

**Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional
Affairs and Transport Committee**

on

Importation of Apples from New Zealand

by

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and Heritage**

Submission relating to the: Importation of Apples from New Zealand

The initial response to the Draft IRA is one of great disappointment, given the protocol proposed is less stringent than that proposed in the year 2000 draft IRA. Buffer zones, for example no longer apply. Given the bacteria is windborne, and trees in the adjoining orchard may be infected, visual inspections to establish symptom free status is not sufficient. Nor do chlorine dips and 6 weeks of cool storage, along with visual inspection, constitute sufficient effort to ensure the disease is kept out of Australia. The significance or the impact of the disease has not diminished over the last four years. Fire Blight remains a bacterial disease which has never been eradicated once established in a region. Its control in apple orchards requires the use of antibacterial sprays which are not currently in Australia, given their potential to enter the food chain and affect the immunity of a range of species, including humans.

The continual use of sprays, the constant pruning and removal of diseased trees does see some apple orchards survive despite the Fire Blight infection, albeit with higher labour costs and higher chemical use. In particular, greater use of chemicals impact on the biodiversity and health of the environment that the “clean-green” image is compromised when additional sprays are used to produce food. Pear trees, however, do not survive Apple and Pear Fire Blight infection.

The Pear Industry

Australia has a fruit manufacturing/preserving industry dependent on pear as a main ingredient of any fruit salad or mixed preserved fruit product, and pear juice is the essential ingredient of all mixed or single fruit products (given its natural sweetness and comparatively low cost).

As well, given few countries continue to have a thriving pear industry, there is growing demand and markets for fresh pear exports which Australia’s growers are now developing. New varieties of fresh eating pears are now being planted over large areas in some fruit areas of Australia. The Draft IRA pays insufficient attention to pear tree vulnerability. A separate risk assessment process should have been undertaken to accurately reflect the different levels of risk and impacts on pears, as distinct from apples. While the apple industry also needs adequate protection from disease, pears represent a separate case, given their susceptibility to Fire Blight.

Indigenous Species

I also continue to be concerned at the lack of scientific information cited to properly inform the draft IRA about the risks of the disease Apple and Pear Fire Blight infecting members of the indigenous family *Rosaceae*, at least one Victorian variety of which is listed in the EPBC Act as “vulnerable.” We should not assume that the loss of this species to the disease is inconsequential. Our biodiversity should be protected at all costs.

Pest Species

There is also limited research cited on the impacts of the other six or so pest species known and expected to be on fresh apples imported from New Zealand. Yet the protocol supposed to eliminate the arrival of such pests as well as Fire Blight bacteria, depends on control processes which are less stringent than those which WA requires before fresh apples can be shipped from Victoria, in order to protect them from such pest species, as codling moth.

While the Department of Environment & Heritage was satisfied with the communication which occurred between them and BA, the Department of Environment & Heritage did not contribute any scientific knowledge re the pest and disease impacts of a failed protocol on the native flora and native insects of Australia. This lack of information remains a serious flaw.

USA, Japan and the WTO

Because of these additional considerations, ie Australia's important pear industry, the indigenous *Victorian Rosaceae* specie's vulnerability, and the other pest species associated with the import request, I do not believe the Japan-USA case brought before the WTO means that Australia's efforts to adopt a strong quarantine protocol, can never succeed. The cases are clearly different. We should never be concerned about the threat of a WTO challenge if the science clearly demonstrates that a disease represents a significant risk to Australia's Enterprise, and very stringent measures are in order. Such measures must, include consideration of the continued exclusion of the potentially disease carrying fruit from Australia

The need for an Independent response to the stakeholders' new information and evaluation of the draft IRA.

To be fair to Biosecurity Australia, I believe they should not be put in the position of evaluating the stakeholders' and other contributors' new or alternative science brought forward in response to the Draft IRA. Rather, an independent panel of objective scientists, (who may not be specialists in quarantine issues) should evaluate the new cases brought forward. There is precedence in this. The GMO regulator is not required to be prosecutor, judge and jury.

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