

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
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Submission to the Inquiry into the Commonwealth Amendments (Disallowing Permits) Bill

This Bill represents a poorly thought through approach in relation to the taking of biosecurity decisions for imports. It is highly likely to weaken market access arrangements for our agricultural export industries. The Bill appears contrary to our obligations under the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement, where we are obligated to take market access decisions on a scientific basis.

Australia is a small player in world terms but nevertheless a significant exporter of agricultural goods. The end result of the bill proposed will be to undermine the ability of our agricultural exporting industries, particularly in exporting to markets which are in turn seeking import access for their own products.

If Australia seeks access to a new market for our agricultural goods, we are required to provide pest and disease information in support of that application. We expect our trading partners to evaluate our submission on scientific grounds. The ability of Australia to gain access, and perhaps even more importantly maintain access, in the face of a problem depends to a high degree on the credibility of DAFF scientific staff involved in market access arrangements. This Bill will undermine the credibility of Australia's market access efforts. The value of Australian scientists who contribute to our market access efforts should not be underestimated, as it is very substantial.

It is true that world trade is not pure, in the sense of all member countries abiding by their WTO obligations. However, it is very much in Australia's interests to respect and act accordingly in relation to our WTO SPS obligations. If there are economic issues of concern to domestic industries, they should be dealt with under the available economic framework rather than impose unsustainable technical measures that may damage Australia's exporters of agricultural products, and degrade Australia's scientific reputation as it relates to biosecurity.

The Bill will no doubt be welcomed by many in our agricultural sector, particularly those involved in industries that are not significant exporters such as the pig meat, pome fruit, salmon, banana and poultry. No doubt it will also strike a chord with some others who hold the mistaken belief that Australia:

- Should be permitted by other countries to export as much agricultural produce as it can, while declining reasonable and scientifically justified import decisions;
- Is a clean green country without any serious pest and diseases that may be of concern to potential export markets.

The lead up to the decision in the early 1990's to allow the importation of Canadian pig meat provides a cogent reason why the basis of quarantine decisions must not be subject to Parliamentary disallowance. Australia's tardiness at that time in taking the decision to allow the importation of Canadian pig meat led to retaliatory action in the form of a quota reduction being taken by Canada against our beef exporters to that country. The measures that were implemented by Canada no doubt cost our beef industry millions of dollars in lost revenue.

Populous pandering to largely domestic industries at the cost of Australia's scientific credibility and potential damage to our major agricultural exporting industries must be resisted.

There is no better testament to where populous pandering leads to in an economic sense, than by looking at the current economic situations faced by the USA and EU, situations that unfortunately impact on many Australians as well.

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