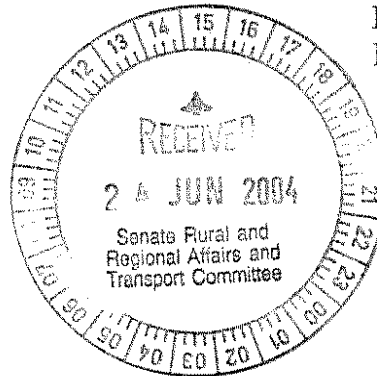


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The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs
And Transport Legislation Committee
Suite S.G. 62
Parliament House
CANBERRA 2600
A.C.T



Dear Sir,

I am the President of The Batlow Development League, I am a Qualified Horticulturist, and I own and operate a small growing nursery. I am a would be orchardist having just brought land with this in mind. I was born and raised in Batlow and I am proud of it, I have worked in Canberra and Sydney and have travelled extensively overseas.

I returned to live in Batlow some fifteen years ago and since that time have seen th town dwindle away through no fault of its own. Things we have lost are include 2 Banks, Managers and their families, Forestry offices with five foresters (three with families) and administration staff. In the last few years the Mountain Maid Cannery closed it's doors.

These have had an effect on business, schools and other services providers due to the lack of numbers in the town. As a community we realise all these things have gone for very good reasons market trends, viability of business, progress and government policies of the day. It's not much consolation when you see your town becoming less viable through no fault of it's own. So when our main industry Batlow Apples is threatened understandably the community feels threatened, and at an ends to think of alternatives.

I write to you with great concern about the import of New Zealand apples into Australia and most all the risk of also importing the devastating disease Fire Blight. It seems that the reason behind this importation is free trade between Australia and New Zealand and The World Trade Organization's agenda to open up trade world wide on a level playing field. A level playing field where Australian sugar farmers are left out of trade with America. Why? Could it be that the American sugar industry is heavily subsidized and still couldn't compete with our imports or do we have a disease like Fire Blight in our sugar that could infect their industry? I would say the first scenario would be the answer.

I really do wonder about the trade balance between Australia and New Zealand. I guess New Zealand buys cars and other manufactured goods because they need too and maybe even wheat from Australia. Does New Zealand buy dairy and wool products from Australia because they don't need too? Australia buys Dairy and Wool Products from New Zealand and we probably don't need too. My point being why should Australia buy

in apples when we don't need too especially when the risk is so great with such a devastating disease Fire Blight is eminent.

I have attended the presentation by Plant Biosecurity in Batlow to convince this small struggling town that the science is right that there is a low risk of us getting Fire Blight through fruit imports. At this presentation the trade question come up and we were told that we have a good relationship in trade with New Zealand which is great but hard to swallow when we talk carting tea to China with a twist, the risk of crippling our Apple and Pear industry with and incurable disease Fire Blight.

I have thought since the presentation that in the early 1990's Coles or Woolworth's imported Peaches and Nectarines from New Zealand, this only lasted one to two seasons and we have never seen them since, I guess that it wasn't viable for someone so it wasn't worth doing again. I have traveled through England and Europe in the early 90's and have seen and purchased New Zealand apples and I really don't think they are as good, certainly not better the Australian apples. I really do wonder whether New Zealand apples would compete on the quality and of the market, they will find the prices will drop to a level where it will not be viable at the quantity end of the market. My point is, is it worth the risk of a couple of years trade to keep up our good trade relationship and risk our industry to Fire Blight that would devastate it forever.

Perhaps if we are such good trading partners our Apple Industry should agree to stay out of New Zealand's other export markets in Europe and America, for an assurance that they will not keep trying to import into Australia. This would save all a lot of time and money and maybe keep the prices a little better for New Zealand's already established markets. New Zealand may even need to fill their orders. I realize this seems a little radical but I'm sure it would be better than any chance of having Fire Blight.

There seems to be a double standard in this deal to allow New Zealand Apples in. We are told that under no circumstances will antibiotic sprays be allowed to be used on our orchards if we should get Fire Blight. Yet it is OK to import apples from a country that uses these sprays to combat not cure Fire Blight.

After talking to Biosecurity scientists during the Batlow presentation New Zealand and America is also experimenting with a type of biological control for Fire Blight spraying with a competing bacterium to lessen the affect of Fire Blight? It seems to me that we need to have a plan to combat the disease if we do get it. An wait until these biological controls are perfected and proven to eradicate the disease in other countries.

Listening to the science at the Biosecurity presentation in Batlow it was very hard to argue against the scientist findings but it was all portrayed as low risk or minimal risk, never no risk! I thought while I listened why weren't these risks put into 1 chance in a million or 1 chance in 2 million similar odds to winning lotto, I'd say. People win lotto everyweek!

As previously stated I am qualified in Horticulture and own and operate a nursery in Batlow growing apple tress for the local market and ornamentals for the retail nursery trade. One of my major lines are ornamentals pears to which Fire Blight is devastating along with dwarf apple stock. I did ask the question of Biosecurity if much research has been done on host plants and carries of Fire Blight. My concern is that ornamental pears (MANCHURIAN PEAR PYRUS ASSURIENSIS) have been a major seller in the Nursery and Landscape Trade for the last ten years. They colour well on the eastern

seaboard and have been planted from Newcastle to Adelaide also throughout inland N.S.W and Victoria. These ornamental pears also flower from mid winter to mid spring depending on winter temperature and the particular variety.

We were told by Biosecurity that the bacterium of Fire Blight needed to be splashed on to a flower of a host plant, there was talk of birds and possibly even Bee carrying the bacterium from flower to flower.

A scenario I put to biosecurity is Mrs. Housewife on the North Shore of Sydney buys a New Zealand Royal Gala from her fruiterer Woolworth's in June or July she doesn't realize that the apple has living bacterium that has slipped through all the checks and processes in place to kill it. Unknowingly Mrs. House Wife throws the core and peels the mulch heap as she throws it the core hits some branches of a "winter blow" Pear growing beside the mulch heap in full flower in late June. It just happened to be a rainy day and the rain splashed some bacterium onto the flower to the Pear, the temperature is mild not dropping below 30c so the bacterium multiplies and kills the tree in Mrs. House Wife garden unnoticed. In the mean time nectar feeding birds have passed the bacterium to the neighbors Manchurian Pear or Cotoneaster or Rose and on through the suburbs. We have Fire Blight In Australia whose to say that one of those kind gardeners hasn't taken a Cotoneaster in a pot to a friend in Batlow, Orange or Shepparton we are ruined. I would say the same scenario, Mr. House Wife, could live in Melbourne, Shepparton or Tumut the conditions could all be favourable for the Bacterium. Biosecurity tells us that the chances of the Bacterium surviving are every low but there is a chance.

Since the presentation from Biosecurity I have give this a great deal of thought the other thought I have had is the chances of our native parrots, Eastern Rossellas etc, that feed on apples and flowers of apples pears and cotoneasters could also increase the chances of infection. America does not have our parrots and I'm not sure about New Zealand, has only reasearch has been done on a parrot eating a discarded apple with living bacterium on it on then feeding on fresh flowers and buds of a ornamental pear?

My biggest fear is that infection of ornamentals could occur and go unchecked and eventually infect our Apple and Pear Industry. I am certain the chances of infection are high there is any living bacterium coming into Australia it will infect a host plant in our bigger populations of Sydney or Melbourne. I am concerned for our ornamental nursery industry also. The affect on plants in our climate is unknown there could be total losses of varieties probably ornaments at pear, There will be great cost to both private and government landscapes and nurseries. The cost of removal and replacement of affected tress and shrubs would be huge and very counter productive. As treatment to combat the disease seems like it would be none existent.

I hope the Government that is so keen this free trade agreement and so sure the risk of us contracting Fire Blight is so low a plan to compensate the Apple and Pear Industry and the communities that one built around them around them if infection occurs.

I really feel Australia is a complacent country we need to look after number one for a change. I am sure if we had Foot and Mouth disease Beef and Pork exports to New Zealand and America would not be an option and we would have to accept that.

We have lost so many inventions and technologies over the years because we are too easy going. Lets not cripple our Apple and Pear industry for the sake of political corrections keep New Zealand apples out of Australia until you can be 100% certain we cannot be infected with Fire Blight.

Yours faithfully

Baron

Scott Baron