

To the Australian Productivity Commission,

As an Australian fruit grower, what happens to SPC Ardmona (SPCA) has a direct impact on my business and livelihood and also my employees and suppliers of all my inputs.

SPCA is facing a flood of imported products in the retail market, which is directly related to the high Australian dollar. This region has suffered a prolonged drought, floods and severe frost but the damage to SPCA from imported product that began before these events, has far reaching effects and has continued after climatic conditions have returned to normal.

The affect that this situation is having on SPCA has far reaching implications on our Goulburn Valley region.

SPCA has provided stable employment to hundreds of workers from Shepparton and surrounding districts over a long period of time and closure would impact severely on these people, their families, and the communities they live in. Job prospects would be grim, and the social impact would be severe. Apart from the people directly employed by SPCA there are a large number of contractors and suppliers who would be directly impacted.

I produce pears, peaches, apricots and apples on approximately thirty five acres. My supply to SPCA is approximately 80% of my income. My quota for the 2014 season has been dramatically reduced and because there is no other profitable outlet for these varieties we have no option but to bulldoze trees that are still productive and have taken five to seven years to reach that stage.

Due to our reduced quota we have reduced employees to the bare minimum and I continue to work longer hours to try and cover more

but there are limits to this strategy . As well as reducing wages I am also reducing input costs in every area I can find, so less money is flowing on to the community .

Like SPCA, I have invested in our business continually to remain competitive. Some examples of this are in equipment purchases, drip irrigation, fertilizer application methods, new varieties and continual professional development by attending seminars and field days to keep up to date with modern orchard practices.

However, all these attempts and a comprehensive quality assurance program we undertake to supply SPCA is undermined by the continued flood of cheap imports.

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

SPCA is asking for temporary breathing space through tariffs, which are allowed under the WTO Safeguards Agreement. I strongly support this reasonable request. In particular I support SPCA being given emergency provisional safeguard for 200 days, followed by longer-term safeguards.

If this industry does not turn around and SPCA closes, it will see the end of fruit growing on my property which has a proud record of 102 years. The prospects are indeed very grim if this were to happen for myself and all the other growers employees and dependents of this industry.

SPCA is an integral part of the economy of this region and Australia and we all need this company to regain strength and thrive like it once did.

Yours sincerely,
Ian Puckey