



## SUBMISSION TO AQIS INQUIRY

### Imported Food Quality

Research evidence is that Australia's food imports are increasing. These include processed/preserved fruit and vegetables, processed/preserved seafood, transformed meat and meat products minimally transformed vegetables, fruit and meats and flour and cereal products. Significantly increased exports are coming from Ireland, China, New Zealand, United States, India and Thailand and (particularly for seafood) China 280% and Vietnam 160% respectively in the last three years.

Food testing and Quality Assurance programs in Ireland, New Zealand and to a lesser degree the US are of a high standard but the evidence is that Thailand, China and Vietnam lag well behind. Broadly the evidence is that in these latter countries there are high levels of contamination in inland and coastal waterways, as well as inadequate facilities for solid waste disposal. There is also significant evidence of use of banned pesticides and unsafe pesticide use in Thailand and a high level of environmental contamination by organochlorine pesticides and other persistent organic pollutants (POP) in China.

POP pesticides have the potential to cause cancer, hormonal imbalances, organ dysfunction, immune system suppression, reproductive disorders as well as a number of other illnesses.

The use of DDT, officially banned in 1983, continues and the levels of DDT in breast milk of Chinese women is many times higher than the levels detected in Australian women.

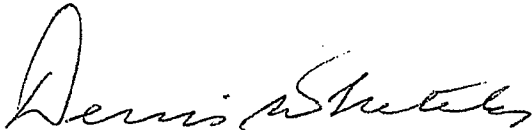
Based on its involvement in a task force charged with examining China's key agricultural and rural development policy issues, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research recently concluded that reform of China's food quality regulation and monitoring system is crucial and that upgrading China's food quality and safety regulations and enforcement capabilities to international standards is an urgent public policy imperative.

### Recommendations

#### Imported Food Quality

- (i) That the AQIS risk based inspection system be overhauled and frequency of testing be increased to 100% for countries such as China, Thailand, Vietnam etc which have unacceptable growing and processing standards and/or inadequate food quality testing and enforcement regimes.
- (ii) That no Government to Government certification agreements or AQIS to overseas producers Quality Assurance (QA) agreements be continued or entered into with countries, with inadequate quality testing and enforcement regimes.
- (iii) That where Government to Government certification agreements or AQIS to overseas producer QA agreements are entered into then stringent random audits be carried out in those countries by AQIS officials and the results published in Australia wide media.
- (iv) That negotiations between Australia and New Zealand, to bring risk category foods within the scope of the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Act 1997 (TTMRA) be expedited urgently.
- (v) That the AQIS pesticide screen for imported fruit and vegetables be expanded to include testing for DDT, other organochlorines and any pesticides and fertilisers that are thought to pose a long-term health risk and are still being used in other countries.
- (vi) That AQIS publish in the Australia wide media and at least quarterly the results of its inspections of imported foods.

- (vii) That AQIS include microbiological contaminants in its routine screening of imported horticultural products.
- (viii) That measures be taken urgently to ensure that the new Standard for Country of Origin Labelling requirement, gazetted on 8th December 2005, applying to all packaged foods and unpackaged fish, fruit and vegetables and pork is enforced and that Country of Origin statements meet the Country of Origin tests under the Trade Practises Act 1974.



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