




Speech by

Jon Krause

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

Hansard Tuesday, 5 June 2012

HORTICULTURAL INDUSTRY, IMPORTS

 **Mr KRAUSE** (Beaudesert—LNP) (12.01 pm): I rise to speak on a matter of public interest that is of importance not only to the Beaudesert electorate but also to the people of Queensland and Australia who believe that our primary producers should be given a fair go in their businesses. There are many pressures facing our primary producers at present: a high Australian dollar, making exports less competitive; rising costs of electricity, fuel, water and labour; low prices offered by domestic buyers, most notably Coles and Woolworths; and the complex web of red tape and environmental regulation which successive governments have imposed on them but we will cut.

The import of fruit and vegetables is a pressure point for growers in the horticultural industry. Whether it is oranges from the United States, apples from New Zealand, peas and beans from New Zealand or vegetables from Asia, our horticultural industries compete with businesses from across the globe. But there is no level playing field and no fairness for our horticultural industry. When it comes to the importation of fruit and vegetables, including frozen vegetables, it is particularly concerning to growers in my electorate that only approximately five per cent of the imported fresh and frozen green beans, peas, carrots and similar vegetables reaching Australian markets are in fact tested by quarantine inspectors for compliance with Australian standards.

This is of concern to growers in my electorate because of worries that primary producers in certain parts of Asia are regularly treating their produce with pesticides and other products which have been banned in Australia for decades—and banned on health grounds. These products may be quite effective in eliminating pests from plants, encouraging growth of the plants or increasing yields, but the fact is that Australian growers do not use these products and are unable to achieve any similar benefits in growth, yield, pest reduction and so on. So Australian growers are not competing on a level playing field; they are starting from behind.

As an example, I refer to an article from the *Good Fruit and Vegetables* journal published in November 2011—

Mr Rickuss: Great journal.

Mr KRAUSE: I take the interjection of the member for Lockyer—which refers to the importation of Malaysian pineapples into Australia, importation which the Gillard government determined did not pose a risk to the Queensland pineapple industry, despite the fact that there is a very real risk that these imported pineapples could bring into Australia a disease known as bacterial fruit collapse—a disease which would decimate local horticultural industries—and despite concerns that the Malaysian pineapple industry still uses chemicals that are not permitted to be used in Australia such as the fungicide benomyl, which is no longer used in Australia due to its link with birth defects.

What is worse is that some of these products—not necessarily pineapples but other produce—are making their way into Australia marked as 'product of New Zealand' through a process where they are combined with New Zealand grown products and then exported to Australia. There are many fine things about our trans-Tasman cousins—most notably their sauvignon blanc and their ski fields—but ensuring a viable future for Australian primary producers is not something they are inclined to do. The mixing of

Chinese or other Asian grown products with their own prior to sale to Australia is a sham and a fraud on Australian primary producers which must end.

Shamefully, the Labor government in Canberra recently approved the importation of apples from New Zealand, ignoring significant biosecurity concerns on a number of fronts. Australian farmers produce their products to be of the highest standard and in compliance with the strict health standards we expect in this country. This increases their costs and financial burdens, but their international competitors do not carry these burdens.

Our horticultural industries are severely jeopardised by a quarantine system which favours the imported product over the native. An inspection rate of five per cent on imported produce makes it viable for foreign entities exporting into Australia to simply take the risk that a batch here or there will be condemned, while significantly all of their products find their way onto our supermarket shelves. Industries in the Fassifern Valley and other communities in Queensland face a slow decline into oblivion unless this injustice is made right.

Today I call on the federal government to immediately increase quarantine inspection rates on imported horticultural produce to 75 per cent to ensure that Australian health standards and the standards of production imposed on Australian horticultural industries are met by imported products. The federal government should also seek dialogue with New Zealand and other countries from which significant amounts of fruit and vegetables are imported to ensure that the produce being sold as a 'product of New Zealand' is in fact a product of New Zealand. If New Zealand apples are imported into Australia as New Zealand apples then they should be New Zealand apples. Australian consumers should know that the products they are consuming are safe to eat and free of pesticides or other products which have been banned in Australia on health grounds.

This is an economic issue for our horticultural industries, but it is also a health issue. It is an issue of fairness for our growers and our farming communities. For too long the Labor Party has ignored these problems, and I stand shoulder to shoulder with my federal colleague the member for Wright in our efforts to support and protect our local producers and consumers. We need to stop placing our own businesses at a disadvantage to the rest of the world, and the only way to do that is to make sure those overseas producers are complying with Australia's health and biosecurity standards.

(Time expired)