Guide to the Export Readiness Checklist

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Are you Export Ready?

The Guide to the Export Readiness Checklist

Exporting your vegetables does not need to be a daunting task. The whole process can be made much simpler by understanding your own business goals, your export opportunities and the relevant export requirements.

After receiving an enquiry from an overseas customer, you must ensure that ALL parts of your business are ‘export ready’. Having export sales does not necessarily mean that the correct foundation for a successful vegetable exporting business has been laid.

If you are thinking about exporting vegetables you can use the Export Readiness Checklist as a tool to see if your business is export ready. The Export Readiness Checklist can be downloaded at www.ausveg.com.au/export.

This Guide to the Export Readiness Checklist is here to assist you complete the Export Readiness Checklist and provide additional information to assist you to become export ready. Each section of the Export Readiness Checklist has a corresponding section in the Guide to the Export Readiness Checklist. Links to additional resources are also provided should you require further information or assistance.
1. Your Motivation

Understanding why you are exporting is important in determining if you are ready to complete this checklist. If you are planning on incorporating exporting as a long-term operation, you should continue with the checklist.

- Are you planning on exporting strategically?

Guide to Your Motivation

You must first understand your motivation for exporting vegetables before continuing to become ‘export ready’. You must decide how exporting will help you to achieve your long-term business goals. For example, if you export to sell an excess of vegetables in one season, your approach will be different to if you consider export to be central to your future business. In addition to completing the Export Readiness Checklist, you should also prepare an export strategy to give your business the best chance of long-term vegetable export success.

Developing an export strategy for your business is an important part of being a successful exporter. While the Export Readiness Checklist is not a strategy in itself, many parts of the checklist should help inform your export strategy. The key parts of an export strategy are outlined below.

Steps in preparing an export strategy

**Step 1**
Determine the role of export to your business
How does export fit into your long-term business goals?

**Step 2**
Understand your current capabilities
Do your current production practices support export activities?

**Step 3**
Market research
Have you identified and ranked potential export markets for your vegetables?

**Step 4**
Product export strategy
What channels and marketing will support your vegetable exports?

**Step 5**
Detailed action plan
Have you outlined what needs to be done, by who and when?

2. Your Company

Having an established Australian customer base gives potential international customers confidence in your current operations. It allows them to see that you are a reliable supplier. Also, domestic success will help provide you with the necessary cash flow and working capital required to export successfully.

- Are you prepared to make exporting a legitimate and integral part of your business plan? Is management prepared to make a long-term commitment to sustain the company’s export?
- Does your company have a good track record of meeting production/delivery deadlines?
- Does your company have a proven track record competing in the Australian market?

Guide to Your Company

The role of vegetable export in your business

It is important to determine how export fits in your long-term business goals. In order to complete this step you should review your current business, but importantly you should also assess the potential that your business has to create additional value through export. You may like to access professional advice to help with this assessment. Typical questions you may ask yourself in relation to future export are:

- Are you seeking an increase in vegetable profit margins or sales volume?
- Would you like to develop a broader customer base and access new vegetable markets?
- What competitive advantage might your business have in export markets?
- Would you like to make use of excess production capacity?

Meeting production deadlines

The ability to meet production or delivery deadlines is a good indication of the efficiency and effectiveness of your business processes. Reviewing your current business will help you to understand your own capabilities to export and the impact export might have on your existing production. A review of your current vegetable growing business will typically involve an assessment of your:

- On-farm production processes and capacity,
- Off-farm activities such as freight and logistics; and
- Farm management issues such as staff availability and access to finance.

This review will help you identify any improvements that might be necessary to successfully export in the future.

Success in the Australian vegetable market

A review of your vegetable growing business should also consider your success, or otherwise, in the Australian domestic vegetable market. Some questions to consider might be:

- What are the key factors in the success, or otherwise, of your business in domestic markets?
- Is there a particular aspect of your business that provides you with a competitive advantage in domestic markets?
- Are there any strategic partners that contribute to your business success?
3. Your Target Market

Researching a viable market is the first and most vital step in selecting your export destination. Knowing how overseas markets work and who your competitors in the market are will help you price your exports effectively and competitively. Also knowing the necessary requirements for accessing your chosen market are vital as these requirements will affect your export process.

- Have you researched a market that has a demand for your commodity?
- Have you conducted market research on your potential target markets:
  - Religious and cultural practices and sensitivities
  - Customs requirements and quarantine restrictions
  - Trading preferences, payment terms and quotas
  - Licences and specific labelling
  - Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), tariffs, phytosanitary requirements or any other barriers to entry

Guide to Your Target Market

Researching your target market is an essential part of successful exporting. Market research involves finding out important information such as countries that import your commodity, the quantity of produce that will be potentially purchased and how this country does business (e.g. cultural sensitivities).

The first step in market research is to gather the information available on the internet, however you should also seek advice from people with first-hand experience in your target market. The Australian Trade Commission (Austrade), the Australian Government’s trade and investment development agency, is also available to assist businesses access market information and contacts in international markets.

A great place to start your research is online at www.austrade.gov.au. Other useful links for market research are IRIS World and the Asian Development Bank.

Trade agreements, tariffs and quotas

A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) allows for better market access to specific countries, including the removal of importing fees and tariffs. Australia has a number of FTAs with international trading partners, including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and other South-East Asian countries. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website has more information on Australia’s trade agreements.

A Customs tariff is a government levy on commodities entering a country. Tariffs are often used by importing countries to protect their local industry. Quotas may also be part of the entry requirements to your export destination. Quotas limit the imports for a particular product and like tariffs, are often used to protect local industry in the importing country.

It is important to determine if your export destination has tariffs and import quota restrictions on the product you wish to export, as this will affect your vegetable export cost and demand. For more information regarding trade agreements, tariffs and quotas, please refer to the Austrade website.
4. Your Product

Most exporters need to make some alterations to their product in order to prepare it for an overseas market. Required changes may be as simple as different packaging or labelling but could be more complex depending on your market.

- Is your product acceptable to your target market in its current form?
- Do you have a clearly defined selling proposition for your product and can state why overseas competitors should buy from you and not your competitors?

Guide to Your Product

Suitability of product

Your vegetables must be suitable for the market to which you are intending to export. This will depend on your market research, with some relevant questions being:

- What are the packaging requirements of the importing country?
- How long is the shelf life of your vegetables?
- Are different production techniques or extra treatment required for your vegetables?
- Will your vegetables meet the expectation of the international buyers and market?

Your selling proposition

A clearly defined selling proposition, also known as a unique selling point, is the understanding of what differentiates your vegetable products from your competitor’s products. A clearly defined selling proposition must be one that the competition does not or can’t offer. It should be unique in its claim. The selling proposition of Australian vegetables in general is one of premium quality, freshness and safety.
5. Your Logistics

Selecting the correct option of freighting for your business is a high priority and is vital to exporting success. In this decision factors such as price and payment method should be taken into consideration. Not getting your export pricing right can result in losses due to unforeseen costs. Also, chasing outstanding debtors overseas is a difficult task, selecting the right payment option for your business will reduce the risk on non-payments.

- Have you considered the logistical demands of exporting? E.g. where are you in the exporting supply chain?
- Have you investigated physical infrastructure that may limit your export potential? E.g. the location of packing houses and the location of ports
- Have you investigated engaging the services of a sales agent or distributor?
- Have you investigated/hired a potential freight forwarder or customs broker?
- Have you considered the best freight option for you? E.g. Air or Sea?
- Have you determined pricing and understand what costs this pricing should include?
- Do you have an understanding of payment options for international transaction (e.g. Letters of credit, online payments) and managing foreign transactions?

Guide to Your Logistics

Export logistics can be viewed as an extension to your current domestic vegetable growing operation. Understanding where your business is positioned in the exporting supply chain will help you determine what extra steps may be necessary to get your product to its export market. Below is a representation of the basic elements of the exporting supply chain (it may include less or more intermediaries depending on your circumstances). Depending on your business you may be able to control the supply chain yourself, otherwise it will be important to ensure you have arranged the necessary logistical links.

Agents and distributors

Most Australian vegetable growing businesses do not control the entire supply chain and rely on an agent or distributor to facilitate their exporting activities. Agents and distributors have different roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities will also vary according to in which country they are operating. Choosing the right agent or distributor is important because you are relying on their knowledge and expertise in your export market.

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<th>Agents</th>
<th>Distributors</th>
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<td>Do not take ownership of goods</td>
<td>Take ownership of goods and then resell the goods.</td>
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<td>Represent the supplier to the buyer</td>
<td>Add a margin to products on resale.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paid by the exporter based on a commission of sales</td>
<td>Money earned by distributors is higher than that of agents, as distributors carry inventory, extend credit for customers and take on marketing responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The exporter is responsible for invoicing and collecting the payments from their customers.</td>
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Freight forwarders and customs brokers

If you intend to control your own supply chain, however lack the knowledge to get your product to international markets, using a customs broker and/or a freight forwarder is the most efficient way to ship goods. These organisations will have expertise in international freight. When selecting a freight forwarder you should consider their experience in dealing with perishable products.

For more information on finding freight forwarder and customs brokers (as well as other logistics information), one of your best resources is Austrade. A selection of lists is provided below for finding a freight forwarder.

- [Australian Export Online](#)
- [Tradegate](#)
- [International Freight Forwarding Association](#)
- [Australian Federation of International Forwarders](#)
- [Australian Customs and Border Protection Service](#)
- [NSW Government – Checklist for choosing a agent or distributor](#)

International commercial terms (Incoterms)

Incoterms are international rules for interpreting trade terms, effectively acting as a common language for trade. The terms cover things like where goods are to be delivered and whether export tariffs have been paid on goods. Austrade recommends exporters should become familiar with Incoterms. For more details about Incoterms refer to the [International Chamber of Commerce](#) website.

Pricing

In cases where an active international market exists for your product, there will be a clear market price for your product. In some cases there will not be a clear market price and you will have to determine your own price. It is important when considering the price for your product that you also consider the additional costs of export, for example:

- Freight to ports of departure and from ports of arrival (including freight insurance)
- Import duty and taxes
- Customs clearance/broker fees
- Warehouse fees or break-bulk fees (if third party warehouse applies)
- Agent’s commission or importer’s mark-up

Getting Paid

There are several different payment methods available to your business. Some of these are:

- Pre-payment or upfront payment: The buyer pays cash in advance of shipment (uncommon in international trade)
- Letters of credit: The importer’s bank issues a document stating that they will pay the exporter when the terms of the Letter of Credit are fulfilled.
- Documentary collection: Entrusts the handling of your trade documents to your bank.
- Credit terms: Payment will occur after your goods have been shipped.

For more information on each of these methods, see [Austrade](#) and [Export Finance and Insurance Corporation](#) websites.
6. Your Production

One of the fundamental principles of export readiness is understanding that your ability to export is dependent on the availability of your product. If you do not have a yield greater than the demand of your current domestic buyers then it may not be a worthwhile investment to seek overseas orders.

- Can you produce a yield large enough to service your chosen target market?
- Can or are you willing to alter production methods according to particular biosecurity demands of your market?
- Does your product meet government regulations and safety standards in your target market?
- Can you increase production in response to demand? If so, do you have enough trained staff to handle the increased production?

Guide to Your Production

It is important to understand that in most cases, international buyers have specific order quantities that they are required to fill. They are also likely to have seasonal trends in demand that might be different from your current seasonal production. Before engaging in business with a buyer, it is important that you determine the minimum and maximum order requirements, as well as the timing of the orders. At this stage of completing the Export Readiness Checklist, you should be able to compare the order requirements with the capability of your business to fulfil those orders.

In order to maintain a long-term successful relationship with international customers, you must be able to reliably fill orders. The requirements of the importing country may also affect your production methods. The information regarding each market’s importing requirements can be found later in this Guide to the Export Readiness Checklist.
7. Your Marketing

You will need a website and other marketing materials that will help overseas customers be confident in your abilities as a quality producer and reliable supplier. If you do not have overseas business connections then quality marketing materials will help you open doors to new opportunities. You should tailor your material for an export market and focus on commodities that are available for export rather than focusing materials on domestic customers.

☐ Do you have promotional materials suitable for overseas customers such as a website and brochures?
☐ Have you considered the translational of promotional materials into the language that is relevant to your target market?
☐ Are you willing to undertake business trips to the target market in order to promote and market your product, as well as conduct business negotiations?

Guide to Your Marketing

Making a good first impression on a potential vegetable buyer is vital to export success. It is important to be confident, responsive, friendly and professional. In order to make a good impression, it is important to learn about any cultural factors that may influence your ability to export to that market.

Promotional materials

A good website and a promotional brochure are very effective ways to communicate with international vegetable buyers. Your website should be well constructed and easy to navigate, with up to date content. Business cards also make it easy for you to build relationships with vegetable buyers that you meet in person.

Translations

International vegetable buyers will likely speak a language other than English. If this is the case, you will need to consider translating your communication material to the relevant language and hiring the services of an interpreter for personal meetings.

Market Visits

Part of the effective retention and creation of overseas customers is visiting the market to which you are exporting. Building relationships with vegetable buyers should be an important part of your export strategy. Market visits are particularly important early in the export process, as face-to-face meetings are often expected in international markets. For more information regarding visiting your target vegetable market, please refer to the Austrade website.
8. Your Financing

Successful exporters support their overseas partners in a range of ways that include visiting the market. Exploring different funding options available to your business is important in understanding your financial ability to be a reliable exporter.

- Do you have sufficient financial strength and resources to develop overseas markets? This includes financial resources for market visits and the ongoing marketing of your product overseas.
- Have you explored funding options such as the Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) offered by Austrade or any other governmental financial assistance package?

Guide to Your Financing

Financing your export activities will depend on the scale of your vegetable export opportunity and your export strategy. It is important for you to be aware of the additional, often up-front costs that are associated with exporting. There is a wide range of funding options available to vegetable exporters, many of which are included on the Austrade and Export Finance and Insurance Company websites. You may like to access professional advice to help with your export financing issues.

Export Market Development Grant (EMDG)

The Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) scheme is a key Australian Government financial assistance program for aspiring and current exporters. Administered by Austrade, the scheme supports a wide range of industry sectors and products, including vegetable exporters. The EMDG scheme:

- Encourages small and medium sized Australian businesses to develop export markets;
- Reimburses up to 50% of eligible export promotion expenses above $10,000, provided that the total expenses are at least $20,000; and
- Provides up to seven grants to each eligible applicant.

For more information regarding the EMDG scheme please visit the Austrade website or call Austrade directly on 13 28 78.

Other opportunities for financial grants and support will come from State governments. Even if your State government does not offer a grant, they may offer resources that help you understand, and prepare for, the finance requirements of exporting. Other helpful information for funding vegetable exports is available from the GrantsLINK (Commonwealth Government grants) and AusIndustry websites.
9. Your Connection with the Department of Agriculture

Having an established Australian customer base gives potential international customers confidence in your current operations. It allows them to see that you are a reliable supplier. Also, domestic success will help provide you with the necessary cash flow and working capital required to export successfully.

☐ Are you prepared to make exporting a legitimate and integral part of your business plan? Is management prepared to make a long-term commitment to sustain the company’s export?
☐ Does your company have a good track record of meeting production/delivery deadlines?
☐ Does your company have a proven track record competing in the Australian market?

Guide to Your Connection with the Department of Agriculture
The most daunting part of vegetable exporting can be the necessary steps involved in contacting the right agency and following the correct procedures. The body that controls the export of vegetables in Australia is the Department of Agriculture (DoA). Please be aware that the DoA was formerly known as the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), with many documents still referring to the previous name.
As a vegetable grower intending to export, it is your responsibility to abide by the requirements outlined in the Export Control Act 1982 and to meet the necessary requirements of the importing country. Australia’s conditions of the export of vegetables can be found in the Export Control (Plants and Plant Products) Order 2011. The DOA has prepared a six-step process to prepare your vegetables for export, which is outlined in the diagram below.

The Export Process:

1. Identify whether your goods are prescribed
2. Check the importing country requirements
3. Submit a Notice of Intention or Request for Permit form and supporting documents
4. Prepare your goods
5. Present documents and goods to an Authorised Officer
6. Export your goods
Step 1 - Prescribed Goods
Under the Export Control Act 1982, fresh vegetables are considered ‘prescribed goods’. This means that vegetable exports need to comply with the requirements of the Export Control Act 1982.

Step 2 - Importing country requirements
The country that you intend to export to will have specific requirements of you; be it documentation, packaging or testing. It is therefore important to familiarise yourself with specific requirements of your chosen market. Comprehensive market profiles are available through the Austrade website. Completing the correct checks and documentation will help to prevent costly hold ups for your vegetable exports.

Available from the DOA website is the Manual of Importing Country Requirements (MICoR). By selecting the export destination and the vegetable you wish to export in the MICoR website, you can find the specific requirements of the importing country (including any documentation).

Should you need help completing any of the required export documentation, or be unsure as to exactly what documentation you require, more information is available from the DoA website or contact the DoA Plant Operations Team.

Maximum Residue Levels
A further obligation to consider may be Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs). MRLs are set for pesticides registered for use in Australia. The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority proposes MRLs at levels not likely to be exceeded if pesticides are used in accordance with the directions on the label.

A list of sources to determine MRL requirements for selected countries is available from the New Zealand Government Ministry for Primary Industries website. Another source of MRL information can be found at the United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service. Consideration of MRL’s is necessary where they are specified as a requirement by the country you intend to export to.
Step 3 - Submit a Notice of Intention or Request for Permit and supporting documents

If you are exporting over 10 kilograms of vegetables you must submit a ‘Notice of Intention to Export Prescribed Goods’ or its electronic equivalent, the ‘Request for Permit’ which is available through DoA’s Export Documentation system (EXDOC).

Some export destinations may require other documentation such as a Certificate as to Condition (EX46A) or a Phytosanitary Certificate (E16). To determine what documentation your export destination requires, please refer to Step 2 in this process.

By lodging either this documentation, you are also permitting an Authorised Officer to inspect your export vegetables. You may pre-pack your vegetables prior to the inspection so long as the packing can be removed to allow the Authorised Officer to inspect the vegetables.

### The new Plant Exports National Documentation Hub

The Plant Exports National Documentation Hub is a new centralised system to process export documentation run by the DoA. The rollout of this system began in Victoria in late 2013 and will continue to all other states and territories over the first half of 2014.

All documentation requests can now be sent to plantexportsNDH@daff.gov.au. There are several methods of receiving your documentation including postal and courier delivery, personal collection and printing directly from EXDOC.

### Export Documentation system (EXDOC)

EXDOC is a software application that has been developed by the Department of Agriculture to manage export documentation for primary produce. The EXDOC system has replaced manually generated permits, certificates and documentation.

The EXDOC system has improved export documentation turn-a-round time and given exporters the ability to print certificates and documentation on site and at a lower cost. If you would like to register for EXDOC there are three options for registration which can be found on the DoA website.

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Step 4 - Preparing your produce

It is imperative at this stage of the exporting process that you have selected a registered establishment, or are in the process of registering your establishment.

### Registering your premises

In order to export commodities that are considered prescribed goods (such as vegetables), your establishment, or the establishment preparing your vegetables, must be registered with DoA as an exporting operation. The registration confirms that your establishment has been constructed and equipped to operate in a hygienic manner.

In order to register your premises you will need to submit an application form to AQIS (Export Registration form EX026). After this application is received an AQIS officer will visit and inspect your premises. Assuming AQIS approves your establishment, you will be provided with a registration certificate and number which you must then display at your establishment.

The exact requirements for registered establishments can be found in Export Control (Plant and Plant Products) Order 2011. Part 3 ‘Requirements for registered establishments’ can be used as a checklist to ensure your establishment is ready to be registered. The DoA website also contains the conditions for registration and the checklist for basic hygiene requirements for registered establishments.

You can submit your export certification forms electronically via EXDOC, in person to the Regional Plant Export Documentation Hub office or by email to plantexportsNDH@daff.gov.au.

### Reminder for those using a packing house, freight forwarder or consolidator

If you are enlisting the services of a packing house, freight forwarder or consolidator you do not need to file paperwork with DoA other than the registration of your establishment (if this is where the vegetables are being prepared). Packing houses, freight forwards or consolidators (depending on your arrangement with them) will file the necessary paperwork with DoA on your behalf, but you MUST first register your establishment with DoA.
Step 5 - Inspection of produce by an Authorised Officer

Before your vegetables can be exported, they must first be inspected by an Authorised Officer at a registered establishment. In order to make the exporting process efficient you should ensure that your vegetables are export compliant prior to the inspection. The Export Control (Plant and Plant Products) Order 2011 outlines the requirements for export compliant vegetables.

Export compliant goods
An authorised officer can pass goods as export compliant if the goods have been found to be:

- free from pests;
- free from contaminants; and
- in a condition that allows any required phytosanitary or other certificate to be issued.

Unless otherwise specified by DoA, goods are considered to be free from pests and contaminants if they do not contain:

- live pest infestations
- vermin, including rodents, and their waste
- pests or contaminants above the levels specified by the relevant importing country.

The DoA Plant Operations Team will have more detailed guidance for complying with these requirements. To arrange an inspection of your produce to be exported, you must submit a Request for Plant Exports Inspection Appointment form. You can find both the application and guidelines on successful completion of the application on the DoA website.

Present documentation to Authorised Officer

Assuming your vegetables have been declared fit for export, and you have first lodged either your Notice of Intention to Export Prescribed Goods or a Request for Permit, the Authorised Officer will sign and stamp the export permit. The export permit is located at the bottom of your Notice of Intention or in the case of a Request for Permit, it will be authorised by the Authorised Officer. From the date your produce is declared export compliant you will have 28 days to export the produce before your permit is revoked.

Depending on the country that you have selected to export to, you may be also required to complete additional documentation. Please refer to Step 2 above.

Step 6 - Export your goods (packing and authorising)

Your vegetables must be packed in packaging, containers or vessels under the conditions outlined in the Export Control (Plants and Plant Products) Order 2011. Containers must be inspected by an Authorised Officer, who must confirm that:

a) the container will not infest or infect the goods with pests;
b) any cargo already loaded into the container will not infest or infect the goods with pests;
c) no material is present in the container that is likely to harbour pests;
d) no material is present in the container that is likely to contaminate the goods; and

e) the container is not in a condition that could result in the infestation or infection of the goods

Once you are ready to export your goods, contact the DoA Plant Export Operations team. You must do this in order to have your certificates authorised. A list of regional contacts within DOA can be found on their website, otherwise telephoning the general free call number 1800 020 504 will connect you with the nearest regional office.
Risk Management

Understanding and successfully managing the risks associated with exporting your vegetables must be central to your export strategy. Risks to be aware of when exporting include:

Political risks: Political instability at your export destination may disrupt or in some cases prevent effective trade.

Legal risks: Export destinations operate under laws that differ from Australian law. You should familiarise yourself with the laws of your chosen export destination.

Bribery, graft and Corruption Risk: Bribery, graft and corruption are illegal in most countries around the world. Participating in any of these activities is illegal under Australian law and even if the conduct occurs outside of Australia, it is still punishable under Australian law.

Quarantine compliance risk: Understand any quarantine requirements that your export destination demands.

Exchange rate risk: Exchange rate risk can occur because of fluctuations in the value of currency.

Non-payment risk: A serious risk for exporters regardless of the country that you’re trading with.

For further details, including suggestions for managing these risks, refer to the Austrade website.
Are you Export Ready?

Hopefully, by the time you have completed the Export Readiness Checklist, you will be prepared to export your vegetables.

When you are ‘export ready’, you can contact Austrade in regards to their TradeStart Program. The prime objective of the TradeStart program is to assist businesses achieve long-term export success. When you are deemed ready for exporting register your export business online with Austrade or call Austrade on 13 28 78.

Helpful resources:

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<th>Australian Trade Commission (Austrade)</th>
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<td>+613 9882 02777</td>
<td>13 28 78</td>
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<tr>
<th>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)</th>
<th>Department of Agriculture (DoA)</th>
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<th>Export Council of Australia</th>
<th>Australian Institute of Export (AIE)</th>
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