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Disease remains focus for pork industry

Disease prevention will remain the focus of the Australian pork industry following today's refusal by the High Court to hear the industry's appeal against new quarantine protocols for imported pig meat.

In speaking shortly after the decision, Australian Pork Limited (APL) CEO Andrew Spencer said the industry's focus would remain on keeping diseases which Australia does not have out of the country.

"Our goal in pursuing this litigation was to keep the devastating pig disease, Post Weaning Multisystemic Wasting Syndrome (PMWS), out of the Australian pig herd. We do not have PMWS in this country. We are now the only country in the world free of the disease and we would like to remain that way.

"We will now be focusing on research into PMWS. APL has been asking the Government to undertake research into PMWS since it was first diagnosed seven years ago; to this day that research has not been done.

"Australia cannot have a science-based quarantine system in relation to pig meat imports unless there is some actual science. The causative agents of PMWS remain unknown. We do not know how it is transmitted and we do not know how to control it."

Mr Spencer said independent modelling undertaken by the CSIRO showing that the new quarantine protocols for pigmeat gave rise to a 95-99 per cent likelihood of a PMWS outbreak within the next ten years made research more crucial than ever.

"With these risks in mind, APL, in conjunction with the NZ pig industry and Massey University, has funded specialised research into PMWS in the hope we can discover the causative agents of this devastating disease and possibly find some way to devise control measures and an inoculation."

APL's lawyer, Tom Brennan, said the High Court's decision to refuse Special Leave was based on legal technicalities and was no reflection on the merits of the quarantine protocols or the strength of the evidence.

"The fact remains that the quarantine protocols for imported pig meat are not science-based. The only judge to have examined the new quarantine protocols, Mr Justice Wilcox, found them to be 'unsupported by any fact, scientific evidence or scientific expertise'. The Court today has not considered any of the evidence relating to the quarantine risk posed by imported pig meat."

Mr Brennan said Special Leave applications were only rarely granted with only five of the 105 applications made since October being approved.

A PMWS outbreak in Australia is estimated to add \$55 million a year to production costs and result in a \$200 million loss in GDP. PMWS has killed more than 8 million pigs in the European Union since 2000.