

Ms Natasha Exel
Inquiry Secretary
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Hobart Tas 7000

To the members of the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee
'B'

Sub Committee inquiry into Blueberry Rust

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 Willie MLC Member for Elwick

Blueberry Rust Inquiry Submission
Rhyllon Sykes - Dromana Blueberries
15 Dromana Drive, Oyster Cove Tas 7150

Dromana Blueberries is a family operated business in Southern Tasmania that has been in existence for over forty years. The property produces blueberries for the local and interstate market and while not organically certified, the business employs sustainable practices and the orchards are grown chemical free. Dromana Blueberries is operated by Rhyllon Sykes, son of the property owner, Carl Sykes.

Blueberry rust is a significant threat to our business and to the blueberry industry in Tasmania, as are any of a number of potential pests and diseases that are easily spread without appropriate biosecurity measures in place and clear response protocols to outbreaks that are supported by industry and government.

The actions taken by Biosecurity Tasmania to address the 2014 and 2016 outbreaks of blueberry rust

I believe that the change of stance in regard to the management of blueberry rust from elimination to containment is worse for the entire industry and the state in general. We have a small land mass and containment is foolish. Victoria has shown that elimination works and if Victoria can be rust free it is embarrassing that we are not.

Recommended Actions:

- A return to putting priority on returning Tasmania to a Rust Free status and that this be reflected in the management plan and its administration
- Ban on the import of any live blueberry plant material

The future of Tasmania's blueberry industry, including the impacts of previous, current and any future outbreaks of blueberry rust

I am only a small grower but blueberries make up a significant part of my income. I grow organically and currently sell all my fruit locally. Growers who would normally be exporting from the State will have limitations in the markets open to them in face of the loss of rust free status; many of these growers will now be competing on the local market unless they can be supported in developing alternative overseas markets. This requires means of moving fruit without going through Victoria, a state committed to maintaining its rust free status. and with the rust in the state.

Without alternative avenues we face a situation where there will be too many growers selling on the local market with a consequent drop in prices and the ability to sell fruit. The domestic price is already impacted by the presence of big industry holding prices low.

Another potential impact will be on the 'pick your own' element of the market place where many smaller growers derive a percentage of their income cleaning up fruit at the end of the season and increasingly as a semi tourist /semi 'farmers marketplace' market share. At Dromana Blueberries I am having to look very seriously at the biosecurity risk of opening the property to increased outside traffic and particularly to those who may travel from farm to farm in pursuit of different produce and varieties.

Anecdotal evidence in the blueberry growers' community is that the presence of rust in the state is already impacting financial risk with banks questioning the financial viability of the industry when reviewing loans and overdrafts.

Recommended Actions:

- A return to putting priority on returning Tasmania to a Rust Free status and that this be reflected in the management plan and its administration
- Ban on the import of any live blueberry plant material
- Government support for the development of alternative market places and the infrastructure needed to access them – including possible direct cargo flights to overseas destinations from Tasmania.

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

If the policy remains as containment instead of elimination then I have grave doubts as to their ability to contain further outbreaks however if the policy was changed back to elimination then i have much greater faith in their ability to contain outbreaks, As we are fortunate to be an island we are in the ideal position for preventing further incursions to the state.

Recommended Actions:

- A return to putting priority on returning Tasmania to a Rust Free status and that this be reflected in the management plan and its administration
- Ban on the import of any live blueberry plant material

Any other matters incidental thereto.

Biosecurity in general needs to be a serious area of government responsibility. Agriculture in its diversity is a significant part of the State's economy and is fundamental to the lifestyles of many Tasmanian families including my own. The Tasmanian Government recognizes the potential of agriculture with the 2050 Agrivision of a sector grown ten fold. Agriculture colours our landscape and farm gate sales and farm stay are adding to the agri-economics, both of individual businesses and of the state. Within this landscape we need the legislation, authority and funding to be able to maintain good levels of biosecurity that protect our agricultural industries in all their diversity, large and small.

This discussion is also relevant to Brand Tasmania and how we are seen in interstate and overseas markets; the eco friendly, clean food, good water, fresh air image that Tasmania has is priceless in the twenty first century global market place and should not be compromised

Rhyllon Sykes
Dromana Blueberries

15 Dromana Drive
Oyster Cove Tas 7150

rj.sykes@bigpond.com

13 October 2017