HORTICULTURE COALITION OF SA

27th January 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Inquiry into the Implications of the use of Fenthion on Australia's horticultural industry

The Horticulture Coalition of SA Inc represents an industry sector that is integral to the ongoing future development of South Australia.

The Horticulture Coalition of SA Inc comprises representation from almonds, apple and pear, citrus, landscape, mushroom, nursery and garden, olives, onion, pistachios and vegetables through their peak commodity groups. These grower groups have been joined by the Adelaide Produce Markets, the SA Chamber of Fruit and Vegetables and Women in Horticulture to make up the inaugural members.

The South Australian horticulture industry is an important business sector for the South Australia. The industry worth $900 million farm gate consists of 3,500 small to medium business employing 13,500 permanent and an additional 24,000 seasonal staff.
Most importantly the industry is the life blood of the broader food sector and integral to many other sectors including health, tourism, education and employment.
With the projected growth of state, national and international populations securing food production and supply is the major issue for the next decade.

While this "Inquiry into the Implications of the use of Fenthion on Australia's horticultural industry" has some merit Horticulture Coalition of SA Inc believes that the review is not focussed at dealing with the major issues facing the industry in relation to

a) Fruit Fly management and control,
b) Chemical reviews,
c) Investment in new chemical, and
d) Investment in alternative controls.

Fruit Fly Management and Control

Queensland Fruit Fly (QFF) and Mediterranean Fruit Fly (Med Fly) are some of the most destructive pests facing the horticultural industry as well as the general consumer yet there is no coordinated plan to manage and ultimately eradicate this pest. The one pest that affects many commodities within the horticulture industry in achieving market access to countries like China, Japan, Korea and the USA is both Fruit Fly species.

A number of years ago a National Fruit Fly Strategy was developed by government and industry but in recent years government has walked away from funding the strategy. Reality industry does not have spare R&D funds to fund the Strategy. What is lacking is an active National Fruit Fly Action Plan that is owned and operated in a partnership between the Federal Government and industry.
Over the past few years we have seen the State Government's in Victoria and New South Wales either total withdrawn and/or downsized their commitment to managing Fruit Fly outbreaks.
QFF and Med Fly will only be managed with a medium to long term plan which is supported and funded by the Federal and State Governments and industry in a true and committed partnership.

Chemical Reviews:

The chemical reviews undertaken by APVMA need to full scrutinised and a more efficiency process adopted which has great consideration of the value and importance of the chemical to primary production. Health, environment and trade dominate the parameters of all reviews but the effect on production has no weight.

The effect on production through the loss of Dimethoate and Fenthion has been immense to Australian Horticulture but it appears nobody really cares. This is not only having an effect on the ability for growers to produce a crop it has an un-intended consequence of creating human health issues for the producers, their families and staff.

The other issue is the time that it takes APVMA to conduct chemical reviews. In reality the reviews of Dimethoate and Fenthion have been at least ten years in the process. One of the issues is the lack of sufficient resources available to APVMA to undertake reviews in an efficient manner and timeframe.

The Horticulture Coalition of SA Inc believes that there needs to be full review of the APVMA chemical review program including the funding made available to APVMA for chemical reviews.

Investment in New Chemicals.

Alongside the APVMA chemical review program there should be a program of investment in developing new and relevant chemicals for the management and control of pests and diseases.
Such programs cannot be left to the chemical companies to undertake because as international companies they have limited interest in the Australian Horticultural industry (because of its small size in comparison to other countries) and pests like QFF and Med Fly (QFF is native to Australia and Med Fly is an introduced pest).

The aspect of developing controls for a major Australian pest does not appear to be on the Australian Governments priority list. The question is why not?

The involvement in an organisation like CSIRO working on chemical controls for QFF and Med Fly should be seen as a major investment for Government and the community.

Investment in alternative controls.
Much has been documented as potential alternative controls. In fact the 'Dimethoate and Fenthion Response Coordination Committee' organised the development of a report looking at alternative control measures. Unfortunately none of the controls have been effective in filling the gap left by the removal of Dimethoate and Fenthion.

The concept of Sterile Insect Technology (SIT) has been a tool that can be used as part of a management program. It has been shown to be successful in managing outbreaks of Fruit Fly in South Australia and is used as a technique by overseas countries with a high degree of success.
Yet in Australia governments are in the process of withdrawing funds to maintain sterile fly production in New South Wales and Western Australia. The South Australian Government with the support of HAL and some commercial partners has recently announced the development of s SIT facility in South Australia. Unfortunately this facility will take many years to reach full operation and by that time Queensland Fruit Fly will more than likely be endemic across the whole of Australia.

The lack of a national approach to SIT is of major concern.

While South Australia has only had limited Fruit Fly outbreaks when they have affected industry there has been chemicals like Dimethoate and Fenthion to 'fall back on' particularly for exporting produce to Western Australia. These options are effectively being withdrawn resulting in a reduced set of 'tools' to manage Fruit Fly.

Sections of the Australian Horticulture Industry are rapidly declining due to the lack of chemicals like Dimethoate and Fenthion. The South Australian Horticulture industry does not want to suffer the same fate. Immediate support to assist the industry in either regaining access to these chemicals OR the availability of new chemicals and/or effective alternative treatments is essential to assist in maintaining and then growing the South Australian Horticulture Industry.

The Horticulture Coalition of SA Inc would seek an opportunity to give a presentation to the Senate Committee at an appropriate time.

Yours sincerely,

Trevor M Ranford

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Chair
Horticulture Coalition of SA Inc