



Parliament of Australia  
House of Representatives

# HON BOB KATTER MP

## FEDERAL MEMBER FOR KENNEDY



RECEIVED  
- 4 JUN 2007

Plant Biosecurity  
Biosecurity Australia

Innisfail Office  
25 May 2007

The General Manager  
Plant Biosecurity  
Biosecurity Australia  
G P O Box 858  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear General Manager

### Re: Revised Draft Import Risk Analysis Report for Bananas from the Philippines

In 2002 I put forward a Question Without Notice in the House seeking financial assistance for shire councils and communities at Coffs Harbour, Northern New South Wales, Kununurra and North Queensland to cope with the loss of income of 9,500 Australian families with flow on effects and damage to related industries if the government allowed the entry into Australia of bananas from the Philippines. I stand by that question to this day. My figure then was the loss of a \$300m Australian industry.

I did not sit on my hands in 2002 and let this happen. Myself, Senator Len Harris and Rosa Lee Long, Member for Tablelands were part of a well attended meeting at the Silkwood Bowls Club on 25<sup>th</sup> March. I then led a protest motorcade on 12<sup>th</sup> April of banana workers from as far south as Murray Upper, south of Tully, along the coast and north to Cairns where the rally captured media attention. A second rally was held in Townsville that was equally successful.

We stopped the importation of bananas from the Philippines in 2002.

We could not take the risk of Black Sigatoka plagued bananas from the Philippines then and we cannot take that risk now. We could not compete against Filipino labour costs then and nothing has changed, we cannot compete now. They have no responsibility to deliver industrial awards to their employees.

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west • gulf • coast • tablelands

#### Representing

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#### Tourism

As I continually point out there will be a significant impact on the tourist industry as backpackers are attracted to the readily available work on banana farms whilst travelling throughout North Queensland. Of latter times Australian workers have been lured to the mining fields enjoying the benefits of a higher rate of pay that primary producers are unable to match, therefore these seasonal workers/backpackers are an important part of the workforce in the banana industry.

#### Cyclone Larry

In the Innisfail and Tully areas of Kennedy the banana industry was flattened by Cyclone Larry on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2006 and is only now recovering. It was only in January 2007 that bananas were back on the supermarket shelves. These farmers have struggled to get back on their feet but were determined to do so. We don't need the importation of bananas to set them back once again.

#### Environment

We need a more responsible Import Risk Analysis. Not only the banana industry would be placed in jeopardy, but also our native trees and wildlife which will be under the most serious threat by imported bacteria and bugs.

We have inter alia no Moko freckle or Black Sigatoka in Australia and we have to keep it this way. An outbreak of Black Sigatoka that we experienced in Australia in 2001 all up cost nearly \$100m to eradicate.

As recently as 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007 a Cairns Post article states *Asian bees highlight risk to Australia*. A bee hive found on a Portsmouth yacht contained Asian honey bees. The article further says:

*The discovery comes in the same month as bio-security experts identified swine fever, screw worm fly and surra, all of which are present in South-East Asia, as the biggest threats to the region's agriculture industry.*

With the anticipation of millions of boxes of bananas brought into Australia under this new proposal, what guarantee do we have that there will not be amongst them one single microspore of these highly contagious and airborne diseases or to put this another way Biosecurity in this current IRA are putting forward a proposition that 20m boxes of bananas will come into Australia but there will not be one single microspore of bacteria in any of these boxes. This proposition is patently extraordinary.

#### AQIS Quarantine Performance

The Law Courts of Australia passed the harshest condemnation of AQIS's decision on Pork Imports which the Senate made the most scathing indictment on the IRA's on apples, pears and bananas.

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Australia Unique

Other countries argue Australia's photo sanitary requirements are overly restrictive. They of course should be since Australia was the only continent that did not farm or husband. The inhabitants effectively did not track and were still very much a hunter gatherer society. It was only from 1800 onwards that Australians farmed the weeds and pests endemic in other countries that do not occur in Australia but they will if AQIS continues to say yes to every application.

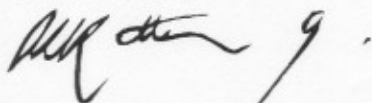
The Biosecurity Australia import conditions proposal effectively throws the responsibility for Australia's quarantine security over to the Philippines. Can we allow this to happen? The report proposes on-the-ground inspections and audits by AQIS but how long will this last before the responsibility is handed over to the Philippines entirely? This is a risk to Australia, a risk of wiping out an entire industry should Moko or Black Sigatoka enter Australia through imports. According to the proposal we cannot directly keep an eye on compliance.

It is disappointing to me to see at the large supermarket chains with more and more imported goods on their shelves. We have an abundance of water and good soil in North Queensland to produce our own crops yet the government policy encourages imports. Do we want to see all imported goods on our supermarket shelves and the closure of industries, loss of employment and the smaller townships unable to survive because of the shift in population?

The banana industry like the sugar industry has faced obstacles that they have had to overcome. The sugar industry had to become more cost effective and more environmentally friendly by eliminating the burning of cane and stringent measures regarding fertilizer run-off. The banana industry too is looking to the future with the proposal of introducing a levy to fund banana research and development. These farmers are serious about retaining their industry and remaining viable.

Bearing in mind that this revised Import Risk Analysis report includes a number of proposed quarantine measures that appears to show a level of protection, I strongly urge you to consider the points I have raised. If any disease is allowed into the country our risks are *loss of whole industries, loss of employment and loss of our small rural communities*. I am elected to see that this does not happen and if a repeat of my 2002 actions on this issue has to happen again in 2007, then so be it.

Yours sincerely



**Hon Bob KATTER MP**  
**Federal Member for Kennedy**