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David GIBSON MP
Member for Gympie



Monday, 15th October 2012

Mr Stephen Palethorpe
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Mr Palethorpe

Submission to Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport - Importation of Fresh Ginger

I wish to thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate inquiry into the importation of fresh ginger as this is an issue that will directly impact upon the State electorate of Gympie in Queensland.

I have had many representations from local ginger farmers who are concerned at the impact that this decision could have upon the Australian Ginger industry especially in the event that the proposed biosecurity measures are not adhered to and disease enters into Australia.

From these representations and my own research I have deep concerns about the importation of Fijian ginger. In short, my view is there are too many compelling reasons, not just the real diseases risk but also the lack of infrastructure, resources and properly trained staff in Fiji to ensure the proper treatment before shipment and the over-riding fact that Australia is already self-sufficient in ginger.

There is a real fear that Gympie's ginger growers will be under a disease threat from any decision to relax import restrictions on Fijian ginger.

The ginger rhizome, because of its irregular, angular shape and tight crevices is virtually impossible to completely remove all soil. This raises the issue that many of the pests and diseases of concern are soil-borne including a range of pathogenic fungi.

Many of the pests and diseases present in Fiji and of concern to the Australian environment or the ginger industry, are also major pests of other crops, such as bananas, citrus, sweet potatoes and pineapples as well as common nursery plants such as Cordylines, Dracaenas, Cannas and the relatives of the ginger, Heliconias, Strelitzias etc. Cross infection to these major industries is a very real risk.

It is understood that Fiji has limited facilities or skills to adequately test for pathogens and limited local agronomic advice or soil testing services are available to ensure adequate disinfections or identification of pests and diseases. With this in mind, there are serious concerns as to how can they provide a secure chain of biosecurity.

The Mary Valley and Gympie region has some of Australia's largest ginger farms and current biosecurity safeguards are best practice. Should there be a breach of biosecurity by the imports this would put local jobs and businesses under threat.

As Chair of the Queensland State Government's Mary Valley Economic Advisory Group I am aware that the properties that were acquired by the previous Labor Government for the Traveston Crossing Dam project are being looked at by growers to expand ginger production. Should the Federal Government allow the importation of Fijian ginger then it is possible that the decision to grow ginger in the Mary Valley would be reviewed putting at risk the economic redevelopment of this region.

I am advised that my concerns have been expressed by the Queensland Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Mr John McVeigh MP who is urging his Federal counterpart, Mr Joe Ludwig MP to reconsider the decision.

My purpose in submitting this to you is to alert you to the serious risks to the ginger industry in the Gympie region both from an economic and environment perspective by the introduction of fresh ginger from Fiji.

David Gibson MP
Member for Gympie