluded that AVA's food safety and biosecurity systems continued to be amongst the best in the world, and that the approaches adopted were top class. The IAC were pleased to note that since 2002, AVA had continued to strengthen and improve its approaches in a range of areas including:

- i) risk analysis and risk management; and offshore work
- ii) epidemiology and surveillance;
- iii) laboratory approaches;
- iv) emergency preparedness and methodologies for emergency management;

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- v) staff training, and
- vi) communications and scientific publications

3 The IAC commended AVA on its progressive shift from a zero or negligible risk approach to a science-based managed risk approach. This has contributed to AVA's efforts to enhance supply resilience by allowing food to be sourced from more countries, including areas where notifiable diseases are endemic. This is done through judicious application of appropriate risk mitigating measures, such as regionalisation and compartmentalization, to ensure that food safety is not compromised.

4 In particular, the IAC was impressed with AVA's efforts to keep out bird flu and supported its enhanced measures of biosegregation and pre-export requirements for ducks, ornamental and pet birds, and limits for backyard chickens. The IAC also lauded AVA for its role in the Kepri assistance programme to help maintain Kepri as a HPAI-controlled zone. This not only helps other countries but also improves Singapore's biosecurity protection.

5 The IAC gave support to AVA's policies to enhance food safety for processed food; plans to manage the risk of importing gourmet meat products; strategies for rabies prevention; quarantine policies for dogs and cats; and monitoring and surveillance programme for plant health. The IAC also gave valuable feedback on how these policies and approaches can be further strengthened.

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6 The IAC strongly encouraged AVA to further develop and enhance its risk-based approaches given the increasing global risk of emerging and re-emerging diseases and foodborne pathogens, and the need to expand Singapore's sources of food supply. At the same time, the IAC urged AVA to continue to engage the industry and consumers to ensure that they play their part in complementing the Government's efforts in managing food safety and biosecurity risks.

7 The IAC also encouraged AVA to focus on specific areas such as assuming a leadership role in regional activities, enhancing its approach to risk analysis and auditing capabilities, as well as improving staff competencies through training and practical experience.

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ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

AVA's International Advisory Committee of Experts (IAC) comprises experts in the fields of veterinary epidemiology, food safety and hygiene, biosecurity, phytosanitary and plant pathology, from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

2 The first IAC review was conducted in 2002 with the emphasis on AVA's integrated approach to food safety, while the second review, which took place in 2003, focused on AVA's biosecurity programmes on food safety as well as animal and plant health. The third IAC review conducted in 2005 considered AVA's risk management approaches towards Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE or mad cow disease), Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI or bird flu), Nipah virus and Salmonella Enteritidis. The IAC was impressed with AVA's systems and approaches during the first three reviews and the current review builds on the knowledge gained during the previous meetings.

3 The four-member team of experts who undertook the fourth review are:

Chairman:

- i. Dr Gardner Murray
Adviser to the Australian Government Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry;

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Members:

- ii. Dr Thomas Ksiazek
Chief, Special Pathogens Branch, Division of Viral and Rickettsial
Diseases, National Center for Infectious Diseases
Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta, USA;

- iii. Professor Dirk Pfeiffer
Head, Veterinary Epidemiology Division
Royal Veterinary College, University of London & Visiting
Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical
Medicine, UK; and

- iv. Mr Robert Griffin
Director, Plant Epidemiology and Risk Analysis Laboratory
Center for Plant Health Science and Technology,
US Department of Agriculture.

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