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**Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**

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## **USE OF REMOTE (VIRTUAL) AUDIT AND VERIFICATION IN REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS**

### **WTO SPS COMMITTEE – PROPOSED THEMATIC SESSION**

#### **COMMUNICATION FROM AUSTRALIA**

The following document, received on 1 September 2021, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Australia.

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1. As per the request from the Chair of the WTO Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures at the Committee's most recent meeting on 15-16 July 2021, the Delegation of Australia submits for consideration an initial proposal for a thematic session to be held in 2022.
  2. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the development and utilisation of alternative verification measures in the food supply chain and regulatory practice. These measures will become increasingly relevant to regulators and food businesses in the post-pandemic world. Australia therefore considers that the SPS Committee could convene a thematic session on the topic of 'Use of remote (virtual) audit and verification in regulatory frameworks' to build greater understanding of how such tools can support robust regulatory practices and assist Members meet their requirements under Annex C of the SPS Agreement.
  3. Australia suggests that the objective of this session would be to provide Members with an enhanced understanding of the state of international developments in this emerging area, including the role of remote (virtual) audit and verification in supporting regulatory frameworks, Members' experience and application of remote (virtual) audit, the status of international guidance being developed, and discussion of the overall benefits and the barriers to the uptake of remote (virtual) audit. The session would draw on the current work of international standards setting bodies, such as the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) work on remote (virtual) audit and verification in regulatory frameworks, as well as international best practice in this emerging area.
  4. Australia will provide a more detailed paper which sets out the objectives and rationale for the thematic session in advance of the November SPS Committee session. This would facilitate an initial discussion on the proposal during the November SPS Committee to solicit preliminary views and provide the opportunity for Members to provide subsequent written comments on the focus and contents of a thematic session.
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