



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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BIOSECURITY AUSTRALIA, IMPORTATION OF BANANAS

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (10.49 pm): Yesterday Biosecurity Australia handed down its final import risk analysis for the importation of bananas from the Philippines into Australia and I am alarmed by the recommendations. Biosecurity Australia has recommended in its final IRA that fruit could safely be imported without the threat of exotic pests endemic in the Philippines entering Australia.

The report released late yesterday recommends that bananas could be imported into Australia if the Philippines meet certain risk management measures. Australia is free of most of the world's banana diseases and the Australian industry believes that it should remain that way. The Australian banana industry does not believe that pest and disease risks associated with the importation of bananas from the Philippines can be managed. I agree totally with the Australian Banana Growers Council, the peak industry body representing Australian banana growers, and pledge my full support to the effort to defend Australia's banana industry.

The disease risk posed by bananas from the Philippines is simply too great to allow imports. The recommendations from Biosecurity Australia that bananas grown in the Philippines should be allowed to be imported into Australia must be resisted at every level. I plead with the Queensland Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries to do what he can to influence the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry not to accept these recommendations.

Indeed, Biosecurity Australia has a very poor track record in respect of IRAs regarding the banana industry. This issue has been running for years and previous so-called banana IRAs from Biosecurity Australia have been riddled with errors. We simply cannot risk the Australian banana industry being exposed to the range of pests and diseases that other banana producing countries struggle with.

The complexity of the proposed risk management measures for imported bananas from the Philippines will inevitably lead to quarantine breaches that will ruin the Australian banana industry. Scientific experts engaged by the ABGC are working through the detail of the final IRA. This will be done in meticulous detail because earlier reports contained a number of errors in risk calculations undertaken by Biosecurity Australia that were identified and exposed by scientists engaged by the banana industry.

The IRA identifies seven separate quarantine concerns, including moko, black sigatoka, freckle, armoured scales, mealybugs, spider mites and thrips. Amazingly, the Biosecurity Australia recommendations would put the Philippines in charge of implementing proposed quarantine measures on their own banana growers in a country that does not have a culture of quarantine anywhere near comparable to Australia. Those arrangements in the Philippines would undoubtedly be subject to manipulation and abuse. In contrast, Australia has a culture of quarantine and the banana industry has demonstrated its commitment to keeping the industry as disease-free as possible.

The banana industry is an extremely important industry in my electorate of Hinchinbrook, which grows two-thirds of Australia's bananas, and to North Queensland as a whole, which grows in excess of 90 per cent of Australia's bananas. The banana industry has my full support and my undertaking that I will do all I can to prevent the importation of bananas into Australia.