



TROPICAL PINES PTY LTD

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY

**INTO EFFECT ON AUSTRALIAN PINEAPPLE GROWERS OF IMPORTING FRESH
PINEAPPLE FROM MALAYSIA**

Introduction to Tropical Pines

Tropical Pines Pty Ltd is a private company, based in Yeppoon, Central Queensland. The company supports 24 pineapple growers in Queensland by providing the following services:

- Packing
- Sales and marketing
- Administration
- Horticulture

The company supplies approximately 50% of the fresh pineapple market in Australia and supplies to Coles, Woolworths, Aldi, Costco, processors and market agents in every capital city. The company anticipates selling about 13million pineapples in the 2012/2013 financial year.

The company manages packing operations in Yeppoon, Central Queensland, and Beerwah in South East Queensland; and contracts packing to three other packing sheds, based in Rollingstone (north of Townsville), Gympie and Maryborough. The 24 growers supported by Tropical Pines are located in Rollingstone, Yeppoon, Gympie, Maryborough and Beerwah.

The company employs a full time agronomist, Mr Col Scott, who is considered to be a leading expert on pineapples, both in Australia and overseas.

Tropical Pines' submission is based on the scientific knowledge of Mr Col Scott and his associates overseas and the company's knowledge of the market for fresh pineapple in Australia.

Tropical Pines is very concerned about the importation of fresh pineapple from Malaysia because of the risk of introducing a disease into Australia that has had devastating impacts on pineapple crops overseas. The disease is not in Australia currently and it would be extremely difficult to eradicate it once it is introduced into Australia.

Our Concerns

1. It appears that concerns raised by scientists in both Hawaii and Malaysia may have been ignored because their concerns have not been published as peer reviewed scientific papers. Rather they are concerns shared with us in emails. The scientists both have strong credentials and have warned us not to allow the import of pineapple from Malaysia, based on their knowledge and experience in both those countries.
2. It has been estimated by Biosecurity Australia that infected pineapples will be imported into Australia at a rate of 2%. This infection will be in a latent form and completely undetectable. If, as DAFF Biosecurity says, the disease would be very difficult to eradicate, why take any form of risk to allow the entry of a potentially

damaging pathogen? While 2% may seem a low incidence, in real terms it amounts to 2 cases in every 100 cases of fruit. i.e. 14 fruit per pallet.

3. Eradication of this disease would be very difficult if not impossible to achieve.
4. There is no known way to contain the disease to the infected pineapples. It is doubtful whether the suggested conditions of entry will contain *Dickeya* species.
5. The quarantine requirements stipulated by Biosecurity Australia will not be effective against the disease. They are designed to prevent the entry of mealy bugs and scale.
6. After the disease was imported into Hawaii, it is believed to have spread to other plants. Corn grown in soil taken from an infected pineapple field in Hawaii developed severe symptoms of corn stalk rot and *Dickeya* strains with genetic characteristics similar to the pineapple pathogen were recovered from this diseased corn. *Dickeya* strains were also recovered from an ornamental nursery and a taro germplasm collection. While there remains uncertainty as to whether the bacterial strains are identical, the potential of there being other host plants is one that requires immediate scientific investigation.
7. Insufficient research has been conducted to properly assess the spread of the disease and therefore the likely damage to the agriculture industry in Australia. There has been very little research conducted on this pathogen in recent times. Now that the pathogen has spread from Malaysia to other countries, it is critical that more information is collected through research. Tropical Pines would welcome a moratorium on the import of Malaysian pineapples until such time research can produce enough current scientific evidence to allow a better informed IRA to be conducted. Some areas that immediately come to mind are (a) detection of latent infections; (b) alternate host crops; (c) stability of the pathogen in water and soil; (d) other vector forms; (e) genetic relationships between the pineapple pathogen and *Dickeya* strains from alternative hosts. Discussions have been held with staff from the University of Hawaii regarding the possibility of the Australian pineapple industry funding some research at that establishment. Funding has not been available to allow this. Why should the burden of proof be the responsibility of the pineapple industry? Here is a disease considered one of the two greatest biosecurity threats to the Australian pineapple industry (according to the National Biosecurity Plan), yet with little scientific evidence DAFF Biosecurity has seen fit to allow its possible entry. There is a dire need for scientific knowledge and this can only be achieved with the financial support of the Australian Government.
8. What is the benefit of allowing imports of fresh pineapple from Malaysia? There are sufficient pineapples grown in Australia to meet demand. Fresh pineapples can already be imported from the Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Solomon Islands but have not succeeded as Australian consumers have a preference for Australian produce. Demand and supply of fresh pineapple in Australia has been growing at an average rate of 10% per annum for the last 7 years, due to the new varieties of fresh pineapples developed and now readily available in Australia.

9. Why put an industry at risk by allowing the import of fresh pineapples from Malaysia, when there is no known benefit of allowing these imports?
10. It is now known that the disease exists in the Philippines, which have been allowed to export fresh decrowned pineapple fruit into Australia for some years. This situation should be reviewed urgently. Furthermore, a multinational company has indicated its intention to produce pineapples in North Queensland to sell on the domestic market. It is feared that this company introduced plants from its Philippine plantation for this purpose. These plants may have been introduced as tissue culture plants or as conventional plants prior to being tissue cultured here in Australia. They would have had to pass through the normal quarantine and inspection procedures but we question once again, the lack of scientific knowledge and ability to identify the pathogen in its latent form.
11. DAFF Biosecurity (then Biosecurity Australia) granted permission for the entry of fresh minimally processed pineapple from Malaysia as of July 2011. This decision was made without consultation with the Australian industry. This form of fruit poses similar threats as decrowned whole pineapple in terms of disease latency. An urgent review of this decision should be conducted.

Conclusion

Malaysian pineapples are subject to infection by the bacterium *Dickeya* which is a unique and exotic pathogen and we believe there is a high likelihood of these bacteria entering Australia in decrowned pineapple fruit, semi-processed fruit and pineapple planting material. We also believe that adequate pathways exist for their introduction into the Australian pineapple industry. If this occurs, there will be significant damaging impacts on pineapple production in this country. Because the pathogen does not exist in Australia, we have little direct experience with it and thus in the process of conducting an IRA, DAFF Biosecurity should contact and take notice of the advice from the relevant authorities at the University of Hawaii, who are currently dealing with an incursion of this devastating pathogen.

There is currently no level of research and development in Australia aimed at investigating the epidemiology, detection and control of pineapple affecting *Dickeya* species. It is our belief that in order to safeguard Australia's biosecurity and prevent further globalisation of plant pathogens, it is imperative to refine our understanding of the risk posed by exotic pathogens prior to their establishment. This can only be achieved through research.