

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 25 October 2012

STATE REPRESENTATION AT SENATE INQUIRY CONCERNING POTATO IMPORTS

An Inquiry held yesterday morning by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee was attended by representatives from South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. The Inquiry concerned the biosecurity risks to the Australian potato industry of fresh potatoes imported from New Zealand for processing including French fry and potato chip production.

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.

This 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, and collaboration between the major growing states of Australia has arisen in order to provide evidence," said Ms Davis, CEO Potatoes South Australia. Other witnesses included Mr Frank Rovers, Chair Victorian Potato Growers Council, Mr Norm Suckling and Mr Greg Murphy of the McCains Grower Group Ballarat, Victoria and Mr Peter Hardman, Agricultural Manager, Simplot, Tasmania. AUSVEG representatives including Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene, Mr Richard Mulcahy, Mr Simon Coburn and Mr Geoff Moar also attended.

"Together, representing an industry worth in excess of \$1/2 billion, we were in a strong position to provide perspectives from the grower, scientist, processor and the whole value chain all the way to the consumer. We believe that the biosecurity risk posed to the Australian potato industry by the importation of New Zealand potatoes is too great because there are so many 'unknowns' concerning the disease complex. There are no cures or resistant varieties," 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 and Mr Sean Edwards and has the full support of both state and local government.

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For interviews and further information contact:
Robbie Davis 0427 084 319