

Making a sow's ear out of a silk purse

I'M ALL for free trade and opening up the world – especially to New Zealand's top-class agricultural produce. However, I am really struggling with new rules which now allow sales of imported fresh pork cuts into this country. The recent High Court judgement which ruled in favour of the new Import Health Standard (IHS) imposed by the newly monikered Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and its support for fresh pork imports, seems to me flawed.

Don't imagine I've had a Winston Peters-esque conversion to red-neck, simplistic, jingoistic, nationalistic, anti-immigration and

anti-trade stupidity. It's just that these new pork import regulations do not seem to make sense.

So I'm pleased to see that the Industry body New Zealand Pork, which has already spent \$1.4 million fighting the case, is now appealing this latest ruling. NZ Pork claims there is a risk of fresh pork imports bringing an anti-immune response virus into the country – and with it Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS), from which New Zealand is currently free. In herds not previously exposed to the virus PRRS can kill 70% of piglets and increase abortions and stillbirths. Local pig farmers fear an incur-

sion here could wipe out our industry.

NZ Pork argues that the MPI has breached the Biosecurity Act by following an incorrect process in allowing the importation of raw pork, which could be infected with the deadly PRRS virus. But MPI claims the industry is being protectionist and using biosecurity as a barrier to trade. It believes the likelihood of a PRRS incursion is slim and says it was not driven by international obligations to its decision to allow consumer-ready cuts of raw pork into the country.

However, as a casual observer, I find it hard to see how this decision is anything other than a



COMMENT
DAVID ANDERSON

sop to placate claims by overseas counterparts that New Zealand is anti-free trade – especially when MPI director general Wayne McNee admits it was “extremely important” that NZ demonstrates its commitment to obligations under its World Trade Organisation agreement.

Says McNee, “That means we cannot place restrictions on animal and plant product imports that

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are not aligned with international standards or supported by scientific risk assessments.”

Hmmm... and what was that about the MPI?: “Not been driven to its decision to allow consumer-ready cuts of raw pork into the country by international obligations?”

So if there has to be a sacrificial lamb, then better it be the relatively small pig sector rather than the more financially important dairy, red meat or horticulture sectors.

As NZ Pork chairman Ian Carter argues, the local industry is not anti-trade or protectionist; 45% of all pork sold in this country is imported.

Former agriculture and trade minister Jim Sutton was fond of accusing (admittedly more so in opposition than when actually in government) the country's trade negotiators and officials of being too keen on stripping away protections that left NZ exporters naked and unarmed in international trade combat.

So is our pig farming sector being used as a bargaining chip and left naked and unarmed?

Meanwhile, when all this imported fresh pork comes flooding into the country from overseas, will we see crackpot outfits like SAFE (Save Animals From Exploitation)

and the eye-watering, unfunny comedian Mike King running around pig farms in Indonesia, China and outer Mongolia bawling their eyes out about the plight of pigs on these properties?

You can bet your bottom dollar pigs raised in these countries are not the free-range, disease-free, carefully tended and lovingly reared animals these activists regularly demand from New Zealand pig farmers.

Free trade is well and good when the playing field is level, but I have the feeling that in this case it is not. Now where is that swine Winston when you really need him?

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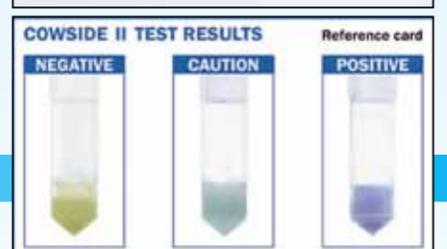
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