

Biosecurity Officer interview questions

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What to expect

Biosecurity Officer interviews assess your ability to apply regulations fairly, inspect effectively and communicate with a range of stakeholders. You will be asked to demonstrate technical knowledge, sound judgement and composure in the field.

- **Process:** Questions that ask you to walk through how you would conduct an inspection, issue a permit or handle a breach from start to finish.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for a past example of how you handled a difficult stakeholder, a compliance issue or a high-pressure situation.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement under pressure, such as dealing with an upset traveller or a repeated non-compliant importer.
- **Technical:** Questions about biosecurity legislation, import conditions, sampling methods or the tools you use in the field.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about how you advise and influence importers, producers and travellers to meet biosecurity requirements.

The interview usually starts with an introduction to the team and the role. Then you will move through a mix of behavioural and technical questions, often with a scenario or process question toward the end. Some panels include a practical exercise, such as reviewing a sample case file or explaining an import condition. You will usually have time to ask questions at the close.

1. Walk me through how you would inspect a consignment of imported machinery that has visible soil on it.

Why they ask

The interviewer wants to see that you know the steps of an inspection, from checking documentation to making a decision and recording it.

How to structure your answer

A process question should be answered as a clear, step-by-step walk-through. Start with preparation, then describe the inspection itself, the decision points and the follow-up.

Example answer

"First, I would check the import documentation and the relevant BICON import conditions to understand what is required for this type of machinery. Then I would put on the appropriate PPE and inspect the machinery, paying particular attention to soil on the undercarriage, wheels and any recessed areas. If I find soil, I would take a sample using aseptic technique and send it to the laboratory for testing. While waiting for results, I would issue a direction to hold the consignment. Depending on the laboratory result, I would either clear the machinery, require treatment such as cleaning or fumigation, or issue a compliance notice. Finally, I would record all findings in the field inspection tablet app and update the Integrated Cargo System so the importer and broker can see the status."

2. Tell me about a time you had to enforce a biosecurity rule with someone who disagreed with you.

Why they ask

The interviewer is assessing your ability to stay professional, explain the reasons behind a rule and achieve compliance without escalating unnecessarily.

How to structure your answer

Use the STAR method: describe the situation, the task you faced, the action you took and the result.

Example answer

"I was inspecting a small consignment of seeds for a regular importer when I found a variety that was not listed on their import permit. The importer insisted it was a minor mistake and asked me to let it through. My task was to apply the rules consistently while keeping the relationship constructive. I explained that the permit exists to prevent the introduction of pests and diseases, and that allowing an unlisted variety would put other importers and Australian agriculture at risk. I offered to help them apply for a variation to their permit and gave them a fact sheet on the process. The result was that they withdrew the consignment voluntarily, applied for the variation and thanked me for the guidance. They have not had a similar issue since."

3. You are inspecting baggage and find a prohibited plant material. The traveller becomes upset and says it is a traditional gift. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests your judgement under pressure, your customer service skills and your ability to follow procedure while showing empathy.

How to structure your answer

For a scenario question, describe how you would assess the situation, de-escalate, apply the rules and document your actions.

Example answer

"I would stay calm and acknowledge the traveller's feelings. I would explain that I understand it is a gift, but that biosecurity laws are in place to protect Australia from pests and diseases that could harm agriculture and the environment. I would then follow the standard procedure: seize the item, provide a receipt and explain the options for appeal or for the item to be treated or returned. I would also give the traveller a brochure about what can and cannot be brought into Australia, so they know for next time. Finally, I would record the seizure in the system and note the traveller's details in case of a follow-up. Throughout, I would keep my tone respectful and avoid arguing, because the goal is compliance, not conflict."

4. What do you know about Australia's biosecurity import conditions and how would you check them?

Why they ask

The interviewer wants to confirm you are familiar with the regulatory framework and the tools that support it.

How to structure your answer

A technical question should be answered directly, with specific references to legislation, systems or methods. Show your knowledge but keep it practical.

Example answer

"Australia's biosecurity import conditions are set out in the Biosecurity Act 2015 and the associated import conditions, which are published in BICON. To check the conditions for a particular commodity, I would log into BICON and search by the commodity's scientific name or common name. I would also check the Integrated Cargo System to see the consignment details and any previous permits. If the conditions require a treatment, such as fumigation or irradiation, I would verify that the treatment provider is approved and that the certificate is valid. I stay up to date by reading departmental notices and completing regular training on changes to import conditions."

5. How would you advise an importer who repeatedly fails to meet biosecurity requirements?

Why they ask

This assesses your stakeholder management, problem-solving and ability to influence behaviour without relying on enforcement alone.

How to structure your answer

Answer this as a problem-solving exercise: identify the root cause, propose a tailored approach and describe how you would monitor progress.

Example answer

"I would start by reviewing their compliance history to understand what is going wrong. It might be a misunderstanding of the requirements, a language barrier or a process issue in their supply chain. I would then arrange a meeting or a phone call to talk through the specific failures and provide clear, written guidance. If they need it, I would point them to resources such as the department's online tools or industry associations. I would also set up a follow-up inspection or audit to check improvement. If the non-compliance continued, I would escalate to a formal warning or compliance notice, but my first aim is to help them get it right, because that protects Australia and keeps their business running."

6. What are the key safety considerations when conducting field inspections?

Why they ask

The interviewer wants to see that you take work health and safety seriously and can identify hazards in a range of field environments.

How to structure your answer

List the main hazards, then explain how you would control them. Be specific about PPE, communication and risk assessment.

Example answer

"The key considerations depend on the environment. On a wharf, I would watch for moving vehicles, heavy machinery and uneven surfaces, so I would wear high-visibility clothing, safety boots and a hard hat where required. On a farm, I would consider livestock, chemicals and biosecurity risks, so I would wear appropriate PPE and follow farm entry protocols. Before any inspection, I would complete a risk assessment and check in with my supervisor or a buddy. I would also carry a two-way radio or mobile phone and know the emergency procedures for the site. After the inspection, I would report any hazards or incidents so the team can learn from them."