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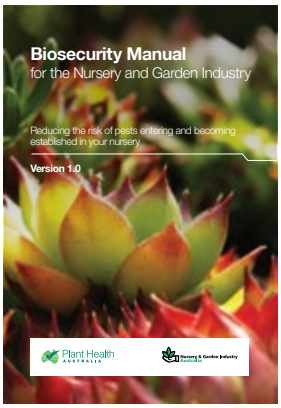
Biosecurity – what is it and what does it mean to the nursery and garden industry?

The Nursery and Garden Industry grows and supplies a vast range of plants to many different regions of Australia. Plants grown by the industry are subject to a range of pests across the different climatic regions and environments throughout Australia.

It is not just the existing established pests within Australia which the nursery industry should be concerned about. Exotic plant pests not currently known to exist in Australia are a real threat as well. Fortunately, due to the geographic isolation of Australia, we have had relatively few of the exotic plant pests which have impacted on plant industries overseas such as Sudden oak death (Phytophthora ramorum). Freedom from these pests is a vital part of the future profitability, productivity and sustainability of Australia's plant industries and will also help protect the natural environment and landscape across Australia.



Biosecurity – what is it and what does it mean to the nursery and garden industry?

What is biosecurity?

Biosecurity is a set of measures which can be implemented at a national, regional and business level to protect against the introduction and spread of new pests and to effectively deal with them should they arrive.

The definition of a pest used under biosecurity is all: insects, mites, snails, nematodes, pathogens (diseases) and weeds that may harm plants or plant products. Exotic plant pests are those not currently known to exist in Australia, whilst established pests are those already present.

The amount of intra- and inter-state border trade in live plants across Australia annually is valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars and is a vital component of the Australian economy.

State and territory biosecurity agencies have the roll to enforce regulations by way of Plant Health Standards (PHS), such as the South Australian Plant Health Act 2009. It is imperative for growers to adhere to state and territory regulations including interstate certification protocols and export protocols. As a retailer, there is also a shared responsibility to order products which are permitted entry into your state/territory and satisfy any regulatory requirements associated with them.

As regulations vary between each jurisdiction, it is important to contact the relevant authority in the destination state/territory prior to the shipment of plants. Details of state and territory plant health services can be found on page 2.

To ensure nursery production in Australia remains free of exotic plant pests, Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) is engaged in several biosecurity initiatives across Australia. These initiatives include the Nursery & Garden Industry Biosecurity Plan, Biosecurity Manual for the Nursery Production Industry, the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) and BioSecure HACCP which is an industry specific biosecurity program for production nurseries and growing media businesses that provides them with a systematic approach to assess on-farm biosecurity hazards. This program also identifies how best to manage these indentified risks.

The Nursery & Garden Industry Australia is also a member of Plant Health Australia (PHA) which is the leading national coordinating body for plant health in Australia. Plant Health Australia oversees the operation of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) for the planned eradication of exotic plant pests. The most recent example of an Emergency Plant Pest incursion of major significance to the Australian nursery industry was Myrtle rust (Uredo rangelli) first detected in late April 2010 within the Central Coast of New South Wales.

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HAL
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Australian Capital Territory
Environment Protection and Heritage
Licensing & Compliance Unit
Level 2, Macarthur House.
12 Wattle St, Lyneham ACT 2602
Ph: (02) 6207 6376; Fax: (02) 6207 2316
Email: environmentACT@act.gov.au
Website: www.act.gov.au

New South Wales
NSW Department of Primary Industries
161 Kite St, Orange NSW 2800
Ph: (02) 6391 3100; Fax: (02) 6391 3206
Email: nsw.agriculture@dpi.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory
Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines
Biosecurity & Product Integrity Division
Plant Market Access Unit (NT Quarantine)
GPO Box 3000, Darwin NT 0801
Ph: (08) 8999 2138; Fax: (08) 8999 2053
Email: quarantine@nt.gov.au
Website: www.nt.gov.au

Queensland
Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries
Biosecurity Queensland
GPO Box 46, Brisbane QLD 4001
Ph: (07) 3404 6999; Fax: (07) 3211 3293
Email: callweb@dpi.qld.gov.au
Website: www.dpi.qld.gov.au

South Australia
Primary Industries and Resources SA
Plant Health Operations
46 Prospect Rd, Prospect SA 5082
Ph: 1300 666 010; Fax: (08) 8344 6033
Email: pirsa.planthealth@saugov.sa.gov.au
Website: www.pir.sa.gov.au

Tasmania
Department of Primary Industries and Water
Quarantine Centre
Macquarie wharf No 1, Hunter St, Hobart TAS 7000
Ph: (03) 6233 3352; Fax: (03) 6234 6785
Email: quarantine.enquiries@dpiw.tas.gov.au
Website: www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/quarantine

Victoria
Department of Primary Industries.
Plant Standards Branch
Melbourne Markets Box 126, 542 Footscray Rd,
West Melbourne VIC 3003
Ph: 136 186; Fax: (03) 9687 6746
Email: plant.standards@dpi.vic.gov.au
Website: www.dpi.vic.gov.au/psb

Western Australia
Department of Agriculture and Food.
Quarantine WA
Locked Bag 69 Welshpool DC, WA 6986
9 Fricker Rd, Perth International Airport WA 6105.
Ph: (08) 9334 1800; Fax: (08) 9334 1888.
Email: followup@agric.wa.gov.au
Website: www.agric.wa.gov.au

What can you do?

Biosecurity is a whole of community responsibility, however for the nursery industry it begins at the farm level. Growers have the responsibility to maintain sound on-farm biosecurity practices to protect their plants, livelihood and the greater industry from both established and exotic plant pests.

Nursery hygiene is critical to maintaining effective biosecurity. Hygiene is more than just using clean nursery inputs and supplying clean inputs to the industry. It is very much about assessing the risk of what is introduced to the nursery and how these inputs are managed to maintain freedom of pests throughout the lifecycle. Personal hygiene and that of contractors is often overlooked, i.e. dirty clothes (hats, boots) which may carry pathogens as spores in clothing or soil containing pests on shoes.

Plant labelling

Labelling of plants prior to interstate movement has become a necessity in some jurisdictions, such as in South Australia where plants material must be labelled to meet import requirements . In addition, certain states have 'lists' of permitted plants. For example, Western Australia has a list of what can be introduced from other jurisdictions.

In order to assist in correctly labelling plants, NGIA has developed the national plant labelling guidelines. The guidelines have been developed to reduce confusion in relation to the content of labels used on ornamental plants, and how plant information is conveyed to the market. These guidelines cover four principles and include:

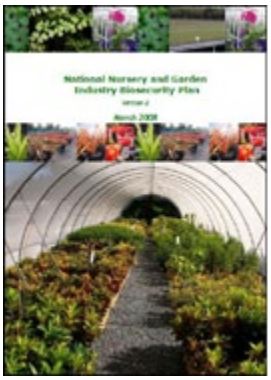
- Correct botanical names – nomenclature
- Intellectual property – Plant Breeders Rights and Trademarks
- Plant growth requirements and characteristics
- Potentially harmful plants – health and environment.

Adhering to these guidelines will assist in meeting state and territory regulations. In addition, correct labelling will assist businesses to identify what key pests may impact them and plan to reduce the risk of impacts to them when growing and supplying plants.

Biosecurity plan

The Nursery and Garden Industry Biosecurity Plan (IBP) provides a framework for biosecurity risk mitigation measures in the industry. The IBP was launched in 2008 and provides a blueprint for the exclusion, eradication and control of key exotic plant pests relevant to the Australian nursery and garden industry. Plant Health Australia has endorsed the IBP and it is vital to ensure the industry has the capacity to minimise risks of exotic plant pests and respond effectively to any exotic plant pest threats, ensuring the future sustainability and viability of the industry.

As part of the IBP, NGIA has developed contingency plans for key exotic plant pests which provide background information on the pest biology and available control measures to assist with preparedness in the event of an incursion. Each contingency plan provides guidelines to assist in developing a Response Plan to this exotic plant pest incursion and proposed eradication.



Biosecurity manual – production nurseries

In 2010, NGIA in partnership with PHA launched The Biosecurity Manual for the Nursery Production Industry. The manual was formally launched in August 2010 by NGIA Environmental and Technical Policy Manager Dr Anthony Kachenko and provides the framework to reduce the risk of pests entering and becoming established in production nurseries. Information is one thing – however it is the implementation of the knowledge and a responsible business and industry which will reduce the risk to all.

The Biosecurity Manual for the Nursery Production Industry offers six simple routine biosecurity practices which can be embedded into the daily management of a production nursery, growing media supplier and the wider industry.

Practices such as:

- awareness of biosecurity threats
- using only clean, pest-free and certified production nursery inputs
- practicing good sanitation – keep it clean
- frequently monitoring crops and the nursery
- abiding by the law and
- reporting anything unusual to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE
1800 084 881

These practices also support various on-farm programs developed by NGIA such as the Nursery Production Farm Management System (FMS) which includes the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA), EcoHort and BioSecure HACCP, which ensure good farm hygiene at all times and adoption of best management practice.

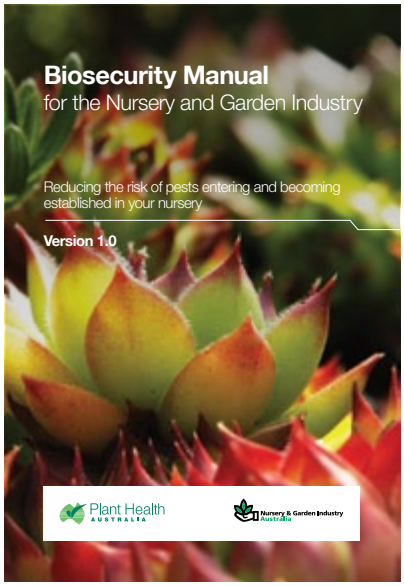
Applying risk management practices makes good business sense by reducing the risk of biosecurity threats and the possible future costs to the business and industry should there be an exotic plant pest incursion.

Awareness of high priority exotic plant pests is crucial. These are outlined in the NGIA IBP with many of the key pests detailed in the Biosecurity Manual for the Nursery Production Industry. Pest surveillance is critical and requires more than just a quick look at a production block in development. Detailed sampling and recording allow quality records to demonstrate effective biosecurity practices.

Monitoring nursery inputs is important and product management needs to incorporate clean schedules of plant growth as certain pathogens (virus, viroids, phytoplasm) may not readily display symptoms upon arrival to the property in the plant material. Clean trusted sources of plant material from NIASA and BioSecure HACCP accredited suppliers can help to minimise the risk. Production facilities, water management and nursery waste all need to be considered as elements of applying risk to the nursery and plants.

Its important to note that people and biosecurity risk are closely linked. Developing and adopting systems to reduce the risk of human activity introducing new pests to the production nursery are worthwhile. The Biosecure HACCP guidelines outline ways to reduce the risk for staff, visitors and contractors.

The equipment and vehicles used in a production nursery also need consideration. Inspection, cleaning, disinfection and access restrictions are important steps in reducing the risk.



Demonstrating your commitment to biosecurity

Well designed signage informs visitors that biosecurity on your property is important and that they share responsibility for maintaining it. The signs serve to alert people to the potential impact of their visit.

Signs also demonstrate your commitment to production nursery hygiene, safety and auditable systems. Biosecurity signage should be placed at the main gate, external entrances, visitor parking areas and wash-down facilities.

Biosecurity signs at entrances or near storages should direct visitors to contact the owner or nursery manager and formally register their presence before entering any production areas. The sign should include important contact details, such as the office telephone number, mobile number and/or UHF channel.

Spotted anything unusual?

When it comes to dealing with exotic plant pests, speed is of the essence. Detecting an exotic plant pest early and mounting a response in enough time to successfully eradicate it is critical.

Businesses should be constantly on the lookout for something unusual in their nursery. Nursery workers' eyes and experience are the most important tools that we have.

If you have spotted something unusual, or suspect a pest that represents a risk to your business and the Australian nursery industry, simply call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on

EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE
1800 084 881

Your call will be forwarded to an experienced person in the state department of agriculture who will ask some questions about what you have seen and may arrange to collect a sample. Every report will be taken seriously, checked out and treated confidentially.

If inquiries confirm the presence of an exotic plant pest then authorities will work with NGIA to develop an action plan. Actions are guided by the seriousness of the pest incursion. If the exotic plant pest can be stamped out, an eradication response may be launched with actions guided by the EPPRD. If eradication is not thought to be technically feasible or economically beneficial, then actions may be directed at containment and control.

Everyone involved in Australian nursery industry has a role to play in adopting biosecurity practices. Prevention of introducing new pests is far better than dealing with the long term consequences of a new pest. Considering the risks and implementing changes to protect your business, industry and the environment are surely worth doing for everyone's sake.

References and further information

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Compiled by Anthony Kachenko, NGIA Environmental & Technical Policy Manager; banner photography by Brendan Osborne.