

# Chairman's Address

## 19th Annual General Meeting 19 November 2019

Welcome everyone to the 19th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of PHA. For those that have travelled to Canberra, an added thank you.

You will have received a copy of the 2019 Annual Report with papers for this AGM. This year, PHA membership stayed steady with 59 government, industry and associate members, keeping PHA well attached to key participants in the national plant biosecurity system.

During the year, PHA member Australian Vignerons joined forces with the Winemakers' Federation of Australia to form Australian Grape and Wine Incorporated, now the designated PHA member.

This year PHA has continued to report progress on the Strategic Plan for 2016–21. The company maintained its approach to bring partners together to invest in biosecurity initiatives and deliver outcomes for Australian plant industries, governments and the nation.

A budget of \$10.5 million dollars was spent on the program of work, including \$2.9 million from subscription funds and \$7.6 million from non-subscription sources.

Member **subscription funds** were mainly spent in the Partnerships and the Emergency Response areas, while **non-subscription funds** were mainly spent in the Surveillance and Partnership areas.

Along with face-to-face meetings around the country, PHA continued to strengthen efforts to communicate with our members and beyond about the broad issues concerning plant biosecurity.

This time last year, at the PHA Member Forum, we heard from members of the National Biosecurity Committee who shared their insights on implementing recommendations from the review of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity and on recent experiences of biosecurity responses in various states.

Mid-year we published the 2018 **National Plant Biosecurity Status Report**. This comprehensive publication relies on the input of more than 100 contributors including our members. It is a valuable reference for those seeking to understand Australia's plant biosecurity system and its performance.

We again supported the Farm Biosecurity Producer of the Year Award as part of the Australian Biosecurity Awards. This year, the Corallos from Strawberry Springs in the Yarra Valley won the award. We will continue to support this award in 2020, not only to promote good on farm biosecurity practice but recognise some of our great biosecurity practitioners.

Engagement through our **electronic communication** grew through a commitment to deliver regular e-newsletters and up-to-date web content. As a result, the number of users of PHA's websites grew nearly 40 percent, now with over 60,000 sessions per month. We attracted 27 percent more Twitter followers and Tendrils readers were up by nearly 20 percent.

A notable achievement during the year was securing funding for the **National Fruit Fly Council** for another three years. This allowed the continued employment of a manager working within PHA and will help drive a nationally coordinated response to one of the most important pests of Australia's horticulture industries.

Grower levy funding supported valuable **biosecurity extension activities** for the honey bee, grains, melon, nursery, and vegetable and potato industries, often in the form of biosecurity officers on the ground.

As many of you would be aware, the **citrus canker incursion** in the Northern Territory and Western Australia was a significant emergency response. It has been a very successful partnership between governments, industry, the community and PHA. This has entailed a major investment by the industry and government. PHA continues to support the communication effort by coordinating numerous teleconferences with leading growers nationally.

This year, PHA continued to ensure the **EPPRD** met the needs of Parties. Initiatives, such as improved equity for owners directly impacted by early containment actions, are aimed to promote grower reporting.

A number of emergency plant pest responses were **finalised**. The successful eradication of banana freckle from the Northern Territory through a multi-million-dollar program under the EPPRD is a credit to all partners involved.

We also saw resolution to the giant pine scale response in Victoria and South Australia, with Transition to Management activities successfully completed.

Significant efforts in **training and simulations** have helped improve industry and government preparedness for emergency plant pest responses. This year, almost 250 people took part in simulation exercises, 50 people did face-to-face EPPRD training, and there were more than 1,200 new users of the Biosecurity Online Training platform.

Much of the additional funding from the Australian Government was directed to plant biosecurity **risk mitigation** through preparedness and surveillance.

In addition to working with industries to update biosecurity plans and manuals, various initiatives having been improving our preparedness for pests such as xylella, spotted wing drosophila and varroa mite.

A growing focus on **environmental biosecurity** saw the appointment of a Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer by the Department of Agriculture. PHA's work in this area has also increased, with the development of biosecurity plans for acacia and mangroves underway.

PHA has been working closely with the industry to build biosecurity surveillance initiatives. The citrus, forestry and mango industries all have **pilot programs** supported by government that we are working with to evolve into ongoing initiatives. These and other industries are also benefiting from having biosecurity coordinators and officers on the ground.

Increasing surveillance for serious pests and diseases provides the benefits of early detection and a higher chance of successful eradication. It also helps prove our freedom from pests which supports market access.

For example, through the **National Bee Pest Surveillance Program**, some 16,000 records of surveillance data were provided from around the country, and no exotic pests were detected.

It is worth noting that the network of **surveillance practitioners** is being strengthened to boost Australia's skills in this area.

This is in addition to good work being done to support our diagnostic capability through the **diagnostician's network** and the delivery of professional development activities.

PHA continues to be a significant driver of the coordination of plant biosecurity research, development and extension.

It is pleasing to see the outstanding work of the **Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative** in attracting nearly \$50m worth of investment (cash and in-kind). This will be pivotal in leading innovation and strategic investment and assessing strategic ways to coordinate RD&E across sectors to leverage investments, promote collaboration and avoid research duplication.

New international collaborations were also established, such as with New Zealand, which shares many of the same challenges as Australia. It was good to see a strong New Zealand presence at the first Plant Biosecurity Research Symposium in Brisbane in August which attracted over 220 delegates

As PHA continues to attract increased project funding, staff numbers have continued to grow. We now have 35 as at 30 June this year, based in the ACT, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. This also allows PHA to fulfil a strategic role in building plant biosecurity capacity with staff recently moving to a number of government and industry roles.

As you will have seen through the Tendrils e-newsletter, we are also actively recruiting for a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as Greg Fraser will be departing PHA in early July 2020. This is a high priority for the PHA Board and not without its challenges given that we will be seeking to replace a high performing and widely respected CEO who has been integral to the company's growth and achievements over the past decade.

While this AGM will be Greg's last, we will have the opportunity to formally acknowledge his contribution to PHA at the next General Meeting in May 2020.

For a small organisation, I think you will agree that PHA manages to deliver well to a wide range of members and stakeholders. The organisation has led and contributed to key gatherings around the country and helped to determine strategies and solutions to improve management of critical issues regarding plant health in Australia. We do this by focusing on a teamwork approach, delivering strong partnerships.

Our work is contributing to protecting Australia from exotic plant pests and diseases through effective responses to pest incursions, industries being more prepared for pests, stronger surveillance and building of new partnerships with international and environmental partners.

With 2020 being the International Year of Plant Health, PHA is looking forward to the opportunity to raise the profile of the importance of plant health to an even wider group of stakeholders.

On behalf of the Board, we would like to express our appreciation to all members who have continued to support PHA. Without your ongoing support, we would not be able to deliver the range of services that strengthen Australia's plant biosecurity system.

I would also like to thank Greg and his team at PHA for their tireless work on your behalf and their commitment and professionalism in delivering the outcomes outlined in this report

Thanks again.

Steve McCutcheon  
Chairman