



Khapra beetle in imported goods

Information for affected plant-based industries

Khapra beetle is an exotic pest. If it were to establish in Australia it would pose a serious threat to many of our food and other plant-based agricultural industries. Khapra beetle poses no immediate risk to human health or animals.

Situation

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) is responding to detections of khapra beetle in the packaging of imported fridges and highchairs. Detections of the insect have been made at multiple sites across Australia.

In August 2020 khapra beetle was detected in the packaging of a fridge, purchased by a resident in Canberra. DAWE traced the fridge back to a consignment of 76 fridges that had been imported in one shipping container. The fridges were distributed to retail stores across NSW and the ACT, owned by the one retailer.



In October, 320 highchairs were imported in a separate infested shipping container. The highchairs in this consignment were distributed nationally to 57 retail stores (owned by the one company) and two distribution/handling facilities.

DAWE has worked closely with the two retailers which imported the fridges and highchairs. It has located and removed the fridges, and the NSW Department of Primary Industries is currently monitoring these sites to ensure that the insect is absent.

All highchairs that have been located have been removed and fumigated. Residences with an affected highchair are being inspected and treated, regardless of whether khapra beetle is found. These activities are now nearing completion. Where khapra beetle has been detected in retail outlets or residences, the infestation has occurred in the packaging, rather than the product itself.

As DAWE finalises its emergency containment and control activities for the fridges and highchairs, the follow-up inspections and surveillance will transition to the state and territory departments responsible for biosecurity. A large number of waste management sites have been identified across Australia as possibly having received infested product packaging. State biosecurity officers will inspect and conduct risk assessments of these sites. If any khapra beetles are detected, the site may be subject to treatment, trapping and ongoing surveillance.

Residences and waste management facilities located in, and close to rural areas have been prioritised for inspection and treatment.



Shipping container tracing

DAWE traced the movement of both infested containers. The container carrying the fridges was empty when it left Australia. The container that carried the highchairs was re-loaded in Melbourne with bagged malt, and shipped to an Approved Arrangement in Kewdale, Western Australia. (An Approved Arrangement is a premise that has been approved by DAWE to receive and inspect imported goods for biosecurity risks).

Officers from DAWE inspected the premises of the Approved Arrangement. The malt was isolated, securely wrapped, fumigated and the premises has also been treated. Traps have been set at the site and the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is conducting the follow-up surveillance activities. The container that carried the barley malt has since left Australia.

DAWE is confident that khapra beetle has been contained to the imported goods and their packaging. **There is no evidence of khapra beetle being detected in rural production areas.**

Strengthening biosecurity at the border

A range of urgent measures are being developed for a phased approach, to better safeguard Australia from khapra beetle. These include stricter import conditions for high-risk goods and containers.

High-risk plant products are defined as products that khapra beetle is known to eat and infest. Some examples include rice, chickpeas, wheat and safflower seed. To address the associated khapra risk, these plant products were restricted from entering Australia where they were part of unaccompanied personal effects or in low value, non-commercial freight from 3 September 2020. Shortly after on 15 October, this restriction was extended to baggage carried by international travellers, and mail articles.

Stringent measures for commercial import pathways are expected to commence in mid-late 2021 and will include revised phytosanitary certification and treatment requirements for high-risk plant and other risk plant products, as well as seeds for sowing.

In addition, on 29 December 2020, Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud announced a \$14.5 million investment to strengthen biosecurity measures at the border. This new funding will provide for:

- faster containerised cargo inspections and increased surveillance
- improved sample collection, diagnostic resources and equipment and treatment
- enhancement of electronic systems.

These improvements will support the next phases of the khapra beetle measures, including new measures to address the risk of khapra beetle hitchhiking in sea containers.

The new measures for sea containers will be implemented in two phases, with the initial focus on highest risk containers (expected to commence in early April 2021) with additional measures on a broader range of containers expected to commence in late 2021.

Further information about the khapra measures for containers and high-risk plant products is available on the [DAWE website \(awe.gov.au\)](http://awe.gov.au).

DAWE is working with national and international government authorities, national plant protection organisations, and peak industry bodies to investigate and identify global supply chain solutions to strengthen Australia's response to the emerging khapra beetle risk.



About khapra beetle

- Khapra beetle is exotic to Australia and is rated as the world's second most damaging plant pest. If it were to establish here it would pose a serious threat to many of Australia's plant industries.
- Worldwide, khapra beetle has been recorded infesting more than 100 commodities including most dried plant products. It has also been detected as a hitchhiker pest on a wide range of cargo including plastic beads, nuts and bolts, timber doors and as a contaminant in shipping containers.
- Khapra beetles feed on dried plant and animal products with a preference for grain and stored products. Larvae can survive dormant for up to eight years in varied conditions.
- Adult beetles are reddish-brown, oval in shape and are about 1.6 to 3 mm long. They are covered in fine hairs that can rub off leaving the beetle shiny in appearance. Adult females lay 50 to 100 eggs at a time, which can produce up to nine generations a year.
- Larvae are typically very hairy, forming distinctive tufts over the body. Longer hairs at the end of the body look like a short tail and range in size from 1.6 to 4.5 mm long. They are pale yellow when small and become golden-brown when they grow. The larvae go through up to nine moulting stages, leaving behind numerous cast skins.
- Adult beetles do not fly despite having wings; however, they can walk.
- Khapra beetle is native to India but has spread to many parts of Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.



The tiny adult Khapra beetle (top) and juvenile larvae (bottom) pictured on grains of rice.

Report sightings

If you suspect that you have seen khapra beetles or their larvae, report it to the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline** on **1800 084 881**. This will put you in contact with your local department responsible for biosecurity.

If you require further information about the response to khapra beetle phone your state or territory department of agriculture or primary industries.



Response arrangements

The fridge and highchair response activities are underpinned by nationally agreed response plans which will be reviewed in March 2021. The plans were developed by the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP) and endorsed by the National Management Group (NMG).

The CCEPP provides technical and scientific advice in response to exotic plant pest and disease outbreaks. The committee is chaired by Australia's Chief Plant Protection Officer and comprises the Chief Plant Health Managers from each state and territory, other specialists from government, Plant Health Australia, and representatives from affected industries.

The NMG consists of chief executive officers from government agencies responsible for agriculture and affected industry organisations. It is chaired by the Secretary of DAWE. Plant Health Australia (PHA) is a non-voting member.

NMG makes decisions on whether to support national eradication programs for pest or disease outbreaks under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD). NMG considers recommendations provided by the CCEPP before making decisions on whether a pest or disease is technically feasible to eradicate.

The EPPRD is a formal legally binding agreement between PHA, the Australian, state and territory governments, and national plant industry bodies representing specific cropping sectors. The Deed covers the management and funding of nationally agreed responses to emergency plant pests.

EPPRD signatories for the khapra beetle responses are: *Almond Board of Australia, Australian Walnut Industry Association, Cotton Australia, Dried Fruits Australia, Grain Producers Australia, Pistachio Growers Association and Ricegrowers' Association of Australia.*

More information about the national response arrangements for exotic pests and diseases is at outbreak.gov.au.