

Media Release

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Apple & Pear Australia Ltd.

Apple and pear industry wants more consultation from Biosecurity Australia over IRAs

Apple and Pear Australia Limited (APAL) has again been disappointed with the lack of industry consultation by Biosecurity Australia (BA) following its announcement on Monday 17 March to commence Import Risk Assessments (IRA) for apples from China and the USA.

APAL Chairman, Mr Darral Ashton, said that both Biosecurity Australia and the industry would benefit from closer cooperation when it comes to making these announcements.

"Biosecurity Australia did give us one day's notice of the impending announcement, for which we are grateful, but with some liaison, the timing of the announcement could have been a lot more strategic from our perspective."

Mr Ashton said the Australian apple and pear industry viewed the IRA for apple exports to Australia from China and the USA quite differently due to the different circumstances that exist in each country.

China

"China currently exports pears to Australia, and as such, has established a protocol for exporting a pome fruit to Australia. However, it should be recognised that the protocol only applies to three varieties of pears from specified regions in China and that product and regional differences complicate the process," Mr Ashton said.

"Therefore Biosecurity Australia cannot automatically apply the existing pear protocol to allow entry of Chinese apples into Australia.

"The Chinese apple industry is huge, producing about 24 million tonnes of the world production of about 60 million tonnes. About 40 per cent of the world's apples are grown in China. We don't believe we understand sufficiently the pest and disease profile of this huge and complex apple growing industry," Mr Ashton said.

"The Chinese apple industry has been largely closed to the outside world in terms of information and this compounds the difficulties in understanding all the pest risks involved.

"While we understand that fire blight has not been detected in China, a thorough exploration of all pests and diseases that could cause problems in Australia needs to be conducted, so that Australia's appropriate level of protection is maintained.

"Given this, we are concerned about the short time frame given to this Import Risk Analysis (IRA), and the fact that Biosecurity Australia believes the IRA can be conducted in less than 30 months. It takes a long time to thoroughly investigate the pest and disease issues and the job should not be rushed," Mr Ashton said.

Australia and China have already started exploring bilateral trade opportunities with apples and both countries are keen to ensure that any trade that develops between the two countries is not harmful to their respective industries.

Given the counter seasonal production, it would be possible for both countries to benefit from bilateral trade in apples. For example, China is a huge market for fruit and despite their high level of production of apples, there could be opportunity for Australia to export to China at the end of their season.

Already, China exports the equivalent of 500,000 tonnes of apples to Australia in the form of apple juice concentrate.

USA

The situation is different with the USA as currently there is no pome fruit trade between Australia and the USA.

Chairman of the Fire Blight Task Force, Mr John Corboy, said that the USA imposes rigorous protocols on imported Australian apples and pears due to the presence of Light Brown Apple Moth in this country.

“The quarantine restrictions are difficult to meet and from that, we would expect that the USA would understand our desire to impose equally rigorous protocols on apples from USA, given the presence of the bacterial disease fire blight and a range of other significant pests in that country.

“Indeed, USA is the home of fire blight,” Mr Corboy said.

“The Australian apple and pear industry is determined to maintain its uncompromising position on quarantine standards to prevent the incursion of fire blight and other exotic diseases not present in Australia. We believe that previous quarantine efforts and restrictions have so far prevented fire blight and other exotic diseases becoming established in this country.”

Mr Corboy said that recent research conducted in Spain has thrown new light on how the fire blight bacteria can imbed itself in the calyx of apples in a form that is difficult to detect, but can be ‘resuscitated’ to an infective form of the bacteria.

“It should be recognised that Australia has experienced an increase in exotic plant pest and disease incursion with an average of 40 per year in recent times. This is demonstration of the lack of information available on how pests are being imported and highlights the risks that our industries face in the future.

“Australia will need to ensure its appropriate level of protection is not compromised in respect of fire blight and other exotic diseases,” Mr Corboy said.

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