

CHAIR'S ADDRESS

PHA 20th General Meeting

31 May 2021 at Rydges Sydney Central

Welcome to everyone attending in person and online at this, Plant Health Australia's 20th General Meeting in Sydney. Not only is this our first post Covid-19 hybrid meeting with a mix of in person and virtual attendance but also our first meeting marking 21 years of operation.

Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of our country and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

On the agenda for today is the 2020–21 Year to Date Performance Report, the 2021–22 Annual Operational Plan and the 2021–22 member subscriptions for ordinary resolution.

The 2021–22 Annual Operational Plan [AOP] describes the diverse yet connected set of activities that PHA will work on in the coming year, on behalf of you, our members. Most of you have seen the draft AOP at the March webinar and have received an electronic copy of the draft AOP. The activities and budgets are set out in line with the seven key areas of PHA's current strategic plan and is once again divided into subscription-funded and non-subscription funded activities.

This AOP is also the last one under the current strategic plan with the new five-year strategic plan setting a new direction for future activities from 2022 to 2027. The new strategic plan is currently being developed with input from our members and stakeholders and is on track to be launched later this year at the Annual General Meeting.

In order to remain relevant, strategic plans need regular revision to keep up with a constantly changing world. As we know in the world of biosecurity, the pace of change is remarkably fast. A positive change brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic is a greater public awareness of what biosecurity is – which complements our continued efforts to improve biosecurity understanding among producers.

Covid-19 has also brought unwelcome changes of course, including the biggest economic downturn in activity on record for the global economy during the first half of 2020. The pandemic's effects have forced companies around the world to examine their supply networks and make changes to reduce vulnerabilities.

Moving product to market has become more difficult. Sourcing seasonal labour particularly in horticulture has been fraught with challenges as lockdowns prevent people movements internationally and interstate. Adaptation has been required at the individual business level but also at Australia's international borders, as commodities and goods are now being sourced from different parts of the world. Mail and cargo deliveries are expected to increase, particularly air cargo which is booming. And with every change in import and export, adjustments are needed in international border restrictions and market access arrangements.

Another positive change since the last strategic plan was developed is the aspirational target set by the Australian agriculture industry to build the agriculture sector to \$100 billion in farm gate output by 2030 to support the Australian Government's vision, Delivering Ag2030.

This vision is backed by the recent Federal Budget announcement of a new \$401 million biosecurity package that sets out how Australia can achieve the target and identifies and commits to safeguarding Australia from exotic pests and diseases. PHA can play a large role in this, facilitating processes through partnerships, assisting the efforts of jurisdictions and industries and aligning strategies to achieve long-term growth.

Despite these positive changes, producers and industries continue to face local challenges including severe weather. In 2021, we have already seen tropical cyclone Niran in February, followed by storms, torrential rain and floods in March in southern Queensland and New South Wales. Combined with moderate to high mouse activity experienced in the southern states, increased locust populations and legacy issues from the Black Summer bushfires, many Australian producers are doing it tough.

These challenges raise the possibility of a broader role for PHA in assisting producers through natural disasters and climatic variability. With so much of crop production in Australia covered by PHA membership, and established partnerships between government, industry and researchers, PHA is well positioned to provide coordination among stakeholders in plant production more broadly. This could include agricultural and environmental recovery initiatives for growers, supply chains and local communities. These drivers along with many others will be considered in the development of an effective plan for the next five years.

Another positive initiative is having 2021 designated as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. This campaign aims to improve healthy and sustainable food production through innovation and technology, and to reduce food loss and waste. This focus will provide PHA and our members with opportunities to promote the crucial role that biosecurity plays in food security and producing high quality crops.

For the coming year, PHA subscriptions have not been budgeted to increase. This means that core funding through subscriptions from our government, industry and associate members will be \$2,660,000. In addition, PHA expects to receive \$8,553,923 in non-subscription funding. A breakdown of these figures is provided in this [AOP] document.

Turning now to other company business, most of you know that following the amendment to the company's Constitution at the May 2020 General Meeting which removed the CEO Executive Director position from the Board, the number of Directors on the Board was reduced from nine to eight, all of whom are Non-Executive Directors. The Board has decided that this number of Directors is appropriate for the company and will not be seeking to replace the Executive Director position on the Board with another Non-Executive Director.

This brings me to the next round of Board Director selection and appointments. The terms of four of the current eight Board Directors positions expire in November this year. The process for this round of selection and appointments has commenced with these positions currently being advertised. Applications close on 28 June. Thereafter, the Board Selection Committee, consisting of government and industry member representatives and chaired by myself, will convene to review and shortlist candidates. Final recommendations from the Board Selection Committee will be brought to the next AGM for approval.

Finally, I would like to thank the PHA team for not only preparing an AOP that will maximise outcomes for members but for the time and effort in arranging the Plant Industry Forum, General Meeting and Members Forum. I would also like to acknowledge the excellent start that Sarah Corcoran has made in her first nearly twelve months as CEO – despite the disruptions caused by Covid-19, Sarah has quickly settled into her role and readily embraced the challenges that come with running the company that brings all plant biosecurity stakeholders together for the betterment of Australia's plant industries and the broader community.

Thank you for your attendance today. I look forward to seeing you all face-to-face at our AGM in November.

Steve McCutcheon
Chair, PHA