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The Secretary
Joint Statutory Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Secretary
(Copy to Sen R Colbeck, Senator for Tasmania.)

Submission-Review of Australia's Quarantine Function

Summary.

The witness supports the continuation and if necessary, expansion of Australia's quarantine protection. The witness believes that if the public is well briefed and understanding of the need for strict quarantine, then the role of AQIS will be made easier. He believes that an acceptance of the regionalisation policy will bring benefits to Australia, and that AQIS and AFFA may benefit by broadening their lines of communication with stakeholders

Submission

I wish to make some brief comments to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit with regard to the Committee's review of the effectiveness of the Quarantine function. There are some dot points in the Committee's Terms of Reference where I have no experience and therefore cannot comment.

As an individual grower I am well satisfied with most aspects of Quarantine issues with which I come in contact.

Dot point two refers to identifying potential risks, and allocating resources to meet those risks. This is a critically important area, as at present we have access to markets which could be denied if new pests or diseases were introduced to Australia. As a primary producer, I endorse the allocation of funding and other resources to identify threats and establish protective barriers against them.

Dot point 3 refers to the impact of free trade negotiations on quarantine matters. I note with some concern a news item (with no follow-up seen or heard by me) that referred to Commissioners of the European Union indicating that they felt Australian quarantine concerns were nothing but a trade barrier. Since we in Australia know that such is not the case, it is important that the message (that we have a genuine case for certain quarantine restrictions) is strongly carried to such officials in whatever country we are negotiating trade agreements.

Dot point 5 refers to AQIS border operations which once again are very important in the safeguarding of our production environment. The resourcing of staff and facilities at all entry points must be maintained, or upgraded if necessary. This process goes hand in hand with dot point 6, where breaches of barrier control must be followed up if found.

The constant promotion to the public of Quarantine issues and the need for community support is essential. (Dot point 8) Many people in this state are very aware of the need for strong quarantine regulation, they are aware of the cost to this state if important markets were lost through lax quarantine standards. It is important that no opportunity is lost to promote the same message to all Australians.

I believe that a concept of “regionalisation” has been agreed upon between the Commonwealth and State Governments. Issues such as Tasmania’s fruit fly freedom and Western Australia’s unique position with some pests and diseases have given benefit to those states. With new, definable areas seeking area freedom from certain pests, there exists an opportunity to expand Australia’s exports. If area freedom from Mediterranean Fruit Fly is granted to (for example) the Riverina then two benefits are realised. The first benefit is expanded source of product for export which benefits not only the region of supply, but all of Australia.

The second benefit is an identifiable clean zone if insects or disease of quarantine concern are found in distant parts of Australia. As long as the quarantine protocols for the “clean” region are in place and effective, there should be no or minimal disruption to exports from that region.

I also understand AQIS has a policy, perhaps through AFFA, of dealing with peak (National) bodies only. In some cases these bodies may be remote from their supporters and levy payers. It therefore raises the question that if AQIS (and AFFA) wish to better communicate with their interest groups, then working through state associations may give a much wider dissemination of information. Such closer contact should also mean that AQIS and AFFA are better informed, through having a wider source of material on which to work.

E E Ted Domeney
Fruitgrower.

Notes. Ted Domeney has operated a family farm in Southern Tasmania since 1964, following his father and grandfather. The property has grown apples and pears, but has specialised in cherries since 1971. Ted Domeney is also co-founder, co manager, and shareholder in Tasmanian Cherry Company Pty Ltd, a 20 hectare cherry orchard in the Derwent Valley of Tasmania.

T Domeney was a foundation President of the Tasmanian Stonefruit Association Inc, and still serves on the executive committee. He has been President of Cherry Growers of Australia Inc (formerly Australian Cherry Growers Federation) for two separate terms, 1986-88 and 2000-2001.