

# CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

## 19th General Meeting

**25 May 2020**

Welcome to Plant Health Australia's 19<sup>th</sup> General Meeting, held for the first time via webinar, thanks to COVID-19. We thank you all for joining us online this afternoon and hope that you have not had too many problems with the technology so far.

You will have been involved in recent discussion with PHA regarding the 2020-21 Annual Operational Plan at the March webinar and or in one-on-one meetings with PHA staff. In any case, you will all have received an electronic copy of the Draft Annual Operational Plan so you'll know that 2020–21 will be a busy, if not unusual, year for the company.

The COVID-19 situation in Australia sets the scene for at least the early part of the 2020–21 year, and possibly longer, depending on the expected second wave of infections.

COVID-19 has already had an impact on PHA's programs, some more so than others. While being innovative and focussed on solutions are two of our core values as a company, adapting to the new working environment to ensure we continue to function efficiently and effectively for the benefit of Australia's plant biosecurity system is testing our mettle.

Where possible, at least in the short term, planned face-to-face meetings will now be video meetings: workshops may be deferred and training delivered via webinars. PHA will aim to be as flexible as possible as we change the way we interact with members and stakeholders to deliver the activities outlined in the AOP.

This year's income budget is nearly \$10.4 million, made up from about \$2.6 million of subscriptions and \$7.5 million from project income. A breakdown of these figures is given in the body of the AOP. Proposed total subscriptions for 2020–21 have not increased from this year, in recognition of the impacts of drought, bush fires and COVID-19 on members.

Normally in this address, I would discuss the work of the emergency response team. This year, in lieu of the usual May EPPRD meeting, all members were invited to three teleconferences held in April where Parties were updated on the status of important items and how these will be progressed.

I will say, however, that this year marks a key milestone for EPPRD parties, with the agreement being ratified 15 years ago. The third formal review of the EPPRD in 2020–21 will provide an opportunity for parties to reflect on its operation and evolution.

PLANTPLAN, too, will be reviewed, and the findings from recent evaluation exercises incorporated, to ensure it meets the needs and expectations of users.

The Australian celebration of the International Year of Plant Health will continue in the second half of 2020. It's a tremendous opportunity to build a better understanding of the value of healthy plants in the wider community, even though the importance of plants to human health and wellbeing has been somewhat eclipsed lately.

This year, there are multiple strategies in the area of plant biosecurity at different stages of revision, including the diagnostics, surveillance, preparedness and RD&E strategies. It's also time to review the overarching National Plant Biosecurity Strategy, which will guide the development of a new PHA Strategic Plan 2021–26, during 2021. New actions and activities for PHA will be developed and presented to members for consideration at the General Meetings in May and November 2021.

A partnership that all Australian governments have committed to, and many industries affected by fruit fly will benefit from, is the Intergovernmental Agreement on Strengthening Australia's Fruit Fly Management.

Already, a new National Fruit Fly Strategy for 2020 to 2025 has been developed, and the National Fruit Fly Council now has the task of reviewing the accompanying Action Plan and a swathe of fruit fly R&D projects.

PHA's growing number of industry funded programs include those for the avocado, banana, mango, grape, and wine industries. We will continue to work with industries to establish programs funded by biosecurity levies, such as for citrus and forest and wood products.

The existing levy-funded biosecurity program for grains will be renewed after a decade in operation. So too will programs for melon and vegetable and potato growers, encouraging the use of biosecurity practices throughout production. The bee biosecurity program will also be reviewed, setting its priorities for a further three years.

This year, PHA has been funded to review biosecurity plans for plantation forestry, production nursery and tropical fruit sectors, and biosecurity reference panels for 14 industries will be

convened. PHA will work with the peak industry bodies for citrus, cotton, grains, honey bees and rice, along with the relevant RDCs, to review their plans at a suitable point in time.

Surveillance still features heavily in 2020–21, with continued funding for PHA to work on a range of surveillance programs, including those looking for exotic pests of citrus, forestry, grains and honey bees. Surveillance for pests that pose a risk to crop production in northern Australia and plants in botanic gardens has also received welcome funding.

To foster surveillance activities, an array of online training and other resources will be developed and posted on the website of the Plant Surveillance Network Australasia-Pacific.

Also on a surveillance theme, PHA will scope and assess what is needed for MyPestGuide™ to be used nationally as the app for industry, government and the community to report on the presence or absence of pests. Working with our government members, triage and diagnostic processes will be developed to deploy AUSPestCheck™ for the collection, visualisation and reporting of national plant surveillance data.

I've only been able to touch on a few of the many projects that will be on the go in 2020-21. I encourage you to peruse the AOP to get a fuller picture of the scope of our work.

Turning now to other company business, most of you will realise that we currently have a Director vacancy due to only three of the four Directors nominated at last year's AGM being appointed. The Board Selection Committee met via videoconference on 26 March 2020 and reviewed the short-listed candidates, and those interviewed in the earlier process. Given the strength of her experience, the Selection Committee agreed to nominate Kathy Kelly for the remaining board vacancy.

Kathy is a Chartered Accountant with over thirty years of board level experience across the public, commercial and not for profit sectors, with particular experience in agriculture and agribusiness.

Voting on Kathy's appointment has been deferred until the November AGM due to the difficulties surrounding the holding of a meeting and voting caused by the COVID-19 restrictions.

Finally, on behalf of my fellow directors, I'd like to congratulate Sarah Corcoran, who you may know most recently from the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry, on her appointment as the company's next CEO.

It's likely to be a challenging year ahead, as Sarah takes over from Greg Fraser who has served the company for 12 years, overseeing a considerable expansion in the breadth of PHA activities and the depth of our engagement with members. It is a shame that we are not able to meet in our normal way to personally thank Greg for his leadership of PHA and his enormous contribution to the broader plant biosecurity system for over a decade.

I also thank all of you for assisting our staff in their continued efforts to achieve the biosecurity system that we all want.

Thank you for your virtual attendance today, but I must say that I look forward to seeing you all face-to-face at our AGM in Canberra in November.

Steve McCutcheon

Chairman, PHA