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

Dear Mr Palethorpe,

Thank you for your invitation of 18 September to contribute to the Inquiry on the proposed importation of processing potatoes from New Zealand. I have been travelling overseas for most of the past month and have not had regular email access or an opportunity to prepare a detailed submission. However, under the circumstances I request that you accept my advice and note that I will be happy to elaborate on any points raised at the Committee's convenience.

I have read the relevant Pest Risk Analysis and commend DAFF for their work. My concerns are twofold:

1. The PRA identifies potential points of escape of the pathogen and its vector and recommends the implementation of appropriate biosecurity measures. Curiously the PRA recommends that shipping containers may be opened for ventilation at the port of entry. This makes no sense and poses a real threat that any psyllids contaminating the shipment may escape. Any host plants in the vicinity could become infected with the zebra stripe pathogen and provide a source of inoculum for the further spread of the disease.

2. The PRA assumes perfect knowledge and compliance. I challenge DAFF to identify one instance of perfect compliance to biosecurity conditions regulating the importation of plant material in recent years. The recent incursions of eucalyptus rust, chestnut blight and stripe rust of wheat demonstrate the catastrophic failure of Australia's risk assessment-based plant biosecurity system. In each case biosecurity measures and incursion management plans failed because of modelling based on imperfect knowledge and flawed assumptions, followed by human error and regulatory failure.

I urge the Committee to apply the precautionary principle and reject the application to import processing potatoes from New Zealand until it is possible to absolutely guarantee the exclusion of zebra stripe, the tomato/potato psyllid and other pathogens and pests. The potential benefit to Australia of importing processing potatoes from sources where these pests and diseases are present is overwhelmed by the potential damage an incursion would cause.

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Sincerely,