

GRAINCO (Queensland, Australia) attains 'certification assurance' accreditation

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Abstract

GRAINCO, the grain bulk handling authority of Queensland, is the first such authority to achieve a 'Certification Assurance' arrangement with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS). Certification Assurance saves the grain industry inspection costs and allows a more effective and flexible system to operate at export terminals. Certification Assurance accreditation has been a major undertaking for GRAINCO, achieved at considerable effort, and through cooperation between all levels of GRAINCO staff, external consultants, and AQIS. Certification Assurance accreditation has led to the development of quality systems, manuals, and training materials, and is a step towards ISO 9002.

Introduction

All prescribed grains and plant products requiring phytosanitary certification are inspected during export to ensure that Australia's export regulations are not breached and that the cargo complies with the importing country's quarantine authority.

In the past this inspection has been performed by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS). Certification assurance (CA) allows the inspection function to be replaced by a quality assurance system. CA is the quality assurance system accredited and audited by AQIS.

GRAINCO is the first Grain Bulk Handling Authority to achieve a certification assurance (CA) arrangement with AQIS.

GRAINCO's CA accreditation has been achieved by staff participation, consultant assistance, and AQIS participation. It has led to the development of manuals, procedures and training.

Staff participation

The most critical aspect of GRAINCO's CA arrangement is staff participation. This is the key to the success of achieving and maintaining CA accreditation. Staff involvement from the bottom up is vital. The system will fail without staff support. Ownership of the arrangement at each of GRAINCO's terminals belongs to the terminal staff.

GRAINCO's CA systems are not static. All staff are encouraged to develop and improve the system on a continuing basis. There is a clear amendment procedure for all CA manuals and procedures. Amendments may be made either from the terminal or corporate level. All amendments are approved and

distributed through the corporate office as changes may require AQIS approval.

Significant benefits in implementing CA include an increase in morale and willingness of staff to take responsibility for their own work. The CA accreditation process has been a successful team-building exercise.

AQIS involvement

AQIS has had a significant involvement in the accreditation process. This has included the provision of training courses, desk auditing manuals, and performing physical audits.

AQIS offered training courses in CA manual writing and in auditing. GRAINCO sent four staff members to each course. These courses were well designed and presented. This also presented an opportunity to develop an understanding between AQIS and GRAINCO staff.

One of the hurdles GRAINCO faced was convincing AQIS how serious it (GRAINCO) was about CA. It is not in the interest of GRAINCO or any other exporter to have grain rejected overseas. The cost of removing a cargo — loss of faith with importers and exporters, and endangerment of the CA arrangement — far outweighs the value of any short-cutting.

One problem in the accreditation process between GRAINCO and AQIS was simply the fact that GRAINCO was the first to enter an uncharted area. 'Nobody has asked the question before' was a recurring problem for AQIS. This should be less of a problem for future quality assurance systems as these problems have now been resolved.

Consultant selection

GRAINCO engaged consultants for manual development and support, and for the development of training programs.

Michael Ashton of the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI) was engaged for manual development and support. He has eight years experience working with AQIS and is familiar with the operations of AQIS, and the technical and legislative requirements of CA.

GRAINCO engaged Michael Jones and Mark Morain of the Queensland DPI to develop CA training packages. Michael Jones was a developer and presenter of the CA manual writing course. A video to supplement the CA courses was made by CB Productions of Toowoomba.

Manuals

GRAINCO's CA manuals were written in the same format as 'Certification Assurance — Guidelines for Bulk Grain Handlers' a booklet published by AQIS. The contents of each of GRAINCO's CA manuals have the same elements as the booklet. This was designed to assist AQIS in understanding and auditing the system.

GRAINCO developed a three-tier structure of CA Manuals. Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the documentation.

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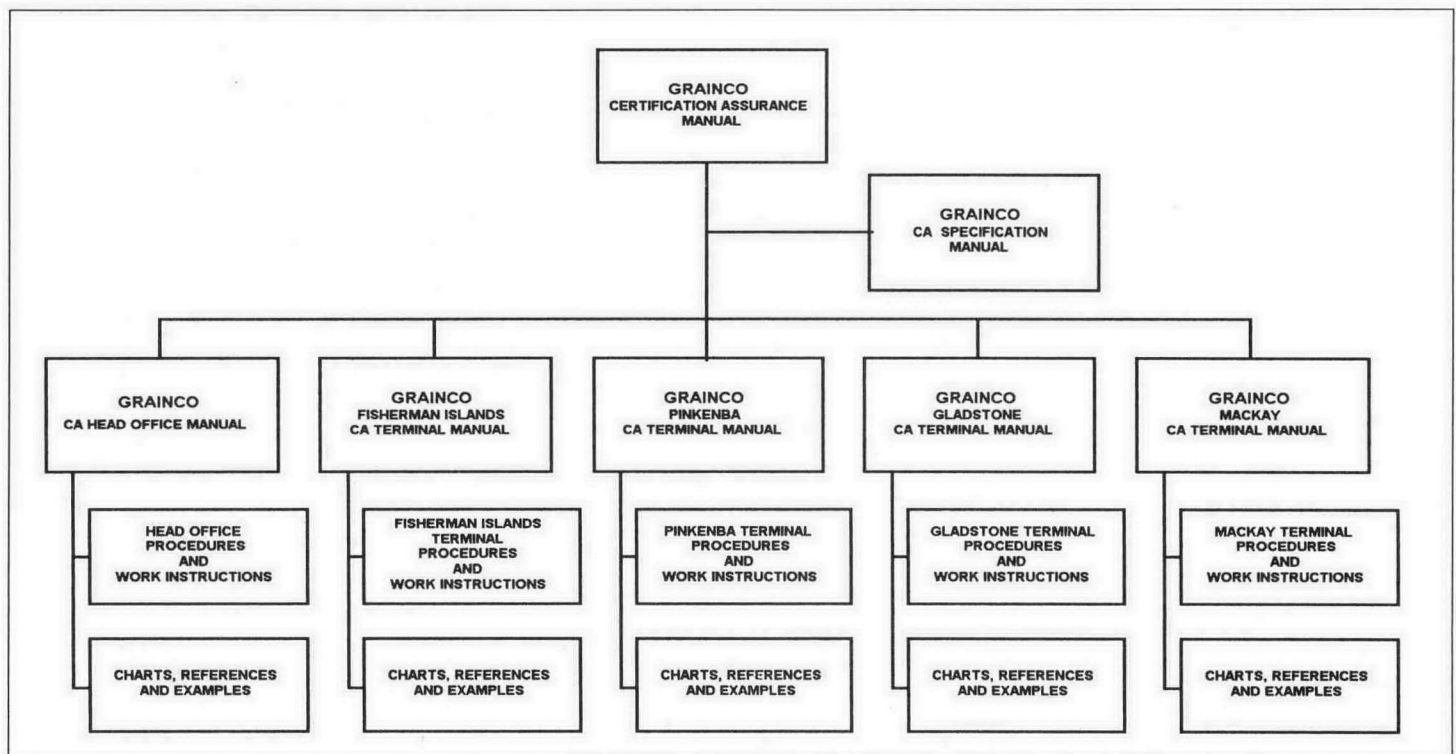


Fig. 1. GRAINCO CA system—documentation chart.

The CA manual is the top-tier document, outlining policy for the arrangement and indexing the quality system.

The head office and terminal CA manuals detail the implementation of policy on a local level. These manuals reference procedures for the location as they apply to the elements listed.

The third-tier consists of procedures and work instructions. Procedures detail the functions that are carried out at terminals. Work instructions detail how tasks are carried out on an individual basis.

The CA specification manual details the conditions and restrictions of export under the *Export Control Act 1982*, and the quarantine requirements of importing countries for the different products exported from GRAINCO's terminals. This manual provides the minimum specification for all inspections performed at the terminal.

GRAINCO has developed and documented procedures for the following activities:

- rail intake
- road intake
- pre-shipment check
- ship loading
- container loading
- blending
- hygiene
- treatment and surface spraying
- waste removal
- fumigation
- rodent control
- completion of phytosanitary certificates
- manual amendments
- internal auditing
- investigation of client complaints
- creating and amending CA specifications.

Training

Staff participation in the CA arrangement is the primary step in achieving and retaining accreditation. Training of staff is therefore a key requirement.

GRAINCO developed three courses specifically for CA: induction; CA inspection; and auditing.

The training packages developed by GRAINCO were designed to be primarily self-paced learning, with classroom time of approximately one day per course. Training materials for these courses consist of course notes for each participant, a teacher's guide, overheads and videos.

The content of the courses is as follows:

Induction

- Introduction to quality systems
- Introduction to certification assurance
- Certification assurance and GRAINCO
- Staff responsibilities and authorities
- Quality records and document control

CA inspection procedures

- Phytosanitary certification and the *Export Control Act*
- Identification of commodities handled by the terminal
- Pest and disease identification

Auditing

- External (AQIS) audits
- Dealing with external audits
- Management review and internal audit

Induction is designed to give participants an understanding of what CA is, use of manuals and documentation, and staff responsibilities.

CA inspection is to train staff in grain inspection procedures under the *Export Control Act* and for phytosanitary certifica-

tion. Since AQIS inspections are being eliminated from the terminals, their function needs to be understood and carried out by terminal staff. This course covers the legislative requirements of the CA arrangement, as well as the performance of inspections.

Internal auditing is a required element of the CA arrangement. This course trains GRAINCO staff members to become internal auditors. It also prepares staff for external (AQIS) audits.

CA vs ISO 9002

GRAINCO achieved CA first. This gives the financial benefit of CA and gives an interim achievement to the organisation. CA accreditation is not as encompassing as ISO 9002 and may be further developed to ISO 9002.

CA is compatible with ISO 9002. All training, documentation, and procedures developed may be used in an ISO 9002 accreditation.

CA costs and AQIS charges

The reduction of inspection fees charged by AQIS provide the financial benefits of CA. These fees are reduced from 43 cents (including overtime) to 9 cents/t under CA. Where exports are not prescribed grains, there is no charge.

In addition to the tonnage charges, AQIS charges auditing fees of \$745 per auditor per day. AQIS auditing fees are expected to cost GRAINCO about \$50000 per year.

AQIS charges are therefore \$140000 or 14 cents/t for 1 Mt. In addition there are operating costs for the arrangement.

The internal costs of operating the arrangement are:

- performing inspections previously carried out by AQIS staff;
- internal auditing;
- documentation control;
- CA training; and
- management review.

Conclusion

Certification assurance has provided a number of benefits to GRAINCO. These benefits include increased morale, teamwork and sense of achievement at export terminals. It has also led to improved documentation, training and work practices at our terminals.

CA also provides a direct cost saving through a reduction in AQIS inspection charges.

This achievement has come from the involvement of staff members from GRAINCO's export terminals and corporate staff. It has also come from the participation of external consultants from the Queensland DPI, and from AQIS itself.