



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Trade: Banana Imports

SPEECH

Thursday, 27 June 2002

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (9.41 am)—I rise to speak about the impending IRA that is coming out on the banana industry. The Biosecurity people were in Innisfail for hearings last week or the week before, and I put a simple question to the head of the Biosecurity team. I asked: what applications has Biosecurity rejected in the last two years? She stumbled and bumbled and ran around the mulberry bush, so I asked it again. She did the same thing; then I asked it a third time and a gentleman who was with her, a senior officer, said, 'Oh, well, there was the apples case.' I said, 'No, there wasn't; you people agreed to apples.' I said, 'The Senate overturned your decision. In the same way that the parliamentarians overturned your decision, the Prime Minister overturned your decision on cooked chicken meat. So don't tell me that.'

I asked the question five times and I am still waiting for an answer. I assume that these people simply say yes to every application that comes before them, which is an absolute disgrace. The lady said, 'We, of course, have the bar much higher than most other countries.' I said, 'Don't you come here and say that; it is absolutely disgraceful that you would come here and say that.' I said that in the case of mangoes, a very big product that we produce in Australia, we cannot get into the United States because we have a seed weevil. The United States just says, 'You've got a seed weevil; you can't come in.' So the United States set the bar. When the durian application came in from Thailand, they had seed weevil. I said, 'You've got no worries because the bar has already been set by the Americans.' Of course, within two or three months, durian was allowed in from Thailand. So these people are a disgrace.

I do not have time this morning to go into the various aspects of the matter, but the proposition with bananas is incredibly simple. They have black sigatoka; we do not have black sigatoka. Black sigatoka is, to this industry, what foot and mouth disease is to the cattle industry. Does anyone in this place seriously think that any country on earth would allow beef in from a foot and mouth disease country? No way, Jose! But one must wonder, and I am a cattle producer myself, what would happen if there was an application from a foot and mouth disease country to bring beef into this country, because these people say no to nothing. They are obsessive free traders and think it is their duty not to protect this country from disease but to protect this country from people who believe that we should have some protection, in the general sense of the word.

We had an outbreak of black sigatoka. One little farm got it, and it spread quickly throughout the entire Tully Valley, which is responsible for about half of Australia's banana production. The cost was \$42 million; the losses were maybe \$150 million a year. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—Before calling the honourable member for Paterson, could I make a comment that I think is attributable not just here but to the main chamber. Even though you might be on a speakers list it does not guarantee you the call. You have to seek the call from the Chair.