BIOSECURITY

Policy statement

The issues

The prevention of pest and disease incursions is of vital importance to the viability of all rural industries. Australia's unique biodiversity and relatively disease-free status, along with our reputation as a supplier of fresh, high quality, clean produce must be maintained. Freedom from many of the world's major pests and diseases is a clear advantage in both domestic and global markets.

The majority of horticultural trade occurs interstate resulting in the biosecurity systems between jurisdictions being significantly important. However, international trade is also important. Australia requires rigorous science and monitoring to substantiate market access requirements for both domestic and export markets. From an incoming trade perspective, the horticulture industry requires an import risk assessment system which maintains high import quarantine standards to protect Australia's horticultural production base as well as the environment and biodiversity.

Our position

Effective sanitary and phytosanitary controls contribute towards preventing the importation and spread of exotic pests and diseases that lead to crop losses as well as a loss of market access.

Governments, industry and the community all have a role to play in biosecurity issues. Resources must be effectively used to assess import applications, prevent and combat pest and disease incursions as well as fund and coordinate eradication procedures. In addition, resources need to continue to be applied to the protection of our borders from the natural spread of pests through continued support of programs such as Topwatch and the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy.

In combination, these activities must leave the international community without doubt that Australia's quarantine and risk assessment regimes are developed and operated independently, and are based solely on sound scientific and risk assessment principles and analyses.

We acknowledge that the surest route to this outcome is through the Recommendations of the Beale review of Biosecurity, and we request their implementation as a matter of some urgency.

Our commitment

Growcom is committed to working with its partners, government and other stakeholders to ensure that biosecurity standards are maintained at the highest level, that quarantine risk assessments are based on sound science and transparent decision making processes and that there is a high level of co-ordination, preparedness and planning to manage any pest or disease incursion. Growcom is committed to membership of Plant Health Australia and the benefits it brings to preparedness and response capacity on biosecurity issues.

Our expectations

Growcom is seeking progress in the area of world trade reform, contingent upon Australia being able to maintain a very conservative level of quarantine protection. Australia's quarantine protocols are designed to defend the integrity of our environment and production areas rather than as a barrier to fair trade.

In order to ensure high levels of sanitary and phytosanitary control, a transparent risk assessment process based upon sound science and vigilant quarantine systems is required.

Growcom expects government and industry to have a high level of preparedness and capacity to apply to biosecurity measures at the pre border, border and post border levels.

We would expect that the Recommendations of the Beale review of Biosecurity be

implemented as a matter of some urgency.

Our agenda items

Issues to be considered within the broader quarantine policy heading include:

- Pest and disease management and response preparation e.g. Industry Biosecurity Plan development, diagnostics standards, contingency plans and risk mitigation strategies developed.
- Risk Assessment for international, interstate and intrastate trade.
- On-farm biosecurity planning.
- Adequacy of the quarantine and biosecurity network.
- Participation in Plant Health Australia.
- Compensation and eradication for pests and disease incursions that meet the requirements of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.
- Border protection.
- Incursion responses and preparedness.
- Development of a National Fruit Fly Strategy.
- Implementation of a well resourced and effective biosecurity agency in Queensland.
- Interstate certification agreements (ICAs) process to be streamlined and more timely, in line with Biosecurity Australia's import risk analysis process
- Control of chemicals of security concern without undue regulatory burden on producers and the supply chain.
- Biosecurity planning or risk management on farm or commodity based.

- Domestic and international market access needs to be equitable, transparent, risk-based, with agreed time-lines.

State and federal governments should provide an enabling environment for horticultural businesses to operate in, including timely streamlined domestic and international market access. Regulatory burdens should be reduced wherever possible by recognition under the Interstate certification Assurance system of elements of Quality Assurance/farm management systems that mitigate Biosecurity risk.

The state and territory domestic market access systems should be devolved to allow Third party auditing of the ICA system, with the jurisdictions retaining the authority and accountability to prevent commercial conflicts of interest.

Further policies need to be developed around the following areas:

- Growcom's role in biosecurity incursions as per our obligations under the Emergency Plant Pest Deed.
- Risk management.
- Research into suitable replacement chemistry for dimethoate, fenthion and endosulfan along with updated ICAs for any replacements determined.