

## China fallout: Aussie seafood, wine, fruit and dairy exports under threat

Chinese officials have drawn up a hit list of Australian exports that could face added restrictions or sanctions, as diplomatic relations between the two countries continue to sour.

US news service Bloomberg reported on Tuesday that Australian wine and dairy, along with seafood, oatmeal and fruit, are on the list, which could subject billions of dollars worth of exports to China to stricter quality checks, anti-dumping probes, tariffs or customs delays.

State-run media could also urge consumers to boycott Australian goods, according to Chinese government inside sources, after the Australian government's strident calls for an independent investigation into the origins of COVID-19.

On Tuesday at a World Health Assembly meeting in Geneva, more than 130 countries - including Australia and China - voted in favour of an investigation into the origins and early handling of the COVID-19 pandemic which first broke out in the city of Wuhan the central Chinese province of Hubei in December.

The same day, the Chinese Embassy in Canberra issued a statement saying the Morrison government's claims it had been vindicated over its push for an independent investigation into the origins of COVID-19 were "a joke".

This came after Australian grain growers learnt China had suddenly slapped a crippling 80 per cent tariff on Australian barley, and just one week after China suspended beef imports from four major Australian meatworks.



In April, China's ambassador in Canberra, Cheng Jingye, responded to PM Scott Morrison's call for an international inquiry into the pandemic by issuing a trade threat.

***'Ordinary people will say 'Why should we drink Australian wine?'***

"If the mood is going from bad to worse, people would think 'why should we go to such a country that is not so friendly to China?'" Cheng said.

"It is up to the people to decide. Maybe the ordinary people will say 'Why should we drink Australian wine? Eat Australian beef?'"

Since then, both countries have played down the links between the coronavirus inquiry, bilateral trade changes and deteriorating diplomatic relations.

On Wednesday, Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne said she would be "disappointed if there was any process of conflating these issues".

"We deal with the trade issues on their merits as they stand," she said.

"We will engage respectfully. Most importantly though, we will always protect Australia's national interest."

### **Meet in the middle**

When Bloomberg asked China's foreign ministry about the rumoured Australian imports hit list, a spokesman said the government "had always sought to find common ground while putting differences aside, cooperate to achieve win-win results and will not harm others to benefit oneself."

The spokesman said China hoped Australia could meet in the middle and "take more measures to improve bilateral relations and deepen mutual trust, and provide favourable conditions and atmosphere for practical cooperation in various areas."

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