ABGC calls for election commitments on biosecurity

In the lead up to tomorrow’s Queensland election, the Australian Banana Growers’ Council (ABGC) has called for increased biosecurity resources, identifying them as one of the banana industry’s key issues.

ABGC Chairman Doug Phillips said the banana industry had sought commitments from the major political parties on additional resources for the Queensland Government’s biosecurity agency Biosecurity Queensland (BQ).

Specifically, the banana industry was seeking additional high-level experts in the areas of plant science and risk management experts for BQ. Also sought were assurances on the enforcement of existing and future plant pest regulations and better joint government and industry incursion risk-management and planning.

Mr Phillips said biosecurity remained a top priority for the banana industry because of the threat plant pests posed to banana production.

To see a copy of the ABGC statement, click here

To see details of the LNP’s agriculture policy and ALP policies, go to the following websites:


New ethephon permit means easier nurse-suckering

In a breakthrough helping Queensland banana growers to more easily manage crop production cycles, ethephon is now permitted for nurse-suckering.

The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) in December granted a permit allowing ethephon pseudostem injections in bananas in Queensland for crop-timing management.

The permit (PER14966) is valid until 31 March 2018 and contains information on the rates and pattern of use. More
Ethephon stem injections can now be used by Queensland growers controlling production cycles through nurse-suckering.


The permit was granted based on research undertaken by the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry at South Johnstone to investigate the most effective usage rates and any requirements for a pre-harvest withholding period.

DAFF senior development horticulturist Stewart Lindsay said ethephon is an active ingredient that produces ethylene as one of its break down products and is best known for use as a ripening agent. Injection into the banana pseudostem at the correct rate and volume kills the main bud or growing point of the pseudostem resulting in vigorous sucker growth.

The technique is much less labour intensive than traditional nurse-suckering methods. For more information go to the APVMA webpage or contact Stewart at South Johnstone.

ABGC Chairman Doug Phillips thanked Stewart for his research work that led to the permit being granted.

**Register now for the Banana Congress, June 17 - 20**

Registrations are now open for the 2015 Banana Industry Congress being held in Melbourne from June 17 to 20.

Get in early to take advantage of the special early-bird rates. There are also discounts for Australian Banana Growers’ Council members.

Easy online registrations can be made at the Congress website www.bananacongress.org.au

Registration forms are also available for downloading at the site and there is also information for those wanting to join our growing list of sponsors and exhibitors.

Major sponsors of this year’s event are Visy Boxes and More, Woolworths, Bayer, LaManna, Costa, mgroup and Orora with more new sponsor announcements expected soon.

**Top coach and chef in our Congress line up**

Leading NRL and former State Of Origin coach Craig Bellamy will be our opening keynote speaker at the Banana Industry Congress.

There’ll also be a visit from celebrity chef Miguel Maestre who will demonstrate some innovative banana recipes.

Craig’s address will be given at our Melbourne event the day after the city hosts the second game in the 2015 State Of Origin series, with Craig speaking on our theme of Change. Challenge. Opportunity.

The Congress program features a mix of business and social sessions as well as partners’ events. Look out for the new-format R&D sessions, a presentation on the new Australian Bananas marketing strategy, a special retail tour and the chance to visit the new Melbourne Markets.

The Banana Ball and Awards of Honour will be held on the Friday night with an announcement soon on the nationally-known TV personality who’ll be our entertainer for the evening.

For more information, go to www.bananacongress.org.au

**Partners asked to rate Melbourne attractions**

Delegates can now register for this year’s Banana Industry Congress.
Partners attending the 2015 Banana Industry Congress are being asked to vote on their favourite Melbourne attractions and activities as part of preparations for a special Partners’ Program.

Banana delegate partners and family members can go online to help choose the Melbourne activities they’d most like to participate in. Choices include activities such as shopping, CBD visits, food and wine events, visits to historical sites, an MCG tour, cultural events and more.

To make sure we have the best possible Partners’ Program, make sure your partners and family members have their say by going to the Congress Partners’ webpage:

http://bananacongress.org.au/program/partners-program/

Banana Freckle levy submission progresses

The Australian Banana Growers’ Council (ABGC) will next week finalise its submission to the Federal Government on the Banana Freckle levy proposed to begin on July 1 this year.

Banana growers have continued to provide comment on the plan for a 0.75 cents-a-kg production levy, or 9.75 cents per 13kg carton.

The levy will fund the banana industry’s contribution to the $26 million Banana Freckle eradication in the NT.

ABGC Chief Executive Officer Jim Pekin said the ABGC had written to all growers and banana grower associations about the levy proposal. He is continuing to speak with growers prior to the finalisation of the industry’s levy submission.

“Growers have noted that the current Banana Freckle response in the NT is being conducted under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, which means the banana industry is to pay its share of the costs of the response,” he said.

“The question is how best to use the Emergency Plant Pest Levy mechanism to repay the debt that is being incurred. Growers have mostly been supportive of the ABGC Board’s proposal for this levy to be raised from zero to 9.75 cents for a 13kg carton.”

Last chance for Reef grants as final round opens

North Queensland banana growers have one last chance to access grants through the Australian Government’s Reef Program.

The final round of grants opened this week and Australian Banana Growers’ Council Reef Grants Officer Robert Mayers will be helping banana growers with their applications.

Applicants must register their interest by March 6. For further information, contact Robert on 0447 000 203.

The grants improve land management practices to help reduce the runoff of nutrients, sediments and pesticides from agricultural land into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

Terrain NRM is responsible for delivering the grants across the Wet Tropics region in collaboration with industry partners, including the ABGC.

Terrain’s Reef Programme Manager, Deb Bass said, “The previous seven rounds of the Programme have seen a significant commitment from over 1,000 Wet Tropics farmers who have improved their land management practices through minimising soil...
disturbance, reducing rate and application of residual herbicides and fertilisers through the purchase of specialised equipment, and by fencing off river banks, to name a few.”

“By matching the grants with their own investment, not only have farmers proven their commitment to the health of the reef, but many have benefited with implementing more efficient systems on their farm resulting in more sustainable production.”

**Palmerston region hit twice in Summer storm season**

Some growers from the Palmerston area, west of Innisfail, are again assessing damage after being hit by the second severe storm of the Summer season.

There were reports of heavy losses of bunched trees on some farms which were hit last week.

Some growers had also suffered losses about six weeks earlier, in early December, from the first major storm of the season. In that storm, there was sporadic damage to farms stretching from the Tully Valley north to Palmerston and Nerada, the northern edge of Innisfail and through to Cairns.

Growers hit by both storms have suffered some significant damage to bunched trees, however the damage is not expected to have a major effect on overall north Queensland banana production.

**49-degree heat hits Carnarvon bananas**

Banana growers in Western Australia's Carnarvon region are assessing damage from last week's January record temperature peak of 49 degrees that hit the region on the 20th.

Growers will assess damage over the coming weeks as the impact on young plants and maturing bunches becomes apparent. The effects of the one-day heatwave could last for six months if bunch choking results.

Adding to the impact of the hot conditions are irrigation restrictions in the area where the Gascoyne River has not had a flow for almost a year.

**Grower meetings for February**

Grower meetings are being held in New South Wales next week with more meetings the following week in North Queensland.

The Nambucca District Banana Growers’ Association meets on Tuesday February 3 at the Macksville Ex-Services Club and the Coffs & District growers meeting the following night, February 4, at Club Coffs.

Mareeba growers meet on Wednesday, February 11 and Cassowary Coast growers meet on Thursday, February 12.

**Duranbah trial block visit planned for March**
Plans are underway for a field day in March at the Banana Plant Protection Program’s Duranbah trial block in northern New South Wales.

Details are being finalised for the day which will provide growers with the latest update on the performance of new varieties being assessed for their tolerance to the soil disease Panama Race 1.

A second stage of trials began at the block last year to assess the varieties’ commercial prospects. Pictured are growers at an earlier field day held during the first stage of new-variety assessments.

ChemCert training at Murwillumbah - Feb 24

ChemCert training is being offered in Murwillumbah on February 24 for NSW growers who use AgVet Chemicals. The training is for ChemCert Accreditation AQF3. Growers are required to be trained, assessed and reaccredited in chemical use every five years. Information is available on 1800 444 228 or [www.ChemCert.com.au](http://www.ChemCert.com.au)