

TO: The Australian Productivity Commission

I wish to advise that my farm business that has been part of a three generation farm entity and as supplier of fruit to SPC Ardmona for over 50 years has been under enormous stress in an effort to deal with reduced fruit intake primarily driven by cheap imports.

We believe that the Australian Multi serve fruit and canned tomato industries have suffered immense damage from cheap imports that have flooded our markets on the back of the strong Aussie Dollar.

This has meant that our major fruit processor SPC Ardmona has had to reduce the intake of fruit for processing. Australian producers can no longer compete on a level playing field with overseas countries that have lower labour costs and stronger government support through subsidies. Our strict quality measures and clean green practices are far superior to that of cheap imported products. Our on farm practices that are audited at a large financial cost direct to the grower are non-existent with our overseas competitors. The implementation of Integrated Pest Management Practices also illustrates our high level of innovation and industry best practice which strives to reduce chemical usage and improve environmental responsibility. Our standards towards fruit cultivation prove more advanced to the poor practices undertaken by overseas competitors.

With a significant reduction in intake being the result of this economic situation, we are now in the position of having no available home for our fruit and have therefore been forced to leave a large proportion of our pear crop on the trees. This has created a huge financial loss to our business, with a reduction in on-farm jobs also resulting. We are currently in the difficult position of having to consider removing trees without the necessary funds to do so – some of our pear trees are over 80 years old and still producing. If trees are not removed a serious environmental issue of pest and disease will invade our region. This is not a subjective situation with many fruit growers in the region facing this same decision.

Excess fruit that would normally be destined for processing has been forced onto the fresh fruit market only to cause even more grief by flooding the market and impacting

on our other fruit varieties with returns below the cost of production being delivered backed to growers.

The ramifications of this industry crisis extends to the wider region with growers, suppliers, processors, process workers and all other allied industries which are heavily reliant on SPC Ardmona now in a state of concern. The greater Goulburn Valley region is suffering economically, social and will environmentally unless action is taken promptly.

Our industry requires breathing space so that we can survive and then undertake the investment and productivity gains necessary to compete against imports longer term.

SPC Ardmona is asking for temporary relief through tariffs which are allowed under the WTO Safeguards Agreement.

Shepparton, the Goulburn Valley and Australia need this company to regain strength and thrive like it once did.

I urge the Commission to accept my submission and give consideration to applying safe guard measures to ensure that our area - the Goulburn Valley food bowl of Australia - continues to grow fruit in a sustainable and viable way that will prosper and keep local businesses and people employed.

I strongly support this reasonable request. In particular we support SPC Ardmona being given emergency provisional safeguards for 200 days, followed by longer-term full safeguards.

If this industry does not turn around and SPC Ardmona closes, our livelihood and career is over. I, along with many others, will be forced to exit out of farming. This is why SPC Ardmona must survive. It is almost 100 years old as is our Pear Industry.

Most of all we need Australian Food Manufacturing to stay – we need it (Jobs and Food Security). Australia has lost its Textile Industry, Car Industry and is now losing its Food Manufacturing

Vera Fleming

Geoffrey W Fleming