

## SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPORTATION OF BANANAS FROM THE PHILIPPINES

I share the government's concern that the economic downturn could lead to kneejerk reactions from governments that could make things worse. If protectionism prevents fair trade from occurring it damages a nation's economic wellbeing; if the products of a poor country are thus excluded the effects are even more damaging. But as far as I can tell the Doha round of trade talks has little to do with fairness.

Freemarket theory holds that when trade barriers are removed everybody wins—eventually. No proof has ever been offered that it will work however; and in the meantime it is wrecking economies. Our agricultural sector has been hamstrung by a lack of fair trade, for example. Our farmers produce some of the world's greenest, most nutritious food— and have built up a local and international clientele for themselves. But many now struggle against cheap imports grown by virtual slave labour in countries that know little about food safety. The wealthy exploiters of farm labourers in poor countries grow richer from our market— but our farmers can't afford to employ the workers they need without secure income.

A case in point is the proposal presently before the government to import bananas from the Philippines-- despite the heavy application of toxic sprays to them, the devastating diseases they carry, and conditions for the workers who produce them. Granting market access to the Philippines would be unfair to them as well as us; the quality of our crop would suffer because more sprays would need to be applied, and it would be less reliable— whereas Philippines' growers would have no incentive to improve their product or work practices. The fair policy would rather be to export our agronomic talent and banana-knowhow to their growers, so they can command a better price and find new markets.

When foreign goods are denied a chance to compete with ours on fair terms, we suffer. But when the competition is detrimental to our industries and national ethos, it should be prevented. The much-vaunted 'level playing field' of Doha-type agreements is really a 'lay-down misere' in which the kitty goes to financiers; thus we are one of the only OECD nations still promoting them.

As this inquiry deals with the risk-assessment given by Biosecurity Australia regarding Filipino bananas—having studied statistics at university I know how fallible they are. Reason would be a much better guide for such risk-assessment, and it dictates that the risk is too high. The cause of the recent outbreak of Black Sigatoka that decimated crops in Queensland has still not been identified; and the treatments used for Moko disease in the Philippines would be unviable here. To improve the quality of risk-assessment it is necessary to remove our quarantine authorities from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and grant them autonomy, so they can be directly accountable to Parliament. This reform would ensure proper funding and supervision of these services.