

Chairman's address, PHA AGM November 2018

Good morning everyone. Welcome to PHA's 18th Annual General Meeting.

It is a pleasure to be addressing you in my capacity as Chairman since I was appointed this time last year.

In my first 12 months as Chairman, I have appreciated the opportunity to meet with many of you directly to learn more about your particular issues and challenges. Through my participation in National Management Group meetings, I have seen, at first hand, the emergency response mechanism in action and gained a better appreciation of the time and resources that signatories commit to responses. Moreover, I have been impressed by the spirit of cooperation that exists between parties when considering response plans and the technical support that PHA staff provide to these deliberations.

Before running through the company's achievements for the year, it's worth reminding ourselves just how much your industries contribute to this country. Last financial year, collectively, PHA's plant industry member production was worth a massive \$32 billion dollars. Of this, the export value exceeded \$28 billion. The importance of plant industries to employment and regional economies cannot be underestimated.

There are currently 60 government, industry and associate members of PHA, providing PHA with an extremely valuable forum in which to discuss the biosecurity system as a whole. During the year, we welcomed the Australian Tea Tree Industry Association bringing the count of our industry members to 39. Together, we have an obligation and an opportunity to further improve Australia's already very well-regarded biosecurity system.

Our member survey, conducted by independent consultant Kynetec in mid-2018, showed that on the whole, you are positive about PHA and what the organisation provides. 91 percent of those surveyed rate PHA's performance as good or excellent and 96 percent rated your working relationship with PHA as good or excellent, showing a steady improvement over the 2012 and 2015 survey results.

You also rated PHA very highly for our management of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (the Deed), consultation on issues and information dissemination.

I congratulate you for your continuing efforts to strengthen biosecurity in your industries. The survey shows that 85 percent of you are distributing information to growers and the public and 79 percent are raising farmer and grower awareness and undertaking industry liaison. Your priorities for mitigating biosecurity risk are information dissemination, improving grower involvement and cross-industry collaboration

Turning to our finances, PHA's income and expenditure grew this year, with revenue up significantly to \$8.45 million. This increase was mostly due to an injection of funds from the Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper. The areas supported by the White Paper were mainly related to surveillance, including funding directed towards enhancements to bee biosecurity projects, developing national surveillance strategies for the citrus and forest industries and boosting surveillance in Northern Australia.

Through this funding and other programs we now have more people based out in regional Australia working with growers on biosecurity. New to us are Jeff Milne, based in Mildura with Citrus Australia, as National Citrus Surveillance Coordinator and Paco Tovar in Bunbury, as National Forest Surveillance Coordinator. PHA has also recently gained the services of James Walker from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources' NAQS team based in Cairns, seconded to PHA for 12 months.

They join Trevor Dunmall based in Brisbane, Queensland as Northern Australia Industry Liaison Manager, five grains biosecurity officers in each grain producing state, six bee biosecurity officers and two vegetable and potato biosecurity officers and some part time support in other commodity areas. These industry officers are dedicated to working with growers, providing advice on biosecurity measures that can be used on farm to minimise the risks posed by pests and diseases.

We were pleased that four new industry members signed the Deed this year representing sweet potato, lychee, tea tree and truffle growers. There are now 47 signatories to the Deed.

Emergency responses certainly keep staff busy these days, with the team managing eleven emergency plant pest responses during 2017-18. PHA continues to build biosecurity capacity in managing emergency plant pest incidents and protecting Australia from exotic pests. An example, Exercise BeePrepared, has now been run in all states and territories with over 270 attendees, to test our ability to rapidly respond to a detection varroa mite.

PHA is involved in many exciting developments and I would like to highlight a couple.

Firstly, we have embarked on working with the International Plant Sentinel Network which is linking botanic gardens and arboreta, National Plant Protection Organisations and plant health scientists around the world. The Australian initiative, as well as engaging internationally, will support industry and environmental surveillance activities.

The second relates to the Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative (PBRI). As you would know, the PBRI was established in March 2017 and is supporting a growing suite of cross-sectorial research, development and extension projects. This coordinated approach is ensuring effort is aligned with national goals and avoiding duplication of effort of seven plant rural research and development corporations.

PBRI recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Better Border Biosecurity New Zealand. This new collaboration will involve cross-sectoral projects and the formation of a joint plant biosecurity network to support the professional development of post-graduate and post-doctoral students. As part of this collaboration, New Zealand biosecurity researchers will be invited to the inaugural Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative R&D Symposium being held on 5-6 June 2019 in Brisbane.

Fruit fly continues to be a high priority for PHA. This year, we led the development of the Australian National Fruit Fly Management Protocols. These have now been accepted by Plant Health Committee, having been in development for about 10 years.

The new edition of the Australian Handbook for the Identification of Fruit Flies has been very popular. There is also a companion website to help diagnosticians to make more accurate and rapid identifications of fruit flies.

PHA's AUSPestCheck virtual surveillance centre is now well established. Millions of surveillance records have been collated and the number is rising rapidly. This year, new projects were initiated to facilitate greater sharing of plant and animal pest and disease data between federal, state and territory governments. The benefits of being able to collate and map the findings of all this activity are huge, particularly to support our health status and facilitate trade.

In-line with PHA's constitution, which gives the company a clear remit for work to protect native flora, this year PHA also produced the first environmental biosecurity plan for acacia.

There are also many new and revised industry biosecurity plans in the pipeline. The plan for coffee is next to be published, with banana, cherry, onions and potato plans to follow. Other plans anticipated in 2019 are for avocados, ginger, mangoes, onions, summerfruit, sweetpotato, tea tree and viticulture. This year, biosecurity manuals were produced for growers of onions and potatoes and there is one in train for cherry growers.

It was great to see PHA again recognised directly and indirectly at this year's Australian Biosecurity Awards during the ABARES Outlook Conference. For the second year, the 2019 Australian Biosecurity Awards will include a producer category that recognises on-farm biosecurity excellence. In March this year, the Grains Farm Biosecurity Program which was established in 2008 received an award and I am pleased to see that the efforts of the grain biosecurity officers have been recognised. It was also good to see growers in the banana industry recognised for their on-farm initiatives.

PHA finished the year in a good financial position with an operating surplus, which is an improvement on the approved budget. The coming year looks positive too.

On behalf of the Board, I'd like to convey our thanks to the expert staff at PHA for their continued efforts.

You should all have a copy of the 2018 Annual Report which sets out the progress and outcomes of the company for the 2017–18 financial year. If not, pick one up on your way out. I'm sure you'll agree it is an impressive array of work. It couldn't have been done without all of you, our plant biosecurity partners, so I hope you all feel proud of your contribution to the work.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on the biosecurity challenges ahead and I am confident that together we are well placed to face them.

Thank you.

Steve McCutcheon