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Government's about-face on apple zones slow in coming

State Agriculture Minister Michael O'Brien's bravado in hastily declaring apple and pear quarantine zones in SA has eventually succumbed to a more common sense approach to managing plant disease says opposition Agriculture spokesman Adrian Pederick.

Mr Pederick was commenting on the announcement by Minister O'Brien that the government would not continue with the apple no-go zones in the Adelaide Hills and other prime orchard districts.

'The threat of allowing the devastating plant disease fire blight into Australia caused great concern throughout the community,' he said.

'As well as a major effort in the federal parliament to retain the ban, the Liberal opposition stated its whole-hearted support for measures to prevent its entry, but we did question the practicality of this proposal when it was first announced.

'It was a hastily concocted, crowd-pleasing idea but it was obvious from the start that it would cost a fortune to implement and still not guarantee success.

'Minister O'Brien himself conceded in a radio interview on August 30th that there might be as few as eight or ten New Zealand apples a year deposited in quarantine bins around the state.

'He also said no latitude would be given. Were they going to stop school buses entering the zones and check children's lunch boxes for fruit – let alone confiscate it and fine them?

'Education of the public and the support of retailers offer a more practical and effective method of combating the problem.

'The government has known for months that the ban on NZ apple imports was going to be lifted, giving plenty of time to think through the possibilities and be ready with a realistic contingency plan to manage the problem.'

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