



Farming for our Children

Submission for the Senate Inquiry into the importation of Fresh Ginger from Fiji.

The consequences of importing ginger from Fiji puts the Australian ginger industry and its many iconic brands made from our ginger, in jeopardy. As Chairman of the Australian Ginger Industry Association, a ginger farmer and father of three, I am concerned that our industry is being put at risk. One of Australia's unique advantages in horticulture is our isolation from other countries, ensuring a secure control of pest and disease.

We are constantly told by our government that the Australian horticulture industry will feed the Asian market, yet it is the same government putting pressure on its growers to import fruit and vegetables which are susceptible to pest and disease. How will our ginger businesses survive economically and pest free for a farming future for our children?

The Australian ginger industry leads a team of farmers, consultants and scientists who have reviewed the Import Risk Assessment which was drafted by Biosecurity Australia (DAFF Biosecurity). The field report which we obtained showed a clear lack of knowledge about growing and harvesting ginger in Fiji. Our research shows, poor post harvest practices including top up of consignments, a sincere lack of knowledge about pests and diseases in Fiji, including their strains and taxonomy. The field report even claimed that further work was required to ensure bacterial wilt in Fiji is researched appropriately. DAFF B consistently claimed that their research into pest and disease had been thorough, yet industry during the course of 2012 has conducted trial experiments into *Radopholus similis* and proved that the Australian burrowing nematode was a completely different strain than that found in Fiji.

Why should our industry conduct further research into the practices conducted in Fiji for our growers to remain clean and secure? Especially when our head organisation DAFF B simply wipes its hands clean of our own research. DAFF B can only use the science put before them. Yet DAFF B holds the overriding decision for imports and exports. This is a major concern for all horticultural industries as their research arm is inadequate and relies on grower funded levy money to deal with the real issues growers face each day.

The IRA compiled by DAFF B shows the ALOP matrix. It claims that all pests are consistent to Australia. If it wasn't for industry conducting research, our security barriers would be put at risk. We proved our own government's head body DAFF B wrong and this is evident from research conducted into *Radopholus similis*. This poor quality of information industry has received from DAFF B shows clearly a lack of compassion and ultimately scientific research for our industry. The current government should take a hard look at the way it conducts its security measures for all Australians.

Throughout the IRA process DAFF B claimed that planting material of ginger would not be a high risk. Grass root industry growers who deal with the marketing system in Australia are well aware that this is not the case. I am

constantly asked for our business to supply ginger to prospective growers and home gardeners. Often the reply from the wholesale sector is *'we will have to buy from somebody else or look for good ginger in the market place.'* This occurs because ginger is seen as a high return investment. For these reasons Fijian ginger will be planted due to a lack of understanding of pests and diseases and market opportunism.

The Provisional Final IRA (PFIRA) had implemented mitigation measures for *Radopholus similis*. These measures are simply inadequate. Based on my industry experience as a seed grower, my conclusion is that heat treating, certified seed and crop rotation are not adequate measures.

Similarly, industry believes that simple agronomic factors of heat treating, certified seed and crop rotation are simply not good enough for the following reasons - our Nematologists who lead our scientific research team know that temperature and time are too variable, a clean seed scheme from industry and research experience can fall victim to disease particularly when planted in water logged soils, or climatic conditions conducive to disease; and crop rotation can still harbor pest and disease from host weeds and volunteer ginger plants.

Methyl bromide was put forward by DAFF B as the alternative control measure. Due to the reproductive system of *Radopholus similis*, will this fumigant be 100% affective when the burrowing nematode reproduces internally in the ginger rhizome? Methyl bromide is not systemic. One must question whether this mitigation measure requires further research before ginger is imported. How long and at what rate and at what temperature will methyl bromide be used? Who will be required to conduct this operation?

DAFF B has clearly overlooked soil. When asked how much soil is allowed, industry was told that Australia has a zero tolerance yet DAFF B goes further saying in the minutes from a meeting held with industry, that "perhaps a clump of soil would be allowed". Who determines this measure? Ginger's morphology suggests that it is impossible to eradicate all soil. Then why hasn't DAFF B investigated this measure. May I suggest, with respect, that trade influences this outcome. Industry once again conducted its own research proving that ginger can't be totally void of soil. A clump of soil can carry thousands of nematodes.

Industry must remain economically viable for our farming families. In my view further research is required on several pests and diseases to identify their strains in Fiji. No research into this area will see our farms fall victim to DAFF B's inability to scientifically spend their time and money to ensure the risk is mitigated. The mitigation measures for *Radopholus similis* should be AREA FREEDOM (and) FUMIGATION. Asking industry to conduct further taxonomic research into this area within 12 months is not a viable option. We have investigated a research project that has been costed at \$500,000 over three years and would take industry 3 years to fund.

My family has built its business around ginger. With ten full time staff, a casual turnover of 100 people and supporting local businesses the threat of imported fresh ginger from Fiji makes the future of these people insecure. Ginger production is difficult at the best of times without government intervention with the importation of Fijian ginger.

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