



Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator for Queensland

REF: MNMC2011

Mr Max Summers
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Horticulture Exporters Association
621 Burwood Highway
KNOXFIELD VIC 3180

Dear Mr Summers

At a hearing of the ongoing Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Inquiry into Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements, Australian Horticulture Exporters Association (AHEA) representatives, Mr David Minnis and Mr Alastair Scott, made a series statements and allegations about the conduct of officers of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Mr Scott stated on the record that the Horticulture Ministerial Task Force "managed by charlatans and amounts to nothing more than a sham" (Hansard, page 2). Mr Scott later confirmed this description as "appropriate" (page 6).

Further, a written submission in the name of AHEA representative Mr Minnis states "AQIS has deliberately complicated export documentation and procedures to ensure maximum fees are raised".

I take these allegations very seriously.

The Australian Public Service Code of Conduct provides for an APS employee to behave honestly and with integrity in the course of APS employment; to act with care and diligence and to treat everyone with respect, courtesy and without harassment. An APS employee must at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS.

I ask that any evidence supporting these allegations and any other matter involving misconduct by departmental officials be provided as soon as possible. The contact in the department is Ms Lynne O'Brien, First Assistant Secretary, People and Service Delivery on 02 6272 5990. Ms O'Brien will refer the matter to the department's Integrity Unit. If you prefer not to deal with the department directly information can be provided to Mr Stuart Stark in my office.

It is unfortunate that the Horticulture MTF, after almost two years, has been unable to present a clear position, on behalf of horticulture exporters, about more efficient service delivery arrangements. This is in stark contrast to all other industry groups who have progressed well

with significant viable reforms. The Government has demonstrated its willingness to support this process and the industries going through transition.

You have advised that the AHEA would present a unified MTF horticulture industry position on efficiency of service delivery. I am yet to receive this position.

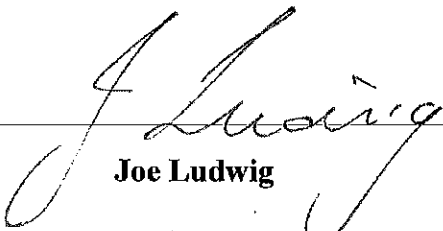
In order to ensure that all members of the MTF and the wider industry are kept informed I have asked the Departmental representatives at the MTF to table this letter at the next meeting of the Horticulture Ministerial Task Force on 20 December.

I am seeking the meeting's advice on whether the MTF can deliver a clear position on export reform by 31 January 2012.

In the absence of a clear position on reform from the industry, the department will continue to perform export certification services under current arrangements. I continue to be strongly committed to reform and will work with any participant in the industry interested in pursuing that goal.

I have provided a copy of this correspondence to the Senate Committee for Regional Affairs and Transport.

Yours sincerely



Joe Ludwig

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator for Queensland

5 December 2011