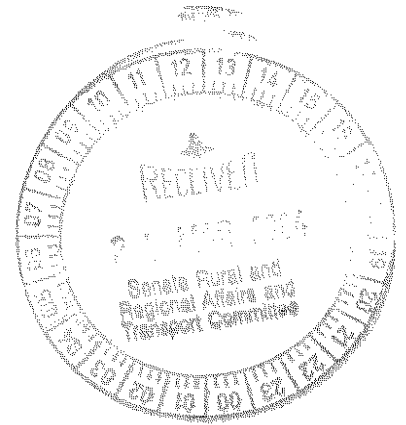


18 March 2004

The Hon Senator Bill Heffernan
Chairman
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
SG 62 Parliament House
CANBERRA 2600



Dear Senator Heffernan

Re: Final report by Biosecurity Australia on import risk assessment for pig meat

NSW Pork, the representative body for pork producers in NSW, would like to register its disappointment that Biosecurity Australia (BA) released its final report into the Import Risk Analysis (IRA) for pig meat without taking into account your Committee's deliberations.

In our submission to Biosecurity Australia we highlighted that the proposed import protocols did not adequately address the significant disease risks inherent with importing pig meat from countries with Post Weaning Multisystemic Wasting Syndrome (PMWS) and Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS).

This is concerning as any weakening of Australia's tough biosecurity and quarantine policy stands to jeopardise our multi million dollar pig industry and Australia's international reputation as a supplier of high quality, safe and disease free pork.

We understand that CSIRO in a report to Australian Pork Limited has estimated a 95-99% chance of the disease PMWS coming into Australia within a decade. Based on this report NSW Pork believes that BA is not justified in easing the protocols to allow the importation of uncooked pig meat from PMWS and/or PRRS affected countries as this action will threaten the future viability of the Australian pork industry.

NSW Pork proposes that in accordance with the Precautionary Principle of the SPS Agreement the most immediate course of action for preventing the spread of PMWS is to prohibit the importation of product from PMWS affected countries until at the very least appropriate research is conducted regarding the disease..

In the meantime, NSW Pork advocates that the final pig meat import protocols should be strengthened so that all pork products imported from PMWS affected countries be first cooked off-shore as a necessary requirement to sufficiently minimise the risk of PMWS and PRRS incursions to an appropriate level of protection.

Attached is a Briefing Note with additional information on the issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mal Peters', written over a horizontal line.

**Mal Peters
President**

Issue

Biosecurity Australia (BA) has recommended the importation of uncooked pig meat from Post-weaning Multisystemic Wasting Syndrome (PMWS) and/or Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) affected countries. This action will significantly threaten the future viability of the Australian pork industry.

Background

- Such a disease would have disastrous effects on the Australian pork value chain which supports over 33,000 jobs and is valued at over \$2.5 billion nationally.
- In NSW, the pork supply chain supports close to 8,000 people and is valued at \$652 million. NSW as the largest producer of pork will be the biggest loser from PMWS as the disease causes in excess of 25% mortalities in pigs between the ages of 4 to 16 weeks.
- The proposed import protocols do not adequately address the significant incursion risk with importing pig meat from countries with PMWS and PRRS. This is backed up by an independent CSIRO study which concluded that there is a 95-99% likelihood that the protocols finalised by BA will result in an exotic disease outbreak in the next decade.
- Both these diseases have no known cure and are endemic in the countries with inferior import protocol arrangements. This is a reflection of the current poor understanding of these diseases but will also mean that little can be done to minimize the impact and cost of an outbreak.
- Given the lack of scientific understanding and agreement regarding PMWS, the NSW Pork industry supports an 'Appropriate Level of Protection' (ALOP) import policy – one which is conservative for Australia in order to maintain our 'clean-green' image.

What the Association is seeking

- That until such time as additional research regarding the causes and virulence of PMWS is conducted, BA should not allow the importation of uncooked pork from PMWS affected countries.
- That additional research be undertaken to determine the rapidity of spread from respiratory versus oral PRRS infected pigs before allowing any uncooked pig meat to be imported into Australia.
- That all methodological concerns are addressed to ensure that an appropriate level of protection is provided to the Australian pork industry.

Cost

The Pork industry estimates that a PMWS outbreak in Australia would result in a loss of \$250 million in exports, a \$188.9 million fall in gross domestic product, a \$55.3 million loss in productivity and a 15% increase in pig farmers' costs of production. This will force the closure of many farms and lead to the loss of a significant number of jobs in regional NSW.

In the EU alone PMWS has resulted in the deaths of 8 million pigs with a cost to its industry estimated at \$A1.5billion.