

Quarantine and cargo

What's in the box?



More than a million containers arrive in Australia each year. We need to make sure they are not carrying pests, weeds or diseases.

More than a million containers of cargo arrive in Australia each year from all over the world. Any could potentially introduce an exotic pest, disease or weed.

Quarantine officers check cargo entering Australia by sea and air. This might mean inspecting anything from a crate of cricket bats, to spare tyres for a jumbo jet.

From the biggest shipload of grain to the smallest pack of seeds, officers check if there's a chance the goods could be bringing in a problem.

It's not just the goods themselves that need to be checked but also the containers they come in.

Last year Quarantine officers checked the outside of more than 1.5 million shipping containers. If you stacked these containers side by side, the line would stretch all the way from Canberra to north Queensland.



Staff from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service check the manifests for a shipment of cargo.

Safe to eat

Quarantine inspectors need to make sure all imported foods are safe to eat and do not carry any exotic hitch-hikers. This involves checking the list of ingredients on the label as well as chemical testing of some food items. These checks allow us to make sure all food Australia imports meets the same standard as the food grown in our own country.



Food imported to Australia is checked to make sure that it's pest free.

Word wise

Cargo: goods carried from place to place, by air, sea or land.

Import: to bring in from another country. Some examples of food we import to Australia are chocolates from Switzerland and Belgium, and sauces and curry pastes from Southeast Asian countries like Thailand.

Export: to send to another country. Some examples of food we export from Australia are wheat, beef and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Manifest: a detailed list of the specific contents of a shipment of cargo.

Hull: the ship's hull is the frame or body. Quarantine inspection of the hull refers to checking the outside of the ship, for any marine organisms that could have attached themselves during the journey. Ships need to provide evidence that their hulls are clean, before they enter Australian waters.

Stowaway alert

Here are three pests that can be found stowing on or in cargo containers, and that we definitely don't want getting into Australia.

1. Cereal killer

Not quite *serial* killer, but nearly as bad ... khapra beetles devour stored grains and cereals. From their native home in India the beetles have spread – mostly through shipping and trade – to southern Asia, the Middle East and north Africa. Australia exports billions of dollars worth of grain and plant products each year to more than 50 different countries, and our trade partners will refuse grain that contains pests like the khapra beetle. So this pest is one we definitely don't want.



Larvae of the Khapra beetle - a very serious pest of stored grains.

2. Trail of destruction

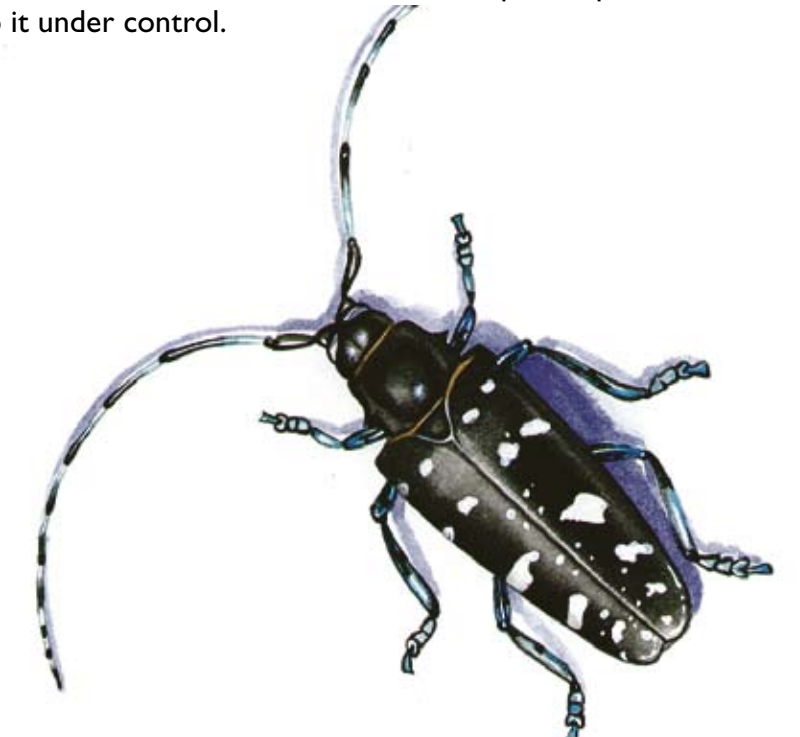
The giant African snail can grow to over 30cm in length, eat over 500 different species of plants and can lay more than a thousand eggs each year! AQIS finds over 30 of these slimy hitchhikers on cargo every year, but fortunately not one has made our country their new home.



Giant African snail can reach the size of a football, and has an appetite to match its size.

3. Bored to death

If Australia didn't have quarantine inspections and treatments for incoming cargo, the Asian longhorn beetle would almost certainly get into the country on wooden pallets used for packing. This pest bores holes in timber, and if it got in it could attack our trees. Since this pest got into the United States, authorities there have had to kill thousands of parkland and street trees, and create special quarantine zones, to keep it under control.



The Asian longhorn beetle eats and lives in wood, and is one reason why Australia keeps a close eye on wooden packaging materials like pallets.

See pages 8 and 9 for other examples of pests we want to keep out of Australia.

Activities

- Have a look in your cupboard at home and see how many imported foods you can find. Remember, if it's imported it's been checked by AQIS.
- See if you can find an ordinary snail, and measure it to see how big it is (don't let it get away though!) How many of these ordinary snails would it take to match a 30cm Giant African Snail?

