

**AUSTRALIAN RESPONSE TO JOINT ASEAN STATEMENT
ON TROPICAL FRUITS**

Statement by Australia at the Meeting of 21-22 June 2000

1. We thank the representative of the Philippines for her statement on behalf of the ASEAN countries. Australia fully appreciates the interest of its near neighbours in our region in advancing their export trade, especially in products such as tropical fruits. Australia is also a producer of many tropical fruits, including bananas, pineapples, mangoes as well as others. We will consider the statement carefully and respond as appropriate in due course.
2. There are several matters raised in the ASEAN statement on which we would want to make some initial response at this time.
3. First, we do not accept that there is any defect in the way in which Australia is meeting its obligations under the SPS Agreement. However, we do freely acknowledge that Australia consistently maintains a highly conservative approach to the appropriate level of protection. We do so for a number of reasons, one of which is that our capacity to continue to produce agricultural products depends critically on maintaining the relative freedom which Australia has from exotic pests and diseases.
4. In evaluating requests to establish conditions for the safe entry of products, including tropical fruits, we follow the established international guidelines for pest risk analysis (International Standard for Phytosanitary Measures No. 2). Members of the Committee will appreciate that pest risk analysis involves the identification of quarantine pests which exist in the country of export but which are not present or which are subject to active control in the country of import. Pest risk analysis is therefore specific to any two trading partners, and the results of the analysis will differ between exporting countries according to their respective pest status.
5. It follows that there is no justification to say that "Australian authorities refuse to recognize phytosanitary protocol(s) which, following rigorous scientific tests, have been considered adequate by other countries". Where such protocols exist we are pleased to take them into account to the extent that they are relevant, but they may not be relevant to Australia's specific circumstances. A country which does not grow bananas is unlikely to be concerned about phytosanitary risks from banana imports; we, on the other hand, are quite rightly concerned by the risk of black sigatoka, moko disease, fusarium wilt and a number of other exotic pests whose entry to Australia would threaten major damage to our banana industry.
6. It is not true to say that Australia's stringent SPS measures are applied "without benefice of any risk assessment exercise". Australia's established measures reflect the known presence of serious pests in many countries, which are exotic to Australia. However, we recognize that we should revise our measures, in the light of scientific information provided by trading partners and on the basis of risk analysis. The procedure which we follow consistently in such cases is highly transparent,

comprehensive and coherent, and fully in accordance with our SPS obligations. We cannot conduct such risk analyses without having scientific and technical information which can only be provided by the intending exporting country. Risk analysis therefore needs to be conducted as an interactive, co-operative process between the exporting and importing country.

7. We recognize that this may place significant demands upon exporting countries especially in relation to the provision of data by developing countries, and we are prepared to co-operate with our trading partners to minimize such difficulties.

8. There is, however, an added trade policy dimension to the ASEAN statement which should be brought to the attention of this Committee. The Philippines, in particular, has been critical of Australia's quarantine measures on some tropical fruits. At various times the Philippines has raised concerns about Australian restrictions on mangoes, pineapples and bananas. We would like to place on record some information about Australia's response to these concerns:

- In relation to the Philippines' request for access to Australia for mangoes, Australia has completed its risk analysis and published proposed conditions in accordance with which trade can take place. It is now a matter for the Philippines to initiate the trade, but it has yet to do so.
- In relation to the Philippines' request for access for bananas to Australia, it has been indicated to the Philippines that Australia is prepared to commence a risk analysis immediately.
- In relation to pineapple, Australia has indicated to the Philippines our preparedness to initiate a generic risk analysis, including pineapples from the Philippines, in a few months time.

We have been involved in extensive dialogue with the Philippines in an attempt to resolve their concerns while at the same time maintaining our rigorous, science-based approach to quarantine. We are ready to continue these efforts.
