

Hillside

Apple rejection heightens concerns

DODGY leaf matter and live insect pathogens found in apple imports from New Zealand have sparked urgent calls for a review of Australia's quarantine measures to ensure domestic orchards are protected from any incoming diseases.

For the first time in 90 years, Australia is importing apples from New Zealand despite heated opposition from those concerned about the risk of exposing our pest-free apples to diseases such as fireblight.

Australia is currently free of fireblight, and according to the Member for Riverina (NSW), Michael McCormack, an outbreak would devastate Australian horticulture, cause considerable environmental harm and be impossible to eradicate.

Arguing the future of Australia's apple industry is in jeopardy, Mr McCormack told the House of Representatives one of the first consignments of New Zealand apples has been denied entry because of quarantine concerns.

"By 18 August 2011, just a day after the all-clear was given, seven permits had already been issued to New Zealand orchardists. Later that same month a live-insect pathogen and potentially fireblight-carrying leaf matter had already been found in one of the first consignments," Mr McCormack said.

"The Australian government needs to urgently review its quarantine protocols to ensure our biosecurity measures are the tightest and toughest they can be."



THINKSTOCK

Garden mishap prompts label debate

ONE man's gardening misfortune with toxic compost has fuelled debate in the House of Representatives over the need for improved labelling of fertiliser products.

In a private member's motion the Member for Sturt (SA) Christopher Pyne called for the introduction of a new national standard for composts, soil conditioners and mulches.

He said the need for improved labelling came to his attention after one of his constituents, Des Kerr, purchased compost with a dramatically high pH level which suffocated his plants.

"Like Mr Kerr, all gardeners should know what is in the compost we are buying, what the pH level of the compost is and what other ingredients it may contain," Mr Pyne said.

With around 57 per cent of Australians growing their own vegetables, fruit and herbs, and an estimated 72 per cent purchasing plants for their garden during spring, Mr Pyne said the motion would help consumer confidence in a growing industry.

"The compost industry in Australia has a turnover of more than \$600 million per annum, employs more than 1,900 full-time employees and has an investment in capital of over half a billion dollars," he said.

"This motion, which seeks to encourage the uptake of compost for private and domestic use, would contribute to the future growth of this important industry."

Opening our hearts to save theirs

AN Australian medical program is giving hope to thousands of people in the South Pacific region and beyond who suffer from life threatening heart conditions.

Operation Open Heart was founded in 1986 by medical volunteers to provide cardiac treatment to the people of Tonga, and has since expanded to more than 2,000 patients throughout the South Pacific, Africa and South-East Asia.

The Member for Bruce (Vic) Alan Griffin became aware of the amazing work being done by Operation Open Heart during a parliamentary committee visit to Tonga and Indonesia.

Mr Griffin told parliament he was inspired by the amount of time and effort being donated to those in need.

"It is common to do more than 50 surgeries in a 14-day visit," he said. "As anyone who has been involved in the medical area would know, that is a phenomenal level of activity."

As well as conducting surgeries, volunteers also help train local medical staff to diagnose and treat heart

conditions, with the aim of becoming self-sufficient once visiting teams return home.

Mr Griffin thanked all the Operation Open Heart volunteers for the selfless work they are doing to improve the lives of people suffering from heart conditions.



NEWSPIX

ALL HEART: Medical volunteers are helping to save lives in the Pacific