

Q: APAL is making a number of requests regarding protocols for the importing of New Zealand apples. Are those requests compliant with WTO rules?

A. The advice that APAL has received is that what the industry is asking for in terms of protocols for New Zealand apples is within the WTO rules.

For example, the WTO SPS rules are in place to reduce the chance of a pest or disease being transferred from one country to another that does not have them. WTO rules allow that product should come from a 'pest free place of production'. That is all we are asking for in relation to fire blight, that orchards be certified free of the disease before apples from those orchards can be exported to Australia.

New Zealand takes this concept further by demanding that for example pears from Australia have to come from an area free of fruit fly. That means fruit harvested within 80 kilometres of a fruit fly outbreak cannot be exported to New Zealand.

Also, WTO allows for verification and assurance that conditions are actually met. For example, it is well known and accepted that trash, such as small twigs and leaves, is a high risk carrier of the fire blight bacteria. New Zealand has said it would transport fruit in trash free cartons. But what assurance do we have of compliance with that undertaking? That is why we have asked for statistically verifiable inspections of cartons to ensure that the cartons really are free of trash.

WTO also recognises there are higher risks associated with pests and diseases if fruit comes from an area known to have a high prevalence of a pest or disease. It is acknowledged by New Zealand that it does have regions that have a high incidence of European canker, yet Biosecurity Australia has not sought to reduce the risk by restricting fruit from those areas.

That principle also applies to the apple leaf curling midge. In areas of high infestation, this very small midge transfers to apples and lodges in the calyx, so it is difficult to see. The best way of ensuring we do not import apple leaf curling midge is to ensure fruit comes from areas free of the insect.

So the requests we are making are well within the WTO rules.