



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Biosecurity

SPEECH

Tuesday, 14 June 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Marino, Nola, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (16:00): The agricultural sector and Australia's biosecurity are under attack from the Labor government. On 16 February this year the headlines around the nation ran 'Gillard says yes to New Zealand apples'. The *Financial Review* told us on that day that Prime Minister Julia Gillard 'has again confirmed that Australia will soon begin importing apples from New Zealand despite the risk of fire blight'. With the Prime Minister's statement Australia's biosecurity was sacrificed to give the Prime Minister a good media story for the New Zealand press. Following this, Biosecurity Australia has had little choice but to sacrifice our biosecurity in its import risk analysis, because the only other option is to contradict the statement by the Prime Minister. Labor has once again hung biosecurity and Australian agriculture and food production out to dry.

How incredibly offensive this is to Australian and Western Australian apple and pear producers, particularly those in the south-west in my electorate in Western Australia. I heard the member for Fremantle say in the House last week that the Australian apple and pear industry requested that any new importation arrangements with New Zealand must apply the highest inspection and monitoring standards, when it is the Australian Labor Party, led by the Prime Minister, who has put at risk their very industry and their livelihoods by lowering our quarantine standards to below those required by the US. The need to maintain our quarantine standards is absolutely paramount.

Unfortunately, the government is continuing to attack Australian food production and agriculture. In the federal budget of 2009 \$35.8 million was slashed from quarantine and biosecurity budgets, leading to the loss of 125 jobs and reduced cargo and passenger inspections. An amount of \$58 million was slashed from the Customs budget, leading to 4.7 million fewer cargo consignments being inspected each year and 2,150 fewer vessels being boarded on arrival. This is a major issue for this nation. It is deliberate and calculated neglect and it sets a trend that has been continued into the current budget. In 2011 another \$32.8 million was cut from the operational budget of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, reducing the department's capacity to deliver services to Australian agriculture. Unfortunately, the government just continuously demonstrates its contempt for farmers and Australia's biosecurity by ignoring the threats to our borders.

We have seen no action either on the dairy industry inquiry report, of at least a year ago, entitled *Milking it for all it's worth—competition and pricing in the Australian dairy industry*. There has been absolutely no response to any of the recommendations made in that report. (*Time expired*)