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Grant Carter 04/10/2017  
Lalla Natural Selection Ms Natasha Exel  
388 Lalla Rd Inquiry Secretary  
Lalla Tas 7267 Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Hobart TAS 7000  
0448954111  
Members of the Committee  
Lns388@outlook.com Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC, Member for Launceston  
Hon Ivan Dean MLC, Member for Windermere  
Hon Kerry Finch MLC, Member for Rosevears  
Hon Tania Rattray MLC, Member for McIntyre  
Hon Josh Willis MLC, Member for Elwick  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE 'B' SUB  
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO BLUEBERRY RUST.

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**Dear Committee Members,**

**I wish to submit the following submission regarding Biosecurity Tasmania and their reaction to the Blueberry Rust outbreaks in 2014 and 2016.**

**I wish to particularly refer to the following points.**

**1 The actions taken by Biosecurity to address the 2014 and 2016 outbreaks of Blueberry Rust.**

**There have been significant differences between Biosecurity Tasmania's reaction to the 2016 outbreak and the latest outbreak in 2016.**

**In 2014, they reacted by destroying any and every plant found that contained the disease, with the result being, Tasmania being declared a Rust free State which ensured that the crop picked that year by Organic Certified Orchards could be sold into the Victorian and South Australian markets which in turn meant the survival of those farms financially.**

In 2016, after a lengthy delay in making this outbreak public knowledge, a decision based on flawed science from NSW which has a different set of climatic conditions, to simply trying to contain the outbreak and not eradicate was adopted. This had the immediate effect of a ban for Tasmanian fruit to the abovementioned markets, as well a potential lucrative market I had been offered in Europe.

Why was such a different approach adopted? I believe that the size of the operation owning the infected plants has had a marked influence on those making the critical decisions. The so called science was based on a NSW report that it would be impossible to eradicate, this is incorrect, as the Tasmanian winters are cold enough and long enough to kill the spores and all that was needed to be done was eradicate the evergreen variety and apply good farm hygiene policies to the farm.

## **2.Past and present regulatory requirements relating to the Blueberry industry in Tasmania**

In the past, when Tasmania was Rust free, Organic Certified Farmers could export to any state in Australia without any documentation other than proof of Organic status. This allowed market forces of supply and demand to work as it should. We could negotiate prices with many buyers in a broad , competitive market. Now, with Tasmania being declared as containing Rust, and with no political will to eradicate it, we are banned from exporting to Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia unless we spray our fruit with a potentially harmful chemical, which apart from being dangerous to apply and very expensive as well as dangerous to consume the fruit, would automatically force the various Organic certifying bodies to de certify us thus losing all the health and financial benefits that go with Certification. We would all be forced to sell to NSW and QLD which would flood the market and has already driven prices down to a level that will be unprofitable for the higher cost Organic Certified operations. Indeed the only Farms to profit from this latest rust outbreak will be Costa group as they can spray and retain access to the markets we have lost. I could suggest therefore that this may be the result that Costa has planned with government aiding and abetting that process.

### **3.The future of Tasmanias blueberry Industry including impacts of previous current and future outbreaks of rust.**

With the previous, 2014 outbreak, the action to eradicate was successful enough to enable farms to maintain the markets they had previously sold to , the swift and ruthless approach by Biosecurity saved the industry from losing an entire crop season. This action was seen as a good thing and gave the destination markets a sense of trust in the Tasmanian brand.

With the current outbreak and the decision NOT to eradicate has resulted in the traditional and lucrative markets being lost, for how long, we don't know but at the time of writing, they will not allow Tasmanian fruit in unless it has been sprayed for rust which eliminates the Organic certified markets.

Without eradication only 2 states in Australia will accept our fruit and they will dictate a price so low as to make it unprofitable due to the extra costs involved in maintaining Organic status.

In short, Biosecurity have, by their lack of action, potentially destroyed the Organic Blueberry Industry in Tasmania which contributes around \$35 million dollars to the Tasmanian economy annually and this figure was growing every year as a number of very young orchards neared maturity.

If the current outbreak is not eradicated, there will definitely be further outbreaks, this disease can be spread by wind, people and machinery and anecdotal evidence suggests that Costa group are not complying fully with the tight controls that should be enforced to try to contain. So future outbreaks will now occur and the Organic Blueberry industry in Tasmania is doomed to rather expensive and quick end. Much I imagine to the delight of the Costa group.

### **4. The capacity of Biosecurity Tasmania to manage blueberry rust outbreaks and other risks into the future.**

Firstly, the so called science upon which the decision was made not to eradicate was based on a NSW report that the spores will survive and spread, this is not true in Tasmanian climatic conditions where with long cold winters and high numbers of frost

events, the spores will not survive on deciduous plants over winter, the leaves fall and do not support the disease, the problem lies with the evergreen varieties which hold their leaves and therefore the disease.

Biosecurity therefore had ample time to go in and defoliate the evergreen plants at Costa's Sulphur Creek property and any in neighboring farms infected. They still have that ability but I fear a lack of political will is stopping them due to influences placed on government and the decision makers.

At the last Agfest, Jeremy Rockliff pledged a large increase in funding to help increase the levels of Biosecurity protection for Tasmania, so funding for this and other measures should not be the excuse given for a lack of action. We are still waiting for a return on our taxpayers dollars to be applied to this outbreak.

Another method of making sure no further outbreaks occur is to ban the import to Tasmania of all Blueberry plants that have not gone through strict controlled quarantine protocols, there are enough growers in Tasmania to provide all nursery needs, and most farmers propagate their own Berry plants anyway.

Other fruit and veg growers are now nervous about their future as the so called "clean and green" Tasmanian reputation has been severely compromised.

The disease needs to be eradicated, it can be eradicated with a small cost compared to the loss of income from those farms who can no longer export and it should be eradicated to show the world that Tasmania is serious about protecting its borders and its reputation and to protect Tasmanian Farmers.

## **5. Other Matters incidental thereto**

I have been fostering a market into Europe through Belgium for a couple of years, this year I was to send a 10kg sample to test both the cool freight systems and the taste and quality of the fruit, had this been successful, I would have had access to \$90/kg sales freight excluded. Thanks to the containment only response by our Biosecurity to the rust outbreak, I was immediately denied access for now and until the rust is officially eradicated. This has caused me to change my entire farm future outlook, this farm was to be our superannuation, it was also to be handed to my two sons as part of the succession planning, all plans now are in turmoil. Stress and fear now reign in our

household. We have debts that unless we can maintain a reasonable income from this farm, we may not survive.

The reaction to this latest outbreak shows a total lack of control by Biosecurity, for the second time, an outbreak has happened without being picked up by them, both cases have been brought to their attention by other people and their reaction has been too little, too late.

The question must be asked, who benefits from this outbreak, under the current treatment of containment only, the answer is Cost group, and for whatever reason, Biosecurity are refusing to do anything that will damage their farms at the expense of a much larger group of farms and potentially larger income to Tasmania, All Costa profits leave the state, All profits from the Organic Certified farms stay in Tasmania, we employ more local people we use local services and support local communities.

I beg you, for the sake of this potentially booming industry, find in favour of eradication immediately

Sincerely,

**Grant Carter**

*Managing Director*

Lalla Natural Selection