

Delay in release of committee findings

THE FINDINGS and recommendations of the Federal Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee will not be released until March 20 next year.

The report was to be handed down on November 21.

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.

Chief executive officer of Potatoes South Australia Incorporated Robbie Davis was advised that the committee intended 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 with distinct discolouration in the shape of brown/black stripes and eventual death of the plant.

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

"The Senate inquiry demonstrates the deep concerns of the industry worth more than \$500m nationally. This delay must indicate the seriousness of the Committee's findings to date and the need for further time can only mean that more questions need to be asked," Ms Davis said.

In SA, potatoes represent the largest horticulture contribution to gross food revenue, and it has the



▲ Potatoes SA CEO Robbie Davis.

most to lose from importing New Zealand potatoes as it is the nation's largest potato producer with farm gate production worth \$206 million.

"SA also produces 80pc of the nation's fresh washed potatoes.

"We must maintain our food security and biosecurity by preventing the importation of exotic pests and diseases – this market access must remain suspended."

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