final report

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National standardised testing of meat inspection competency and currency

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2   Background

Meat Inspection and quality assurance training is delivered in all the States of Australia and more than 15 Training Organisations are registered to deliver these nationally accredited courses. It is therefore essential that there is consistency between these training providers so that both regulators and processors have confidence in the qualifications.

Since 1998 there has been one national set of qualifications for meat inspection and QA. This improved the situation and the addition of nationally available training materials has also increased the consistency in delivery.

In order to further improve the consistency in training outcomes MINTRAC has developed an "exam generator" which contains a data base of questions on meat inspection and QA.

The exam generator enables an examiner to develop a unique examination paper for a range of meat inspection and QA Units. The can be almost instantly printed from the national data base of questions. These questions can be approved, edited and added to by a select group of technical experts at any time.

Because many of the meat inspection and QA students live in regional or rural Australia a significant number undertake training by distance or mixed mode delivery. This requires flexibility in the formulation of examination papers as students often undertake these exams at different times, dates and locations. The exam generator caters for this by allowing examiners to readily prepare new and different exam papers easily.

In addition international reviewers are also interested in the link between the meat industry regulators and the assessment process of meat inspection students. This is a significant issue because AQIS is one of the few regulators in the meat export world that does not have a direct input into the assessment of students undertaking meat inspector training. Increasingly world wide regulators are focusing on the quality of the training and assessment for meat inspection staff.

This exam generator provides an opportunity for AQIS to demonstrate its involvement in the assessment process given the review and direct editing rights that they have with this data base.

For the companies that employ meat inspectors and quality assurance officers there has been increased pressure from regulators and customers to provide evidence of the currency of their employees' knowledge. This exam generator represents a simple solution for both companies and individuals to provide proof of currency.

3   Final on-line and disc-based resource product

The exam generator software has now been built, reviewed by AQIS and trialed by four Registered Training Organizations around Australia. In addition a version of the software has been developed which will enable students to revise by accessing the huge data base of questions and developing their own trial "exam papers".

The RTOs will be able to load the software on their own servers and make the materials available to their students either on disc or on line. Likewise exam papers that are developed by RTOs can be e-mailed to students for them to complete under supervision as part of the overall assessment process.

The database was made possible by the combined efforts of industry, trainers and technical experts such as veterinary officers who contributed questions and photographic material.

This collaboration has generated significant interest in the examination process but additionally people are starting to see the image component of the data base as the basis of a repository for photographs of pathology. This in turn can easily be turned into an online library of conditions which could be a great resource for meat safety field staff.

AQIS nominated Dr Albert Cobb (a Field Operations Manager) as the technical expert to review the data base and his contributions and observations were extremely valuable.

The student version was developed after MINTRAC received suggestions from RTOs post the trial and consultation process. This student version will be a tremendous resource for students studying in this field.

The data base which consists of 300 true / false questions, 300 image questions, 300 short answer questions and 100 multiple questions has been vetted and reviewed by AQIS, RTOs and technical experts. This data base can be expanded at any time and already another 200 images and 200 questions have been submitted for review and addition to the national data base. The Beta version of the software is attached to this report for MLA approval.

This version will then be demonstrated and trialed at all the up-coming training managers meetings before the final version will be released at the beginning of June 2008.

4   Outcomes of three training workshops

To date there have been three workshops to demonstrate and trial the software. The first workshop was at the national training conference in Melbourne in March 2008 where the product was released to the industry as a whole and representatives from training organizations, industry and the regulatory bodies saw the software demonstrated. The second and third demonstrations were conducted in conjunction with Training Manager Network meetings in NSW and Victoria.

In addition the software has been demonstrated to staff at three TAFE Colleges on campus. The feedback from RTO staff has been incorporated into the final version of the software.

5   Implementation plan

The RTOs delivering QA and Meat Inspection training are eager to implement the use of the new software and the release version will be on sale when the final workshop is completed in May 2008.

MINTRAC intends to continue to update the data base on an annual basis as part of its Meat Inspection and QA Network activities.

6   Outstanding work

The following work has to be completed before this project is finalised

- o   workshops in 3 States delivered to RTOs on the use of the exam generator
- o   feedback where relevant incorporated any "bugs" rectified
- o   additional questions loaded into data base