



TOMATO IMPORTS

Australian greenhouse tomato growers should be seriously concerned about Biosecurity Australia's (BA) approval to allow the import of greenhouse tomatoes from New Zealand and Holland. Apart from facing increased competition, their import seriously threatens Australian horticulture crops.

Of special concern is the risk of importing exotic disease such as Potato Spindle Tuber Virus (PSTVd) from New Zealand and Pepino Mosaic Potyvirus (PepMV) from Holland, which would devastate the Australian greenhouse tomato industry, especially if these diseases get into the green waste.

Of more concern to Australian greenhouse growers is BA's methodology and approval process to allow the import of tomatoes from Holland using the same Import Risk Analyses (IRA) as for imported tomatoes from New Zealand. The Netherlands has at least nine insects and five pathogens associated with tomatoes that are not present in Australia or NZ. These include Mediterranean Fruit Fly and Pepino Mosaic Potyvirus, a contagious virus that spreads faster than Tomato Mosaic Virus (TMV). The introduction of any one of these pests or diseases has the potential to devastate the Australian Horticulture Industry; not just the greenhouse industry.

The Australian Hydroponics & Greenhouse Association is concerned about BA's Import Risk Analysis for Dutch tomatoes and plans to raise this issue with Biosecurity Australia. BA has already been severely criticised for their flawed approval processes for bananas from the Philippines and apples from NZ, with both IRAs found to contain substantial errors.

Another threat to Australian greenhouse tomato growers will be supermarkets that turn to overseas suppliers for consistent year-round supply of high quality tomatoes as a result of the current high-low marketing situation in Australia. Greenhouse tomato prices are highest in September and October because of the lack of tomatoes from field-grown tomatoes, then prices level out in February, March and April, which are the most consistent months. To avoid increasing overseas competition, Australian greenhouse tomato producers need to produce a

consistent, high quality truss tomato year round to restore supermarket and consumer confidence in hydroponic greenhouse tomatoes.

At the moment, supermarkets and consumers see quality variation in greenhouse tomatoes which range from very good to really poor. This inconsistency is brought about by problems such as the truss won't set properly, or the heat brings on smaller tomatoes.

There is a concern that a lack of consistency or quality in Australian greenhouse tomatoes, or a large enough hole in the supply chain brought about by growers switching crops or leaving the industry, will invite aggressive overseas competition in the Australian market.

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