AUSTRALIAN SENATE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT

REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Mr Andrew Metcalfe, AO
Secretary
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GPO Box 858
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Metcalfe,

Inquiries into the importation of Malaysian pineapple, Fijian ginger and New Zealand potatoes

The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee is currently undertaking inquiries into:

- the effect on Australian pineapple growers of importing fresh pineapple from Malaysia;
- the effect on Australian ginger growers of importing fresh ginger from Fiji; and
- the proposed importation of potatoes from New Zealand.

As you will be aware, during the course of these inquiries, industry stakeholders raised concerns about the validity of the Risk Estimation Matrix (REM) used by DAFF Biosecurity as part of the Import Risk Analysis (IRA) process. Accordingly, the committee sought independent advice in relation to the operation of the REM.

The consultant chosen to undertake the review of DAFF Biosecurity's REM was Mr Chris Peace, Principal Consultant, Risk Management Ltd. Mr Peace's report—*Advice on the risk estimation matrix used by DAFF Biosecurity as part of the Import Risk Analysis process* (the Peace report)—was provided to the committee on 10 January 2013. A copy was provided to DAFF Biosecurity on 7 February 2013 and a response received on 8 March 2013.

The Peace report has provided the committee with a better understanding of DAFF Biosecurity's REM, the way in which DAFF Biosecurity use the REM to calculate risk, and the ways in which both of these could be improved. In addition, the committee considers that the Peace report and DAFF Biosecurity's response to the report have raised a number of issues that are relevant to all three inquiries.

Before finalising these inquiries, the committee intends to seek further clarification regarding the REM used by DAFF Biosecurity and explore alternative methodologies for analysing and calculating risk factors.

To allow these issues to be examined in more detail, the committee sought, and was granted, an extension to the reporting date for each of these inquiries. In this regard the committee has recently tabled an interim report which I enclose for your information. The committee proposes to table a joint report in relation to these three inquiries on 24 June 2013.

PO Box 6100, Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600 Tel: (02) 6277 3511 Fax: (02) 6277 5811
Email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au Internet: www.aph.gov.au/senate_rat

The committee requests that all decisions in relation to the importation of pineapples from Malaysia, ginger from Fiji and potatoes from New Zealand be delayed until after the committee has had the opportunity to further explore the issues raised and table its report.

Prior to tabling its report, the committee would also appreciate the opportunity to review the report provided by the independent bacteriologist in relation to the review of import conditions for fresh potatoes from New Zealand.

In keeping with past practice, the committee has agreed to publish a copy of this request, and the Department's response, on the committee's website.

If you wish to discuss this matter please contact the Committee Secretary,
Mr Stephen Palethorpe on 02 6277 3510.

Yours sincerely,

Senator the Hon. Bill Heffernan
Chair

25 March 2013

cc. Ms Vanessa Findlay
First Assistant Secretary
Plant Division
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GPO Box 858
CANBERRA ACT 2601

cc. Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
MG. 64
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600