

Belinda Bertollo
NSW

7th November 2001

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen in regards to the inquiry currently being undertaken in the citrus growing and processing industry. This is a serious situation resulting in the deteriorating livelihoods of many growers involved. Consequently, other sectors of the primary and secondary industries are affected in our city. An extensive and coherent solution needs to be sought on behalf of the people and businesses in Griffith and other citrus growing areas in Australia, to undo part of the damage that has already occurred.

One major reason resulting in the deterioration of the industry is the frozen concentrate orange juice being imported from other countries. Also, the changes in tariffs and quotas and trends in relation to demand and supply has seriously reduced the competitiveness of Australian citrus prices. Ironically, we are encouraged by the government to buy Australian products and support Australian primary industries and related businesses, however, the citrus industry is suffering due to the imports of citrus products. The impact of the policies in existence has not favoured Australian growers either.

Another important aspect that needs to be fully examined by the government is the worsening overall health of citrus growers and their families. Statistics collated in this region supports this argument. The Murray Valley Rural Counselling service has conducted fifty appointments with citrus growers over the last six months. In addition, the family friends I have come into contact with can only speak of hardship and family problems.

The government needs to support the Australian family. In the upcoming election we have heard the major parties state how their policies will help families. This is not the case in the citrus industry. The stress of financial ruin for these farmers is real. More often than not the

children of these families suffer in their education and physical and mental health. According to the Family Research Institute one in three marriages breakdown and the Mental Illness Association states that one in five people are suffering from mental illness. The growers in the citrus industry are contributing to these statistics.

Another disturbing fact is an increasing number of growers are purchasing everyday living requirements from payments given by Centrelink or other government sources. It is the only source of income available to them if they are going to survive. Hence, this places financial pressure on government resources. Another ironic situation has emerged which may be resolved if some of the reforms are set in place to help the citrus industry.

In summary, the depressed prices of citrus and the high costs involved in running citrus properties has led to many growers experiencing financial ruin and as a result they are leaving the industry. A move into another form of farming or entirely new career often involves considerable time and money to offset the years forsaken in trying to make a living from citrus growing. The profitability of the industry does not exist and it makes the livelihoods of citrus growers and their families incredibly difficult, if not impossible.

Immediate action for positive reform needs to be undertaken by the Federal and State Governments to support the industry. The government should assist the growers to alleviate a deteriorating situation.

Yours Sincerely

(signed)

Belinda Bertollo