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21st June 2004

The Secretariat

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Room SG.62
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Re: Response to the RDIRA on New Zealand Apples

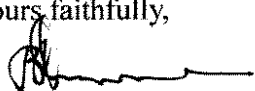
Dear Sir/Madam,

Enclosed please find our letter of response to the RDIRA on New Zealand Apples which has been forwarded to Plant Biosecurity.

This is our formal response to the RDIRA on New Zealand Apples.

Having seen for ourselves the devastation that Fireblight causes to apple and pear orchards, we strongly urge Biosecurity or whoever will make the final decision on this issue, to ban the import of apples from New Zealand. The risk to the Australian industry is just too great despite all the protocol.

Yours faithfully,


BRUCE PLUMMER
Apple Growers in the Adelaide Hills


JOY PLUMMER



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18th June 2004

Technical & Administrative Services
Plant Biosecurity
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
GPO Box 858
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Response to the RDIRA on New Zealand Apples

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Plummer family has been in horticulture in the Adelaide Hills for 104 years. We have been married for 43 years and Bruce has been Managing Director for 40 of those years. Joy has been Office Manager for 32 years and also was Export Co-ordination Manager for 10 years. Together we have seen the business grow from strength to strength and continue to be involved in all aspects of the Industry.

Bruce was awarded "Citizen of the Year" for his development of Export and his achievements in opening up new markets for apples into Taiwan. In 1999 he was presented with an "Award of Honour" by the Apple and Pear Growers Association of South Australia in recognition of outstanding contribution, commitment and service to the Apple and Pear Industry.

We strongly believe that the importation of apples from New Zealand or any other country which has Fireblight, should be banned as the risk of importing apples is far too great for the apple and pear industry of Australia.

In October 2001 we visited New Zealand representing Australian Growers and Packers at the World Fireblight Conference which was held in Napier. At this Conference it did not take long to evaluate the vested interest of Scientists from the countries with Fireblight especially New Zealand and America who at that stage had been trying to export apples to other countries without Fireblight. We will leave Science to the Scientists. Suffice to say that we do not believe this issue can be based on Science alone, but on **realities** as well.

As participants of the Conference, we were taken to orchards and packing sheds for a visit and the very first property that we went to was a pear and apple orchard which had been devastated by an outbreak of Fireblight several years prior. There were large areas of trees missing with replants all at different stages. This orchard has had an on-going problem with Fireblight since the very first outbreak. The owner stated that there was no Firelight within a 15km radius before the infection.

The second orchard visited, the owner showed us apples and pears again newly affected with Fireblight showing the tips of leaves starting to curl. The weather was just right for infection, warm, with inter-mitten showers. We could see sprayers in action, but the property owner said it was impossible to control the infection once it was established in an orchard. We were also shown trees with very bad cankers with ooze coming from the trunks. The owner stated it was a continuous struggle to control it, and could never get rid of it. Some years Fireblight reduced their production to a very low level.

Property number 3, we saw very young orchard growing mainly Gala, Braeburn and Jonagold varieties. The owner was very concerned that the weather conditions on this day were just right for an infection and their sprayers were waiting for the rain to stop so that they could commence spraying as the blossom was out in full.

The last orchard visited was owned by a very prominent industry leader and we looked at his block of Pink Lady trees which were 6 years old. This block was badly affected by Fireblight. It had not been pruned to rid the trees of last year's infection which had the distinct 'Shepherd's Crook' die-back from last year. Also you could plainly see infection starting on the new growth which was very frightening for me as a grower to see. The question was asked "what happened to the fruit harvested from these trees, last year?" and the answer given was that it had been picked and packed the same as any other fruit, nothing to worry about! I believe this block of Pink Lady apple trees has since been removed because they could not control the 2001 outbreak of Fireblight.

We also visited the most up to date packing shed in NZ, Apollo Fruits, which had all the latest washing and trash removal systems in place including chlorine treatment, etc. a very good set up. BUT, as an experienced packer of apples, it soon came to my attention the amount of leaves and stems that managed to get past all the methods of trash removal. This packing shed was not working on this day as it was at the end of their season, a good time for us to see it. I pointed out to Biosecurity people from Australia the amount of trash, twigs, leaves and stems at the final point of delivery of apples into the cartons. They were amazed! And stated that if I had not shown them this fact, they would not have known to look there.

As Chairman of the Pink Lady Australian Alliance, I visited California in the USA also Washington State to talk to growers and packers there on how we market our Pink Lady apples in the UK. This was a very successful trip and they joined our Alliance Group. As I visited orchards and packing sheds it became apparent that Fireblight was causing big problems there especially with new varieties including Pink Lady.

The new rootstocks do not have the resistance to overcome Fireblight as some of the older varieties and rootstocks.

In 1999 we both visited USA looking at new packing lines and on talking to growers there we found that they were removing hundreds of acres of Pink Lady as they had been badly affected with Fireblight.

Biosecurity have spent much time in NZ in past years, looking, but, they are not seeing. Biosecurity were with us on the orchards looking and listening to the same people as us. They were talking and "feeding" off us. But still they are not hearing!

In conclusion – Biosecurity offer a 50 metre buffer zone for a Fireblight affected orchard. However, in NZ an orchard isolated by 15 kilometres was infected! How could this happen?

Once you have Fireblight, you can never get rid of it!

Spraying – If an infection occurred in the Adelaide Hills, we would not have, nor ever be able to get a chemical to be used in this area as it would have to be an Anti-Biotic and it would never be registered for use here as we are in the 'water catchment area' for the Adelaide water supply. Can you imagine the outcry there would be if we were to use that type of chemical here?

If a NZ grower has admitted he has picked and packed infected fruit together with good fruit and exported it, how will AQUIS control this or even find out?

The most modern packing line cannot guarantee to rid **ALL** trash from the finished package. Our experience shows that there will always be **some** risk .

Surely our "FIREBLIGHT FREE", industry and environment is worth maintaining?

We believe the Apple and Pear Industry here in Australia is worth protecting from the insidious disease of Fireblight! The only way to fully protect it is to BAN the import of apples from any areas affected by Fireblight! Full Stop!!

Yours faithfully,

Bruce Plummer
Apple Growers in the Adelaide Hills

Joy Plummer