

23 February 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senators

Inquiry into the import risk analysis (IRA) for the importation of Cavendish bananas from the Philippines

The “Final Import Risk Analysis Report for the Importation of Cavendish Bananas from the Philippines (the Report)” prepared by Biosecurity Australia, provides no comprehensive analysis of the potential implications of banana importation.

In the year ending 30 June 2007 Australia produced 213 193 tonnes of bananas (88.5% from Queensland), exported 5 tonnes and imported 587.7 tonnes (processed). Australian bananas are grown along much of the east coast of Queensland and northern New South Wales, and over parts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The Australian banana industry generates \$300 million a year, directly supports some 5,000 workers, and indirectly many thousand more businesses. Banana importation from the Philippines will place all of this at grave risk.

The Report and the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference include no consideration of the need for banana importation, or its’ potential social and economic impacts. These are significant concerns for the banana industry. Any decision to import bananas could have disastrous consequences to thousands of Australians and should not be imposed without extensive industry consultation.

Turning to the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, it is noted that large volumes of bananas could be imported into Australia from the Philippines. It is illogical to suggest that not one single microspore of disease will come in with those bananas; nor entertain the notion that such disease will not get into the Australian environment and propagate. Indeed this is a flawed proposition that **no reasonable person** would accept.

I note that appendix 3 of the Report provides a summary table of 37 diseases present in the Philippines that could have potential consequences if allowed to spread in Australia. Over 70% of these diseases receive no further consideration in the report, and no comment is made in the summary table on their 'potential for being on hard green banana fruit'; 'potential for establishment and spread'; and 'potential for consequences'. The value and weight of this risk analysis is questioned, given that it does not consider 70% of diseases.

Aside from bananas, all 37 diseases might also have devastating impacts on other Australian crops and our natural flora and fauna population. The Report does not even start to consider these potentially far reaching consequences.

Restorative measures outlined in the report amount to self-policing by the Philippine exporters. The Report acknowledges that with this system, critical failures may occur, which will require immediate action. However, it does not describe the oversight measures that are to be put in place to identify critical failure; rather it vaguely makes reference to ongoing audit by AQIS. It is questioned whether anything less than labour intensive and rigid monitoring, analysis and reporting on a consignment by consignment basis would provide reasonable protection against the array of diseases present in the Philippines.

By way of conclusion, the decision to import bananas will have a colossal impact on the 50 000 people residing in the growing regions within the Cassowary Coast and Tablelands Regional Council area, particularly Tully, Innisfail and Mareeba. Since the demise of the sugar industry, the economies of these regions are mainly dependant on bananas. Experience shows that once the banana industry is closed down, prime 'food bowl' growing agricultural lands will be used of marginal cattle operations, deteriorate, be marked for subdivision and taken over by lifestylers.

I trust that the Senate Standing Committee will give the comments in this submission the credence that they deserve, and look beyond the veneer of a weighty Report that lacks substance.

I also look forward to the opportunity of speaking at the Inquiry, as requested on 21 January 2009. This will allow all Committee Members to put any further questions to me and gauge my passionate objections to the importation of bananas from the Philippines. I believe such importation will have direct and devastating impacts on many people in the Kennedy Electorate, and the Australian economy.

Yours Sincerely

The Hon Bob KATTER MP

Signed by Elise Stocker, Senior Adviser, for
and on behalf of Mr Katter in his absence.