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NEW ZEALAND APPLE IRA

SUBMISSION
TO BIOSECURITY AUSTRALIA
ON BEHALF OF THE
TASMANIAN APPLE & PEAR INDUSTRY

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BACKGROUND

Fruit Growers Tasmania Inc (FGT)

FGT is a non-profit industry Association managed by a voluntary Board elected by growers. FGT represents approximately 120 apple and pear growing families in Tasmania (as well as around the same number of Stone Fruit growers) and has a joint office with the Tasmanian Abalone Council Ltd also a non-profit industry Association.

Tasmanian Industry

The Tasmanian apple industry has a gross value of \$60M to the State producing around 3 million cartons annually. Employment runs at approximately 1000 regular direct employees and a substantial number of seasonal and/or casual workers.

The Tasmanian industry accounts for approximately 18% of the total Australian production and 65% of the total of Australian apple exports.

The major growing regions in Tasmania are located in the Huon Valley down to Geeveston in the south; Spreyton in the North West and the Tamar Valley in the North. Several varieties are grown in Tasmania – Fuji, Jonagold, Red and Golden Delicious, Braeburn, Gala are the major ones.

Pears are grown both in the South North of the State and 1400 tons are produced annually. Major varieties are Buerre Bosc, Packhams, Comisse & Josephine. Winter Cole is a regional variety in the South and in high demand.

The Tasmanian industry exports apples to over 20. This export success has been achievable mainly due to the disease free status of the industry in Tasmania.

The industry sources the majority of packing materials, ie cartons, trays etc from at Amcor who rely heavily on the apple and pear industry for their own continued viability within Tasmania.

There are numerous other organizations relying on the sustainable future of the apple and pear industry for their own future sustainability and a sample are listed below –

Transport Companies such as Edwards Transport (TOLL)

Fuel Companies

Nursery suppliers

Beekeepers

Spray & Fertiliser companies such as Tasmanian company – ServAg

Pallet suppliers

The Cascade Beverage Company currently only use Australian apples in juice production.

Tasmanian Fruit Processing Factory at Cygnet

Franklin Evaporators

Most importantly are the people and small business operators located within the growing regions that all rely heavily on the industry for employment and as their key customer base.

Crop Susceptibility & Potential Impact

The economic impact on the growing areas and for the whole State in the event Tasmania's crop was subjected to an imported virulent disease or pest would be enormous – for example, approximately \$13M in direct industry wages are currently injected into the Tasmanian economy – this alone would be lost almost completely and within a very short space of time, creating a significant downturn in employment and economic stability throughout the State particularly when coupled with the growing families themselves and the indirect impact to those groups reliant on the industry.

INDUSTRY CONCERNS

The Tasmanian Industry is very concerned that the protocols set out in the latest draft of the IRA are not sufficient to reduce the high risk to the industry. Some of the areas of most concern are listed below -

ORCHARD INSPECTIONS

- The current draft IRA does not provide sufficient detail in relation to how the inspections will be undertaken. When this is detailed the industry should be able to participate in developing appropriate procedures with technical input where necessary.
- During orchard inspection, any evidence of recent “clean-up” pruning to remove fireblight infection should result in disqualification of that block for export
- Orchard inspection for Fire Blight should not be restricted to the spring because outbreaks are possible between blossoming and harvest.
- In addition, damaged leaves are often the site of initial fire blight infection so inspection of trees that have been damaged either by adverse weather or insects should also be undertaken.
- Inspections for European Canker also need to be increased when there has been incidence of heavy rainfall in the region of export registered orchards. It has been documented that heavy rainfall is a factor in outbreak and spread of this disease.
- Inspections for insects would be ineffective. The only real way to make sure there are no insects present in an export shipment is to fumigate.

TRASH

Once again, this IRA does not realistically address the issue of trash. In fact the IRA suggests that the trash is of no more concern in relation to fire blight than the fruit. However, it is known that trash is in fact a high risk factor in the spread of fireblight.

For the protocol to be effective, no trash should be accepted in any apple imports to Australia.

REGISTERED BLOCKS FOR EXPORT

- Areas that are known to be high risk for disease should be excluded from registering for export to Australia. For example, Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Tairāhema regions have been identified through surveys as being extremely high risk for European Canker.
- Blocks that have had previous infections of fire blight are at a higher risk of further outbreaks, particularly if the infection was present in the previous year. There is no provision within the current proposed protocols to address this situation.
- Because fire blight is such a virulent disease, there should also be provision in the protocols to address situations where fire blight outbreaks have occurred in adjacent blocks or within close proximity to a block registered for export to Australia.
- In order to meet Australia's ALOP all three protocols relating to area freedom, chlorine treatments and storage should be required to retain the integrity of the overall protocol.

CONCLUSION

Growers are particularly concerned about the quarantine controls proposed in Biosecurity's latest recommendation which would not provide adequate protection from the introduction of Fire Blight, European Canker and other pests and diseases.

The Tasmanian industry has worked very hard over many years to establish its good reputation in global export markets and this has been due mainly to the clean, green, disease free status of Tasmania. The Tasmanian industry accounts for around 65% of all Australian apple exports and this success is at significant risk under the proposed protocol recommendation.

It also needs to be remembered that it is not only the commercial industry that is under serious threat of introduction of new diseases (Fire Blight & European Canker) but our natural environment in Tasmania would also be at risk.

Industry continues to base its responses on science and that has not changed from previous NZ applications. Therefore, industry can only repeat that, with no new science the high level of risk previously recommended by Biosecurity should also have not changed.

The import of NZ apples will provide a vehicle with a very high risk of introducing pests and diseases into Tasmania that are not currently present.

Thomas Frankcomb
Chairman - Pome Fruit Council - FGT