

MEDIA RELEASE

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FINDINGS OF NZ POTATO IMPORTS SENATE INQUIRY DELAYED UNTIL 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 yesterday that their report containing findings and possible recommendations would not be released until 20 March 2013.

The report was to be handed down this week, on 21 November.

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 conduct further analysis of the risks associated with the importation and quarantine process. She was first witness at the October Inquiry.

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 Senate Inquiry demonstrates the deep concerns of the industry worth in excess of \$1/2 billion nationally. This delay must indicate the seriousness of the Committee's findings to date and the requirement of further time can only mean that more questions need to be asked," said Ms Davis.

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.

ENDS

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