

MEDIA RELEASE

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FINDINGS OF NZ POTATO IMPORTS SENATE INQUIRY DELAYED UNTIL 19 JULY 2013

Members of the Federal Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee who attended the Senate Inquiry held on 24 October 2012 announced this week that their report containing findings and possible recommendations would not be released until 19 July 2013.

This is now the third delay; it was to be handed down on 19 June.

The Inquiry concerns the biosecurity risks to the Australian potato industry of fresh potatoes imported from New Zealand for processing including French fry and potato chip production.

Robbie Davis, CEO of Potatoes South Australia Incorporated, which represents the potato industry's entire value chain, was advised that the Committee intends to continue assessing the risks associated with the importation and quarantine process. She was first witness at the October Inquiry. Other key witnesses were Mr Frank Rovers, Chair Victorian Potato Growers Council, Mr Noel Suckling and Mr Greg Murphy, McCain Grower Group Ballarat, Mr Peter Hardman, Simplot Australia and Potatoes Tasmania, representatives of AUSVEG and representatives of DAFF's Biosecurity Australia.

The New Zealand potato industry is affected by many pests and diseases which are not present in Australia, including the devastating Zebra Chip disease, which reduces yield and results in a downgrading of quality due to distinct discolouration in the shape of brown/black stripes and ultimately, death of the plant.

The disease has caused in excess of \$120 million damage to the New Zealand industry. The Australian Potato Industry faces catastrophic yield losses of as much as 50% if approval of market access for New Zealand potatoes by the Federal Government's DAFF Biosecurity Australia goes ahead.

The Federal Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee has now sought additional independent specialised advice in relation to the Risk Estimation Matrix, a tool employed by DAFF to analyse and calculate risk.

"The Senate Inquiry into the importation of fresh potatoes from New Zealand for processing demonstrates the deep concerns of the Australian industry worth in excess of \$1/2 billion. This third delay must indicate the seriousness of the Committee's findings to date and the requirement of further time can only mean that a more thorough analysis of the importation process is needed," she added.

In South Australia, potatoes represent the largest horticulture contribution to gross food revenue and the state has the most to lose from importing New Zealand potatoes as it is the nation's largest potato producer with farm gate production worth \$206 million," she said. "South Australia also produces 80% of the nation's fresh washed potatoes."

"Australia must maintain its food security and biosecurity by preventing the importation of exotic pests and diseases –this market access *must* remain suspended," she added.

The South Australian industry has been liaising with SA Senators, Mr Nick Xenophon, Mr Sean Edwards and Ms Anne Ruston and has the support of both state and local government.

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