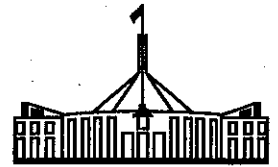




PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HON BOB KATTER MP

Federal Member for Kennedy



15 August 2012

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

via email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senators

RE: Inquiry into the effect on Australian pineapple growers of importing fresh pineapple from Malaysia

Biosecurity Australia's final Import Risk Analysis for the importation of decrowned pineapples from Malaysia is an outrage. Outlined in the submission below are the reasons why potentially contaminated fruit – which puts at risk an industry with a farmgate value of \$79 million – should not be allowed into Australia.

In Queensland, pineapples are grown year around on the Sunshine Coast, Wide Bay, Yeppoon, coastal North Queensland and the Atherton Tableland.

The latest figures show that in 2009-2010, 44,000 tonnes of fresh fruit and 41,000 tonnes of processed fruit were produced. To add to the irony of BA giving approval to the importation of Malaysian pineapples, the Department of Fisheries and Forestry's website boldly claims that the processed fruit industry was "worth \$13.25 million. However, this sector has been in steady decline over many years, due mainly to competition from cheaper imported product".

http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/26_16329.htm

It also states that the fresh sector has expanded considerably over the last 12 years "due mainly to the adoption of better fresh market varieties and improved quality." On the Capricorn Coast, for example, the local pineapple industry has experienced 40 per cent growth during the past 12 months. In the light of the Capricorn Coast experience and widespread improvements across the industry, the Australian Government should be rewarding farmers focused on growth and research. To expose it to a potential incursion (which by BA's own admission sits at 2 per cent), and to allow it to be undermined by cheap imports is neglect of the highest order.

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REPRESENTING

ABERGOWRIE • ALICE RIVER • ALIGATOR CREEK • ALMADEN • ALOOMBA • ATHERTON • BABINDA • BALSER CREEK • BALGAL BEACH • BAMBAROO • BARRINGHA • BARTLE FRERE • BEDARRA ISLAND • BELLENDEN KER • BEMERSIDE • BENTINCK ISLAND • BIBOOHRA • BILYANA • BINGIL BAY • BIRKALLA • BLACKROCK • BLUEWATER • BOHLE PLAINS • BOOGAN • BOULIA • BRAEMEADOWS • BRAMSTON BEACH • BROOKHILL • BURKETOWN • BUTCHERS CREEK • CALCIUM • CAMOOWEAL • CARDWELL • CARMOO • CARRINGTON • CHARTERS TOWERS • CHEWKO • CHILLAGOE • CLARE • CLONCURRY • CLUMP POINT • COCONUTS • COOLBIE • COORUMBA • COQUETTE POINT • CORDELIA • CORFIELD • COWLEY • CROYDON • CRYSTAL CREEK • DAJARRA • DALBEG • DARADGEE • DEERAL • DIMBULAH • DJARAWONG • DOOMADGEE • DUCHESS • DUINK ISLAND • EAST BARRON • EAST PALMERSTON • EAST RUSSELL • EAST TRINITY • EDMONTON • EIGHT MILE CREEK • EINASLEIGH • EL ARISH • ELLERBECK • ETTY BAY • EURAMO • EVELYN CENTRAL • FELUGA • FISHERY FALLS • FITZROY ISLAND • FLYING FISH POINT • FORRESTHOLME • FORREST BEACH • FORSAITH • GARROCH • GARNERS BEACH • GARRALONGA • GEORGETOWN • GLENALLEN • GLENBOUGHTON • GOLDSBOROUGH • GOONDI • GORDONVALE • GRANITE VALE • GREEN HILL • GREENVALE • GREGORY • GUMFLOW • GUMPOWDER • GUMUNA • HAILFAX • HAWKINS CREEK • HELENS HILL • HERBERTON • HERVEY RANGE • HOMESTEAD • HUGHENDEN • HULL HEADS • INGHAM • INNISFAIR • INNISFAIR • INNISFAIR • INNISFAIR • INNISFAIR • IRVINEBANK • JAGGAN • JAPPOONVALE • JARRA CREEK • JULAGOE • JULAKTEN • JULIA CREEK • KABAN • KAIRI • KAIJABBI • KALLINGA • KARUMBA • KENNEDY • KOAH • KURRIMINE BEACH • KYNUNA • LAKE BARRINE • LAKE EACHAM • LANNERCOST • LITTLE MILCRAVE • LONGPOCKET • LOWER TULLY • LUCINDA • MAALAN • MACKNADE • MACROSSAN • MAJORS CREEK • MALANDA • MALJON • MAREEBA • MAXWELTON • MENA CREEK • MIDGENOO • MILLAA MILLAA • MILLSTREAM • MILLAROO • MINBLUN • MINGELA • MIRIWANNI • MISSION BEACH • MORESBY • MORNINGTON ISLAND • MOUNT CARBINE • MOUNT FOX • MOUNT GARNET • MOUNT ISA • MOUNT MOLLOY • MOUNT PETER • MOUNT STUART • MOUNT SURPRISE • MOURILYAN • MULGRAVE • MUNDOO • MURRAY UPPER • MURRIGAL • MUTARNEE • MUTCHILBA • MUTTABURRA • NELIA • NOME • NONDA • NORMANTON • OAK VALLEY • COORINDI • PACKERS CAMP • PADDYS GREEN • PALLUMA • PEACOCK SIDING • PEERAMON • PENFLAND • PETFORD • PIN GIN HILL • PINNACLES • PORTSMITH • PRAIRIE • QUAMBY • RAVENSHOE • RAVENSWOOD • REID RIVER • RICHMOND • ROLLINGSTONE • ROSENEATH • RUPERTSWOOD • SELLHEIM • SILKWOOD • SILKY OAK • SOUTH JOHNSTONE • SOUTH MISSION BEACH • SOUTH EDGE • STAMFORD • STUART • SWANS LAGOON • SWEERS ISLAND • TARZALI • TAYLORS BEACH • TINAROO • TOLGA • TOOBANNA • TOOMULLA • TOONJIAN • TOYAZ • TORRENS CREEK • TREBONNE • TULLY • TULLY HEADS • TUMOULIN • UPPER BARRON • UPPER HAUGHTON • UPPER STONE • URANDANGI • VICTORIA ESTATE • WALKAMIN • WANGAN • WATSONVILLE • WAUGHS POCKET • WINTON • WONDECLA • WONGABEL • WONGALING BEACH • WOODSTOCK • WOOPEN CREEK • WRIGHTS CREEK • YARRABAH • YUNGABURRA • YURLUGA

Aside from significant scientific shortfalls in the IRA process, which will be dealt with in detail later in this submission, the economic, environmental and social impacts in the event of an incursion and the impact of cheap imports cannot be ignored. The fact that the IRA fails to include these impacts stands alone as one of the process' greatest failing.

In 2009, both sides of politics (who are more interested in free trade than protecting our regional communities and borders from pests and diseases) refused to support my Quarantine Proclamation Amendment Bill. It would have ensured that any IRA must consider:-

- (i) the social and economic impacts to the Australian industry, farmers, contractors and farm employees of importation; and
- (ii) the environmental, social and economic impacts on all Australians and the environment if diseases were to be spread as a result of importation.

As a result, regional and farming communities continue to be the sacrificial free-trade lamb. And the decision to import fresh pineapples into Australia, even if momentarily the risk and impact of an incursion is put to the side, will devastate the industry. As stated above, DAFF openly acknowledges that a decision to allow the importation of cheap imported processed pineapples has resulted in a shrinking of the once \$13.25 million business; and the fresh industry will suffer the same fate.

Currently the pineapple industry employs more than 1000 people during the peak season, and industry expects mass job losses in the event of cheap imports or an incursion. For many small regional towns, the pineapple industry is a mainstay. Therefore, in an environment where regional jobs are at a premium, any extra losses would be disastrous.

Our office has spoken to a number of producers about the impact of cheap imports. And the outlook is grim, with most farmers expecting a near total wipeout of their workforce. A large grower based on the Sunshine Coast said cheap imports would destroy nearly a 100 jobs in the company, while a grower on the Capricorn Coast expects 20 jobs to be lost in the small regional town where his business is based.

It is impossible to dispute the impact cheap imports will have on the pineapple industry given the acknowledgement of the damage caused to the processed industry. But the ramifications of BA's decision would increase exponentially if an industry weakened by imports was also forced to contend with a pest incursion.

In relation to biological concerns, the greatest threat relates to the transmission of bacterial fruit and heart rot caused by a species of *Dickeya*. Australia is free of these pathogens and evidence suggests that in Malaysia, where the extent of the infestation cannot be quantified, it has reduced that nation's crop by up to 50 per cent.

If Australia suffered a similar fate in the event of an incursion, farmers and industry lobby groups all believe it would wipe out the industry.

To this end, the IRA has not adequately dealt with the risk this species presents. Despite giving the green light to the importation of Malaysia pineapples, there remains a huge range of unresolved scientific issues regarding the likelihood of it spreading. There is ongoing confusion about the pathogen's taxonomy; and given BA acceptance of this, it sheds doubt on the assumptions made about its ecology and epidemiology which backs IRA's approval. Given this, the risk of an incursion is potentially much higher than 2 per cent. To make matters worse, there are no quarantine measures in place to deal with either bacterial heart rot and fruit collapse.

It is incomprehensible that BA would place at risk 1000 Australian jobs and a \$79 million industry while there is uncertainty around the potential of an industry-destroying incursion. The IRA has defined the risk of bacterial heart rot and fruit collapse as very low, but this assessment has been based on a number of assumptions that are either incorrect or unsubstantiated. The lack of evidence and information on how this disease might enter, spread and establish in Australia should be a key reason to block the Malaysian application and should not be used, as has been done by BA, to justify opening the floodgates and until these unknowns have been resolved, imports should be restricted.

In summary, the decision to allow fresh pineapples into Australia from Malaysia is not backed by robust scientific evidence and is based on a number of assumptions which leading scientists have questioned. As a result of these unresolved issues it is impossible to quantify the real risk and more research must be undertaken to determine the true risk associated with the importation of pineapples. Also, the failure of IRA's to investigate the social, environmental and economic impacts of not only a pest or disease incursion, but also the damaging consequences of cheap imports, is a significant flaw in the process. Any application should face and pass the highest level of scientific and economic scrutiny before being approved; and an approval should only be granted if it can be proven without doubt it will not impact on existing farming operations or pose a biosecurity risk.

Yours sincerely,

Hon Bob Katter MP
Federal Member for Kennedy