



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 26 May 1999

### **IMPORTATION OF GRAPES**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (10.27 a.m.): I wish to bring to the attention of this House the grave concern that I and my constituents from the central Burnett region have about the proposed importation of table grapes from California into Australia. The Australian horticultural industry now supplies table grapes to Australian consumers all year round and the proposed imports can only result in severe economic hardship for yet another Australian primary industry and a reduction in the standard of fruit available to the Australian consumer.

In March 1999 AQIS released an import risk analysis, which proposes that the imported grapes be fumigated with methyl bromide. Methyl bromide is currently being phased out of use in Australia as it is recognised as an ozone depleting chemical and is hazardous to both fumigators and consumers if not used according to strict parameters. Australian grapes are not treated with this chemical and many countries around the world currently ban its use and the importation of horticultural products that have been treated with it. Its effectiveness in treating the range of pests and diseases present in Californian grapes is also strongly questioned by the Australian industry.

As Queensland fruit and vegetable growers know only too well, many importing countries require demonstration of extremely high standards of quarantine treatment for our exported product, yet AQIS consistently fails to require the same high standards for imports which threaten our domestic industries. Given the importance of our primary industries to Queensland, it is surely reasonable to require potential importers to establish 100% security against the import of pests and diseases and for that security to be clearly demonstrated before imports are considered.

Given the importance of clean, residue-free food to consumers, it is surely reasonable to require fresh food imports to demonstrate the highest standards of compliance. The proposal by AQIS to allow the importation of Californian grapes that have been fumigated with methyl bromide should be rejected out of hand for the sake of Australian consumers and Queensland grape growers. The grape growing industry in the central Burnett is in a developmental stage and it promises to be a viable alternative for many small land-holders. Their hope for the future should not be sold out to facilitate the import of inferior product from California.

Time expired.

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