

**Senator COLBECK** (Tasmania) (15:22): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Senator Ludwig) to a question without notice asked by Senator Xenophon today relating to New Zealand Apples.

This is quite a serious matter, particularly given some of the information provided to members and senators this morning in a briefing from Biosecurity Australia. The disturbing element of that is that Australia's apple growers found out yesterday what the final protocols were for the importation of apples from New Zealand. It was only yesterday afternoon, when the minister tabled his statement in this place, that Australia's apple growers found out what the final protocol was for the importation of apples from New Zealand. But it now transpires that there had already been seven permits issued by Biosecurity Australia for the importation of apples from New Zealand into Australia. So, before Australia's apple growers even knew what was going on, this government had issued seven permits to New Zealand growers to import apples into Australia. What I would really like to know is how far ahead of the game the New Zealand growers were. And is it reasonable that New Zealand farmers found out before Australian farmers that there were going to be apples imported into this country? I think it is an absolute disgrace that the minister would tell New Zealand farmers before Australian farmers, and even issue permits for the importation of apples into Australia before Australian farmers knew.

We then find out that those apples will arrive here within days. They will be air-freighted from New Zealand to Australia within days. So Australian apple growers have no opportunity to respond to this. They are left with a fait accompli where the apples will be arriving within days. We then find that the apples were grown and harvested in April this year. That was before even the draft regulations were made public. So what we now have is a situation where apples grown before the draft protocols were made public on 4 May are now being accepted through the process for importation into Australia. So, before we even knew what the initial protocols were, before orchards could be registered, before the final protocols and farm management practices could be verified, it was put into place. So apples grown before any of those processes were made public even in a draft form to Australian growers, those apples are being qualified for importation into Australia.

I do not know how the industry can have any faith in what the Australian government is doing as part of this process. It is no wonder that there is huge suspicion and huge levels of concern about the efficacy of this process when, before the process was even started, New Zealand farmers were obviously gearing up for the process. We had a hearing into this on 21 July and we were told that officials from the Australian government were going to New Zealand to set up the processes and set up the practices. My view is that they were going there to start the

certification process and to begin to facilitate the importation of apples from the day that the minister made his final release. How could it be that the New Zealand growers were so prepared before he had even made his final pronouncement to the Australian growers that this was going to be the final protocol? That happened yesterday afternoon. And we find this morning that there have been seven permits already issued, there will be apples here within days and they were grown before even the draft protocols were announced to the Australian apple growers. It leads me to believe the fix was in.

When the Prime Minister went and addressed the New Zealand parliament in February this year and said, to huge applause in the New Zealand parliament: 'Don't worry, we will abide by the WTO rulings.' Of course, we know that that would be what the Prime Minister would say. But there was obviously a nudge-nudge, wink-wink and the deal was done. The fix was in in February and New Zealand farmers have been preparing since February to bring apples into this country. And yet our farmers find out yesterday afternoon what the final protocol was. We found out this morning: seven permits issued, the planes are loaded, apples will be here within days—no opportunity for Australian apple growers to deal with this. It is an absolute disgrace.

Question agreed to.