

# Chapter 5

## Conclusions

### **Comment on the administration of Biosecurity Australia**

5.1 In the Committee's view Biosecurity Australia's administration of the banana IRA has been less than ideal. The Committee refers to the lack of clear minutes of proceedings, and the lack of a clear procedure for dealing with minority opinions on IRA panels.

5.2 The Committee suggests that stakeholder perceptions that BA has been influenced by free trade pressure have contributed to poor relations with stakeholders.

5.3 Stakeholders' suspicions were increased by:

- BA's reluctance to admit that there were minority opinions on the panel, at a time when others suspected it;
- BA's apparent lack of concern about risks considered over the longer term;
- BA's handling of the public relations problem created by the spreadsheet mistake which eventually led to issuing the June 2004 addendum.

5.4 The Committee welcomes the Minister's recent initiatives to reassure the community of the rigour and independence of BA's procedures, by establishing BA as a prescribed agency independent of the Department, and by appointing a group of eminent scientists to play a key role in assessing stakeholder comments on IRA's.

5.5 The Committee hopes that these initiatives will flow through to the administration of BA as necessary.

### **Comment on import of bananas**

5.6 The Committee does not have the expertise to comment on the scientific arguments in any detail. However the Committee considers that Dr Fegan's concerns about the assessment of Moko (paragraph 3.11ff), and Mr Peasley's concerns about the impracticality of controlling Moko on the highly mechanised farms of Far North Queensland (paragraph 3.20), need to be addressed more fully.

5.7 The Committee is sympathetic to the ABGC's general concerns about places where the February 2004 revised draft downgraded probabilities or risks apparently without any new information.

5.8 Most of the concerns relate to pests for which the IRA (up to the June 2004 addendum) does in fact find that the unrestricted risk is unacceptable (the exception is

Black Sigatoka). Thus the focus of concern turns to the adequacy of the proposed risk management measures (paragraph 3.54ff).

5.9 The Committee agrees with concerns about auditing compliance with an area of low pest prevalence regime in the Philippines (paragraph 3.65ff). On the evidence given, the Committee does not have confidence that the integrity of areas of low pest prevalence could be assured in the longer term.

5.10 The Committee has serious concerns about restricted distribution in Australia as a risk management measure, for the reasons given at paragraph 3.84ff. Plant movement controls already exist in Australia, but they should not be increased if it can be avoided. Australia's large size and scattered population makes internal border controls costly and of uncertain long-term reliability.

5.11 The scientific arguments about the steps leading to the assessed unrestricted risk, and the concerns about risk management measures, do interact in this way: if a certain factor affecting risk is actually higher than was thought (for example, the prevalence of Moko in the Philippines), then the consequences of any breakdown in the risk management regime become potentially more serious.

5.12 For these reasons, but mainly because of concerns about the proposed risk management measures, the Committee does not think the case to allow import of Philippine bananas has been made out.

**Senator the Hon. Bill Heffernan**

**Chair**