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Quarantine and Biosecurity Review

I write this brief submission, not as one who is already involved in the agricultural sector but as a consumer stakeholder and a taxpayer stake holder.

As a consumer, if I find that a products supply of say apples or bananas is significantly diminished due to a disease introduced into this country, then both myself and family are disadvantaged. Supply and quality goes down while price goes up.

Further, if because of a government policy that allowed the introduction of a previously banned item, the government of the day is required to payout to industry or expend significant dollars to fight a spread of a disease due to imports, then both I and every other tax payer will eventually be funding the issue as taxpayers or seeing funding diverted from other departments or from within AQIS so as to address a problem that had not existed if a relaxing of quarantine standards had not been allowed.

Other concerns that require attention from the reviewing committee are:

- The need to differentiate trade policies from quarantine policies. If the World Trade Organisation does not specify that quarantine is a trade issue and that a country can exercise as high or low level as it chooses, then neither should Australia.
- Equivalence of risk assessments when comparing tourism/travel to trade imports. Does the Review Committee believe that is possible to equate the risk of a contaminated piece of food from a tourist to many thousand tonnes of say unprocessed meat from a country with known exotic disease outbreaks found within that product?

I recall watching the late Steve Irwin presenting advertisements for AQIS a few years back. The message was clear from an environmental view point about the consequences to Australia's native flora and fauna. The consequences to our domestic flora and fauna is no less real should an exotic disease from another country take hold due to contaminated imports going undetected.

Application of the precautionary principle must always be allowed when a scientific analysis is either not conclusive or contradictory in the determination of the potential risk. At all times the probability of diseased imports entering the country and the consequences of an outbreak must always be in the mind of the accessing authorities and law makers governing such regulation. I am not convinced that a stated modus operandi of achieving very low, but not zero, 'Appropriate Level of Protection' are in the national interest.

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