



THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP

Minister for Trade



The Hon John Murphy MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

11 JUL 2013

Dear Mr Murphy

I refer to your letter of 25 June 2013 to the Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP, former Minister for Trade and Competitiveness, regarding a petition on the imposition of emergency safeguard measures on imported canned fruit and tomatoes.

The Government recognises SPC Ardmona's role as one of Australia's largest fruit processors and its significant economic contribution to the region, including to employment and community wellbeing.

As you will now be aware, the Government referred SPC Ardmona's requests for safeguard investigations into canned tomatoes and processed fruit to the Productivity Commission on 21 June 2013. The inquiries will determine the impact of imports on the domestic fruit and tomato processing industries and assess whether safeguard measures, such as tariffs, are justified. The Commission is to provide a final report within six months.

Underscoring the urgency with which we regard the situation for SPC Ardmona and growers, the Government has asked the Commission to report on the need for provisional safeguard measures within three months.


In respect of the request for an industry survival package, the Government recognises that some farmers are struggling with high levels of debt and so has developed *Farm Finance*. This is a package of measures aimed at assisting farmers who are experiencing debt servicing difficulties. Under *Farm Finance*, the Government has committed up to \$30 million each year over two years, to each state and the Northern Territory to provide eligible farm businesses with access to concessional loans. These loans will help farmers cope with debt stress, as well as invest in productivity enhancements such as infrastructure improvements, land purchases and equipment, leading to more sustainable production and competitive enterprises.

The timing for availability of the loans is subject to agreement being reached between the Government and state and Northern Territory governments on delivery arrangements, including eligibility criteria and the terms of the loans.

Under *Farm Finance*, the Government is also providing funding for additional rural financial counselling positions across Australia focussing on regions and industries experiencing debt servicing difficulties and where natural disasters have had a heavy impact on farm businesses. These additional resources will ensure growers in the Goulburn and Murray Valley have access to this important source of impartial support.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the attention of the Government.

Yours sincerely

 Richard Marlés