MEDIA RELEASE
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RELEASE OF NZ POTATO IMPORTS SENATE INQUIRY REPORT

After several delays, Members of the Federal Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee who attended the Senate Inquiry on 24 October 2012, announced their recommendations today.

The Inquiry concerns the biosecurity risks to the Australian potato industry of fresh potatoes imported from New Zealand for processing, including French fry and potato chip production.

Robbie Davis, CEO of Potatoes South Australia Incorporated, which represents the potato industry’s entire value chain, was a witness at the Inquiry.

“Today’s Senate Committee Report recommends that the Australian Government conduct a full scientifically based, consultative, independent Import Risk Analysis to safeguard Australia’s $1/2b potato industry from possible infestation by Zebra Chip disease complex,” Ms Davis said.

“This means using the most recent, up-to-date scientific research which looks at all types of exotic bacteria, nematodes and other diseases in addition to Zebra Chip. The Committee also recommends the establishment of an independent, statutory authority which is separate from the Department of Agriculture and which is wholly responsible for all biosecurity,” she added.

Estimated losses in the New Zealand and USA industries due to this disease, Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum, are in the hundreds of millions of dollars and the Australian industry faces catastrophic yield losses of as much as 50% if market access for New Zealand potatoes goes ahead. (Market access rights are asserted under the Closer Economic Relationship Free Trade Agreement).

In South Australia, potatoes represent the largest horticulture contribution to gross food revenue and the state has the most to lose from importing New Zealand potatoes as it is the nation’s largest potato producer with farm gate production worth $206 million,” Ms Davis said. “South Australia also produces 80% of the nation’s fresh washed potatoes.”

“Australia must maintain its food security and biosecurity by preventing the importation of exotic pests and diseases—we will work with the Department of Agriculture and Committee members to ensure that the Australian potato industry is protected; it is of critical importance to our national economy” she added.

The Australian Government has been asked to respond within 3 months.

ENDS

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