**Budgerigar Council of Victoria**

**Comments on the potential importation of Psittacine birds into Australia**

**11th September, 2020.**

* **The BCV believes that the importation of Budgerigars into Australia is a very important matter for its members and the general bird loving community.**
* **There are potential animal welfare concerns at all stages of the importation process. Animal Welfare is one of the highest priorities for the BCV.**
* **The BCV will endeavour to keep members and other interest groups up to date with the enormously complex matter of importation. There are still many questions for which we have no answers. As information comes to hand it will be shared with members and others.**
* **The government veterinarians have asked for commentary on the Draft Importation Review. As one of the peak bodies for psittacines in Australia, the BCV felt it would be irresponsible not to obtain independent specialist advice on the draft proposal which is a very technical paper.**

**Background.** The DAWR (Department of Water and Agricultural Resources) initiated a review of the importation conditions for psittacine birds following the suspension of imports in 1995. This review is now reaching it final phase with DAWR releasing the draft import conditions for comment. The deadline for comments on the draft is 19th September. Following this, DAWR will review the submissions and provided there are no impassable objections, they will release a new approved set of importation conditions for psittacine birds.

There are currently many rumours and stories circulating as well as some ill-informed commentary on various social media platforms. The aim of this document is to provide some facts for our members pertaining to potential importations and to address the “fake news” currently circulating.

**What are Psittacine birds?** Psittacine refers to the broader parrot family and this is certainly not limited to but includes budgerigars

**DAWR have established slightly less onerous conditions for “Pet” birds than “Aviary” birds. What is the definition of a Pet bird and an Aviary bird?**

* “Pet Birds” are household pet psittacine birds, with owners immigrating to Australia to take up residence. These birds must have been owned by, and in the possession of their owners for at least one year immediately preceding pre-export quarantine. There will be a limit of two birds per person immigrating to Australia.
* Aviary psittacine birds including birds kept for hobby purposes or exhibition, in zoos, wildlife parks and conservation programs, birds in breeding centres and private collections, and birds purchased from overseas. There will be no limit imposed on the number of birds imported under this category.

**What does the importation process look like?** DAWR have provided the following information:

* Imports will be permitted from countries that have been approved by the department as having satisfactory animal health services, providing a high level of assurance in the - treatment, management and health status of animals exported to Australia.
* *It should be noted that the document refers to a number of countries that are permissible for the importation of Pet birds, however it is silent on countries acceptable for aviary birds.*
* A quarantine period in the originating country of approximately 30 or 35 days will apply.
* All imported birds be subject to a range of tests for diseases of biosecurity concern
* Birds must have a unique identifier, such as a solid ring or microchip, both prior to and upon arrival in Australia.
* Aviary psittacine birds undergo post-entry quarantine at the Mickleham facility in a Biosecurity Containment Level 3 BC3 live bird room for approximately 15 days.
* Approximately 500 birds can be held in a Level 3 BC3 live bird room at the Mickleham facility.

**What countries can “PET” birds be imported from?** Countries with a history of compliant trade in relevant avian commodities with Australia will be approved for the export of household pet psittacine birds without the need for further assessment. These countries are Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, The Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States. Other countries seeking to export household pet psittacines, **and any country seeking to export aviary psittacines will require assessment and approval before trade commences.** Details of this process are provided in the draft review report.

To-date the department has provided no details on the costing for any aspect of the process (quarantine overseas and in Australia, flights, ground transport, health testing, etc). The Department is very clear that all the associated risks of importation birds will be held by the importer.

**Has Council commissioned an independent review of the draft conditions?** Yes, Council have commissioned an independent Avian Veterinarian the review the conditions on behalf of the hobby. Council were concerned about their ability to prepare a submission that could address the following statement that can be found in the document <http://www.bcv.asn.au/uploads/8/3/6/0/83603870/2020-a04-draft-psittacine-birds-report.pdf>

“We invite comments on technical aspects of the risk assessment and proposed biosecurity measures. In particular, any comments on the appropriateness of the biosecurity measures and any other measures that would provide equivalent risk management outcomes. Comments should include supporting scientific evidence.”

**Why is the BCV spending members funds on something that will only benefit a select section of the hobby?** The BCV understands some of issues from the 1990 importations syndicates where animal welfare matters could have been managed better. Furthermore, the BCV would not like to see its members birds be subjected to treatments that may cause lasting infertility and or breeding issues. While pet birds are a real focus for DAWR imports, our budgerigars are purchased with the expectation of breeding.

The BCV expects many of its members will jump into importation not realising the pitfalls and for that reason it would be irresponsible if the BCV decided to do nothing and fail to protect its members and their investments. Notwithstanding the real animal welfare matters that need to be carefully managed.

**Did the BCV or the ANBC ask DAWR to open the borders to importations?** No, neither organisation approached DAWR and asked them to commence this review.

**Did individual BCV councillors ask DAWR to open the borders to importations?** None of the current councillors have approached DAWR and asked them to commence this review. As this review commenced some time ago, the current council cannot speak for the actions of previous council members.

**Are imports likely to re-commence?** Provided there are no major technical objections (disease control measures) to the draft document that are supported by strong evidence, then it is likely that imports will re-commence.

**When will importation commence?** That is still to be determined by DAWR but a likely time frame is 18 to 24 months. One should note this review commenced in 1995, and this paper has been finally produced in 2020.

**Does the BCV support the re-introduction of imports?** The BCV recognises that there are differing views on this subject amongst the membership and as such, does not have a view on the reintroduction of imports.

**Does the BCV have concerns around the re-introduction of imports?** Based on experience during the previous importation period, the BCV has serious concerns about the potential impact on membership and participation with the re-introduction of imports.

**Can the BCV or the ANBC stop the development of these import conditions?** No. The only objections that can now be made can only be of a technical (disease mitigation / risk) nature.

**What will the BCV do to try and maintain membership after the reintroduction of imports?** Membership is the highest priority for the BCV.Once all the relevant information regarding the sourcing of birds overseas and the importation process and cost is known, the BCV will be working on a plan to try and make imported birds accessible to any interested members.

**Have any BCV Councillors formed a syndicate to import birds?** No. Councillors have not formed syndicates at this point in time. There are no rules prohibiting Councillors forming syndicates with other Councillors or with anybody in the hobby for that matter.

**What is the cost of the independent avian veterinarian’s review?** The estimate of this review is between $4,500 and $6,000 and we have engaged Dr Hamish Baron BVSc (Hons) MANZCVS (Avian Medicine and Surgery) to complete the review on our behalf.

**Has the BCV asked the ANBC to pay for this review?** Yes, however if the ANBC declines to contribute to the cost, the review has already been commissioned and the BCV will fund it.

The BCV will keep its members up to date on importation matters as they are communicated by DAWR. We will be making a submission back to DAWR and if there are other points that members wish to raise please feel free to write to our BCV Secretary.

We hope that this information is useful and standby for future updates.