

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

18th General Meeting 28 May 2019

Welcome everyone to the 18th General Meeting of PHA. Today we have representatives of more than 25 member organisations here. Thank you for travelling to Melbourne. I trust that you've found the meetings informative and useful so far.

You will have received a copy of the DRAFT 2019-20 Annual Operational Plan. It sets out the activities for another busy year for PHA.

This year's income budget is above \$10 million for the first time. In fact, PHA will be investing nearly \$11 million dollars, made up from some \$2.7 million from subscriptions, pending of course on your decision relating to a proposed 1.3% increase and \$8 million from project income.

This year's activities are once again presented to reflect the seven key result areas in PHA's current strategic plan:

- Partnerships
- the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed
- Preparedness
- Surveillance
- Diagnostics
- Research Development and Extension
- Company health.

EMERGENCY RESPONSES

First to the EPPRD, which will consume around 35% of subscription income this year. On a positive note, several longstanding emergency pest responses have been successfully completed.

The eradication of banana freckle in the Northern Territory was one of the largest plant pest eradication programs ever attempted and achieved in Australia.

It is a credit to all the partners involved and recognition of the benefit of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed in bringing industry and government together.

Other significant responses in the past 12 months have been citrus canker in the Northern Territory and WA, Brown Marmorated Stink bug in NSW and WA, and varroa mite in Queensland amongst others.

PHA will focus on evaluation activities including incident debriefs, efficiency and financial audits, along with training exercises to guide future responses to successful outcomes.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR 2019-20

At a strategic level, PHA will be facilitating the revision of the **National Plant Biosecurity Strategy** in the coming 18 months. We also have funds to revise the diagnostic and surveillance strategies and to develop a preparedness strategy.

National coordination of **fruit fly** management is an important priority for the year ahead with the National Fruit Fly Council being re-funded for three years. There will be consultation from mid-year with industry and government on the revised National Fruit Fly Strategy and to endorse priority actions and leverage future investment.

Environmental biosecurity now has greater attention, with the establishment of the office of the Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer. Of interest is a review report into environmental risk management in Australia recently released by the Inspector General of Biosecurity.

PHA will be implementing projects on environmental biosecurity planning for both mangroves and for acacia, which will see us working with a new range of stakeholders.

These projects will be complemented by surveillance activities using Australia's major botanic gardens and engagement with the International Plant Sentinel Network.

RESPONDING TO SURVEYS

PHA is responding to last year's (July 2018) member survey in this year's program.

There are now more **biosecurity officers** working on the ground with industries including grains, citrus, forestry, vegetable and honeybees, along with various industries in Northern Australia.

They are providing on-farm training for producers and introducing surveillance for exotic plant pests.

The **Farm Biosecurity** Program recently conducted a key influencer study to better understand the information needs of agronomists, vets and consultants.

And this year the program will conduct another producer survey to guide the adoption of biosecurity practices.

I'm pleased to report that the Farm Biosecurity program has a new look website and will soon be made public. I encourage you to take a look and promote it to your members.

BIOSECURITY PLANNING

PHA will be working with industry and government members to review biosecurity plans for the avocado, berries, ginger, tea tree and viticulture industries.

As a part of the review, a capability index will measure biosecurity preparedness, industry resilience and capacity to highlight areas where an industry can improve.

Following the recent completion of the revised **biosecurity manual for cherry growers**, the focus in the coming year will be revising the manual on vineyard biosecurity measures, which will benefit the wine grape, table grape and dried vine fruit industries.

SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance programs for exotic pests this year account for some 26% of the PHA budget. Much of this work is being funded from the Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper

There are a range of **bee** surveillance activities at sea and airports throughout the country providing an early warning system for exotic pests of bees and pest bees.

There are now **Bee Biosecurity Officers** in six states promoting the adoption of the national code of practice to improve hive management and beekeeper awareness of exotic pests.

The **citrus** industry, Australia's largest horticultural export industry, is taking a strong lead on biosecurity. A national citrus surveillance coordinator is employed through a PHA project. Their priority is surveillance, awareness, capacity building, response and preparedness activities.

This year the **temperate fruit** crops industry will be consulted on the development of a national surveillance strategy following a pilot program recently conducted in the field.

The **National Forest Biosecurity Program** is seeking to establish sustainable funding mechanisms for surveillance. This year, the priority will be conducting pest and pathway risk analyses for high priority forest pests and establishing a national program for surveillance of high risk sites.

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

PHA continues to reach out internationally. As mentioned earlier, we are collaborating with the **International Plant Sentinel Network**. By linking with botanic gardens and arboreta in Australia, the aim is to provide an early warning system of new and emerging pest and pathogen risks.

The **Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative** (PBRI) has established an MOU with Better Border Biosecurity (B3) New Zealand. The focus there is on cross-sectoral research and supporting the professional development of post-graduate and post-doctoral students.

A strong New Zealand presence is expected at the Plant Biosecurity Research Symposium in Brisbane in August.

STAFFING

PHA's increased budget does place pressure on our human resources.

In the past 12 months, we have managed to attract and retain key skills across the business as it has grown. And we are currently recruiting for more staff.

For example, this year PHA is boosting support to the networks of skilled practitioners in the fields of diagnostics and surveillance with a dedicated network coordinator.

They will also assist with the Australian Interstate Quarantine website, which guides travellers and transporters on what can be taken across state and quarantine borders within Australia.

Finally, particularly for those who may not be aware, our Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Greg Fraser, will be departing PHA in early July 2020. Under Greg's leadership, PHA has grown significantly in both stature and performance and Greg, himself, has been at the forefront in developing and nurturing the strong relationship that the company has with its members. Accordingly, the Board will be spending quite a bit of time and resources to find a new CEO of Greg's calibre. The budget therefore includes a provision to recruit and appoint a new CEO.

There are also funds to run a Board selection process for the four Non-Executive Board Director positions whose terms expire in November 2019.

FINAL WORDS

I think you will all agree that PHA has a busy year ahead. But the good news is that there is a well thought out plan with a series of key indicators to track performance.

Our next formal meeting with you will be in November at our Annual General meeting. At this meeting we will be proposing a number of changes to the company's constitution. We will undertake some targeted consultation with members in the lead up to the meeting.

In the meantime, we look forward to your input throughout the year and we trust that the year ahead, the exotic pests and diseases that give us the greatest concern, remain at bay.

Thanks again.

[Steve McCutcheon](#)

Chairman