




Speech by

Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Tuesday, 19 June 2012

GINGER, IMPORTS

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (11.24 am): I rise to share with the House a very important analysis currently being conducted by Biosecurity Australia. Biosecurity Australia has given the Australian ginger industry 60 days to respond to an import risk analysis into the importation of fresh ginger from Fiji. This is more pressure on our local farmers. It appears that the report compiled by Biosecurity Australia has been poorly drafted using loose science and a lack of references. The problem we have is that the report clearly undervalues many of the insect pests and diseases that could be contained in imported soils. The draft IRA recommends the introduction of fresh ginger into Australia with risk management for just one pest, the yam scale. This is not acceptable for the industry and to the host crops that pests and diseases may impact upon. Because of the irregular, angular shape and tight crevices of the ginger rhizome it is virtually impossible to completely remove all the soil. This raises the issue that many pests and diseases of concern are contained within the imported soils. Another assumption which reflects the lack of understanding of the everyday reality is that the report dismisses the risks that consumers could potentially plant rhizomes purchased from retail outlets. The IRA states—

... as this pathway cannot be effectively regulated. It is expected that the volumes of ginger diverted to growing purposes by consumers would be small.

To assume consumers are not going to intentionally or unintentionally plant or dispose of unused imported ginger rhizomes by planting them, throwing them into compost heaps or into local rubbish depots is unrealistic and naive. It must be remembered that the proposal is to import a product that is a planting material and anyone can simply buy imported ginger and plant it.

The IRA assesses the consequence to native species as not discernible on the basis that there is no information available. Surely the precautionary approach should apply. If there is no information available then the risk must be rated as high until the necessary research can be conducted. However, a properly conducted IRA would have at least attempted to provide some scientific assessment by disclosing the risks. Many of the pests and diseases present in Fiji are of concern to the Australian environment and the ginger industry and they are also a serious risk to other crops in Queensland. Crops like banana, citrus, sweet potato, pineapple and nursery plants could be affected. The ginger industry is self-sufficient and producing fresh ginger for the Australian market.

My purpose in raising this issue is to alert the House to the serious risks to the environment, the ginger industry and a range of major rural industries and backyard gardeners in Australia by the importation and introduction of fresh ginger from Fiji. We need to consider the impacts on our local farmers. We need to consider our agricultural needs into the future and the need for sensible decision making. During the 1960s seeds were imported from Thailand that introduced bacteria and as a result certain areas in Queensland are no longer farmable for plants like ginger. Any notable increases in ginger production and importation from nations such as Fiji will have a strong impact on Australia's ginger industry in the coming years. Demand for fresh product is increasing and I seek to have that demand provided by Queensland farmers.