

Dear Sirs:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit some ideas to the committee. I have read your terms of reference, and appreciate the analysis of the inquiry's key themes. I am not qualified to advise on such matters as enforcement and biosecurity, but recognise Australia's considerable capability in addressing the increasing imports of farm products. I am glad that more attention is being paid to risk analysis, where national quantitative expertise needs to be developed.

There are very few, arguably three, species of banana, of which *musa cavendishii* is much the most important. A chief disease problem is sigatoka, which already exists in Queensland, and its spread is mitigated by shipping bananas from affected plants to Vic. and Tas. There are many analogies with the pome fruits' fire blight, which can be found on Australian cotoneaster. Both problems enable protectionism to be disguised as a quarantine matter.

The demand elasticity of bananas -- Aust.'s most popular fruit -- was illustrated when Cyclone Larry devastated most of the eastern crop. Banana prices reached \$15/kg, while consumers in New Zealand were paying \$1/kg for Ecuadorian bananas. This discrepancy also illustrates the distortions due to excessive protection. A more liberal trade policy would obviously relieve the geographical concentration of banana growing, and provide a hedge against disasters, not to mention an incentive for Aust. growers to improve.

Many banana-growing countries are poor, and will benefit from trade rather than aid.

Another plant in the same family, *musa textilis*, produces abaca or manila, formerly the world's chief cordage fibre. It comes from the outer sheaths of leaves. I can find no reports about diseases or insects being spread around the world by the extensive trade in manila, of which I believe Philippines remains the biggest producer. (A good specimen of this plant grows alone in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens.)

Respectfully submitted,
Robert G. Steadman