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The Chairman
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Senate Inquiry - Imported Exotic Citrus Canker Disease

Thank you for allowing me to appear before this Inquiry.

From a growers perspective this disastrous situation has been an absolute shambles and a total debacle from when the whistleblower first reported the allegation of illegally imported citrus and other materials into Emerald.

The slow response by AQIS, when originally reported by Wayne Gillies, the bungled raid carried out by AQIS in July 2001, poor investigation work in the field, minimum investigation of the nursery, poor search in the main residence where it was said that the budwood was stored in a huge vault, is beyond belief. I am aware of the vault because I was involved in building this structure.

In conversations with Tony Young, the AQIS investigation officer, I asked him if they had investigated the contents of the vault, whereas he stated that he had asked Catherine Cea where the keys of the vault were and she had told him that they (Evergreen Farms) had lost the key. I was adamant that they should obtain access to the vault, as I believed that this was where the budwood was stored.

As far as locating other witnesses involved in the citrus operation at Evergreen Farms, I have personally gone to extreme lengths to locate these former employees. My questions to Governments' representatives have been, if through my contacts we were able to locate these people why hadn't the relative government agencies with all their resources able to do the same.

From a personal point of view on behalf of my wife, my family and myself it has been a shocking twelve (12) month period from July 2004, with little or no response from either State or Federal governments.

With regard to former Minister for Agriculture, Warren Truss, his behaviour has been deplorable for an elected politician, he should be ashamed of the way he and his department has shown a complete lack of leadership, initiative and duty of care.

I firmly believe that Warren Truss should not be a Member of Parliament, let alone a Minister responsible for any government portfolio.

For the benefit of myself and the other Emerald citrus growers I would certainly hope the new Federal Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran conducts himself in a far better, representative and responsible manner.

In conclusion, may I inform you that my family farm is facing financial ruin, and possibly bankruptcy, through no fault of our own, rather, the failure of AQIS, Biosecurity and other governments' shortcomings!