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Department of
**Agriculture, Fisheries
and Forestry**

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

Dear Mr Palethorpe

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Queensland (DAFF Queensland) provides the following submission to the upcoming Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Inquiry on the effect on Australian pineapple growers of importing fresh pineapple from Malaysia.

Bacterial heart rot and fruit collapse diseases of pineapple (caused by *Dickeya* spp.) are serious biosecurity threats to the Queensland pineapple industry. Both diseases are systemic (that is, able to spread throughout the whole plant and the fruit) and can remain latent (symptomless) in fruit even after harvest. DAFF Queensland scientists are of the opinion that these two diseases would have a high risk of spreading to Australia in imported fruit, even under strict inspection procedures. In addition, *Dickeya* spp. has been identified in the Industry Biosecurity Plan for the Australian Pineapple Industry as high priority emergency plant pests.

In Malaysia, both diseases are endemic, with field crop losses of up to 40 percent recorded. These diseases were detected in Hawaii in 2003, and have subsequently caused significant crop losses. Hawaii had been importing pineapple fruit from countries known to have *Dickeya* spp. using similar quarantine conditions to those recommended in the current Provisional Final Import Risk Analysis Report for Fresh Decrowned Pineapple Fruit from Malaysia.

Australia has very similar climatic conditions and pineapple varieties to both Hawaii and Malaysia. Therefore the impact of this disease in Australia could reasonably be expected to approximate the field losses (up to 40 percent) reported from Malaysia.

In 2010-11 pineapple production in Queensland was estimated at 83 221 tonnes covering 3992 ha. The pineapple industry employs approximately 2000 people, both on farm and in packing sheds (source: Pineapple Industry Advancement Group). This figure does not include those processors relying on pineapples such as the Golden Circle canning facility. Australian pineapples are grown year round, with approximately 44 000 tonne of fresh fruit and 41 000 tonne of processed fruit marketed in 2009-10. It is currently estimated that there are 114 production businesses in Queensland. Key production districts include North Queensland, Yeppoon and Cawarral, Bundaberg, Maryborough and Hervey Bay, Mary Valley and Nambour, Glasshouse Mountains and Beerwah, Wamuran, and Elimbah (Pineapple Industry Strategic Plan 2011).

A comprehensive submission in response to the draft import risk analysis (IRA) report for Fresh Decrowned Pineapple Fruit from Malaysia was provided by DAFF Queensland to Biosecurity Australia. The submission identified a number of scientific and technical concerns with the draft IRA. The submission disagreed with three key assessments as follows:

- The assessment of the risk of entry of the causal agent of pineapple heart rot and fruit collapse (*Dickeya* spp.) as 'very low', with no additional biosecurity measures, was too low. DAFF Queensland considered the unmitigated risk of entry to be 'moderate'. Therefore, specific biosecurity measures are required to mitigate the risks during the importation process.
- The consequences of the establishment of exotic mealybug species were significantly underrated. DAFF Queensland considers these consequences to be 'high'.
- The use of chemicals in treatment regimes that are not currently registered in Australia. DAFF Queensland contends that unregistered chemicals can not be used.

In its submission, DAFF Queensland provided the following rationale to support the view that there is a high risk of entry, distribution and establishment of *Dickeya* spp. under the proposed conditions:

- the high susceptibility of varieties exported from Malaysia to *Dickeya* spp.
- the high incidence of disease in Malaysian pineapple fields (up to 40 percent) increases the risk of exporting infected fruit
- the increased risk of including infected fruit for export, due to early (unripened) fruit harvesting, which may have latent infection with no symptom expression
- the inability to visually detect latent infection in the fruits
- a significant number of infected fruits will be included in consignments (even two percent infected fruit is a significant number in terms of total trade, with 30 tonnes per consignment (ref. Draft IRA, page 23)
- the high survival ability of bacteria during low temperature transportation to Australia
- high inoculum densities in infected fruit
- the potential for these diseases to be widely spread through commercial processing (cannery) waste should imported fruit be used for processing
- the potential for long term survival of bacterial cells in the Australian environment

- the fact that these bacteria are readily transmitted through soil, irrigation water and other means
- only small inoculum doses are needed to initiate new infections
- the availability of many alternate hosts in Australia
- the availability of many vectors in Australia
- the high susceptibility of pineapple varieties grown in Australia to *Dickeya* spp.
- the close proximity of pineapple plantations to populated areas and the suburban location of the Golden Circle Pty Ltd pineapple cannery
- residential and peri-urban pineapple growing
- favourable climatic conditions for disease development in Australia.

DAFF Queensland strongly recommends a thorough re-examination of the risk assessment for *Dickeya* spp. to identify the appropriate level of protection.

If you require any further information, please contact Mr Mark Panitz, General Manager, of DAFF on telephone 07 3087 8098 or email mark.panitz@daff.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Jack Noye
Director-General
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry