

# More delays in NZ potato import inquiry

□ By PAULA THOMPSON

THE Senate Inquiry into New Zealand potato imports has been extended – a delay for the fourth time.

The inquiry is about biosecurity risks of fresh potatoes imports from New Zealand into Australia for processing, including as french fries and potato chips.

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

Members of the committee who attended the Senate Inquiry held on October 24, 2012 announced in July that their report containing findings and possible recommendations would not be released until July 19.

That was the third delay – it was to be handed down on June 24.

Now, with the Federal election looming, the report, due to be released on September 5, may be delayed again.

But, Potatoes South Australia chief executive officer Robbie Davis said the delay was positive for the industry. Ms Davis was the first witness at the October inquiry.

“From an industry perspective any delay is welcomed, it means that the issue is being taken very

## FAST FACTS

- Election means possible delays
- Issue taken ‘seriously’
- NZ zebra chip damage at \$120m

seriously,” she said.

Ms Davis said the main concern with New Zealand potato imports was the threat of the devastating zebra chip disease complex, which reduces yield and results in a downgrading of quality because of distinct discolouration in the shape of brown/black stripes and ultimately, death of the plant.

“This is a very, very serious disease – it has cost NZ between \$120 million and \$200m in lost production and in research,” she said.

“In the United States, outbreaks in three states wiped out half the industry.”

Ms Davis said if there were an outbreak in Australia, the costs could potentially run to \$250m in industry losses.

Ms Davis went to New Zealand recently as a guest of Potatoes New Zealand, and was a guest speaker at its annual general meeting and conference.

“My presentation was on Potatoes South Australia’s responses to the opportunities and threats to the potato industry, and obviously one of the current main threats is

imports from New Zealand,” she said.

“The feedback I got was that New Zealand really admires our strict biosecurity, but they also believe Australia is not being proactive regarding exports.”

Ms Davis said Potatoes South Australia and Potatoes New Zealand were working together on researching zebra chip and other pests and diseases of potatoes.

“There is also potential to collaborate to increase demand in the fresh sector, largely based on health benefits,” she said.

Senator Anne Ruston, who is a member of the committee looking into the imports issue, said the outbreak of citrus canker in Queensland was a telling example of what could happen to primary production industries after disease incursions.

“It wiped that industry off the map for years,” she said.

Primary Producers SA horticulture spokesperson and Grow SA chief executive officer Mike Redmond said he was amazed the importation was even being considered.

“It’s not as if we don’t grow enough potatoes here, or we don’t grow good quality potatoes,” he said.

“If you look at the disease risks associated with allowing this importation, it’s just insanity to even consider it.”

Details: [potatoessa.com.au](http://potatoessa.com.au)