

Reducing the Pest Risk – Industry’s Policy Position on Biosecurity and Quarantine

Nursery and Garden Industry Australia launched ‘Reducing the Pest Risk – The Australian Nursery and Garden Industry’s Policy Position on Quarantine and Biosecurity’ at its National Conference on Thursday 15 March 2012. The Policy Position paves the way for industry to ensure biosecurity responsibilities are shared equally between governments, industry and the community as part of the biosecurity continuum.

In this month’s Nursery Paper NGIA Environmental & Technical Policy Manager, Dr Anthony Kachenko provides an overview of this Policy Position and what it means for industry.

Reducing the Pest Risk

The Australian Nursery & Garden Industry’s Policy Position on Quarantine and Biosecurity



The Australian nursery and garden industry (NGI) is reliant upon robust, cost effective, efficient and reliable quarantine resources. This is due to the high volumes of plant material valued in the millions of dollars, which are imported, exported and shipped across Australian jurisdictions on a daily basis.

The industry is a significant user of pest entry quarantine (PEQ) and approved facilities to import new generations in various forms including those with vegetative cuttings and bare root plants. The aggregate dollar value of these PEQs is in the Tens of Billions and the aggregate value of more than fifteen billion dollars nationally.

Although the industry has traditionally had a good export focus, the entrance of Australia into export trade opportunities for export growth to ensure the longevity of the industry and the protection of the Australian environment, plant industries and the wider community. It is a shared goal that can be best achieved through industry and the wider community.

Accordingly, the NGI has a broad role to play in the biosecurity continuum through information dissemination, grower education, on-farm management and risk reduction strategies.

The industry is strongly committed to effectively reducing the potential for incursions of exotic plant pests (EPPs) that could substantially impact domestic and international trade, regional and national economies and the Australian environment. It is committed to leading responses to any EPP incursions and undertake as efficiently and effectively as possible to minimise the cost to growers, the industry, other industries, government and the wider community to support these objectives. The Australian NGI requires a robust, resources practical and



Introduction

One of the greatest threats facing the Australian environment is the introduction of exotic pests. To date, Australia has remained relatively free from many pests due to its geographic isolation and a biosecurity system that has limited the introduction of high risk materials. This is changing however due to ease of travel and the freeing up of world markets.

The Australian nursery industry acknowledges it plays a vital role in this biosecurity continuum and is actively engaged in several biosecurity initiatives across Australia. These include on-going investment in research, development and extension initiatives, as well as the development and extension of on-farm programs driving change from the bottom up. NGIA is also a member of Plant Health Australia (PHA), which has further demonstrated its willingness to participate in this arena.

The National Nursery and Garden Industry Biosecurity Plan developed in 2005 provides a blueprint for the exclusion, eradication and control of key pests relevant to the Australian nursery and garden industry (NGI). The plan, currently being reviewed is vital to the industry as it has the capacity to

minimise pest risks and respond effectively to any pest threats. It also ensures the future sustainability and viability of the NGI is maintained.

In 2005, NGIA became a signatory to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD). The EPPRD is a progressive partnership arrangement between governments and industries that sees them cooperating as equal parties in the management of Emergency Plant Pests (EPPs). As a signatory, NGIA is at the forefront of developments in biosecurity to complement its historical investment in biosecurity related research, development and extension activities.

In recent times, there has been a consistent lack of prioritisation by all levels of government to the threats and costs associated with exotic plant pest incursions facing the industry and the wider Australian community. Nursery production has borne the brunt of almost every exotic plant pest incursion and this has cost millions of dollars in crop losses, mitigation programs, compliance protocols and restricted or closed market access. Despite this, NGIA remains committed to the EPPRD.



Historically, the Australian NGI has had a long and close relationship with biosecurity and quarantine agencies across Australia, particularly in relation to the interstate movement of plant material. Despite this, the industry has identified support components that will be required so it can continue to maintain its role in the biosecurity continuum.

Why develop a policy position?

The Australian NGI has the capacity to play a key role in proactively and responsibly maintaining Australia's 'pest free' reputation. In doing so, it will also ensure a sustainable future for the industry itself.

In order to achieve this, the industry had to develop a united position that could be utilised by the whole industry to advocate stakeholder concerns, to change behaviour and provide direction or influence culture. The policy had to be linked to the objectives of the industry and adequately and succinctly detail the industry position.

How was the Policy Position developed?

Each State and Territory nursery industry association provided input into the development of the Policy Position during 2011. The document took some 12 months to develop to ensure adequate consultation

of all stakeholders involved. The policy development process was managed through NGIA and was funded through nursery levy project NY11000.

Key strategies identified

Six key strategies were identified during the development of the Policy Position. These were:

1. Leadership in policy development and investment in the area of quarantine and biosecurity – this recognises the impacts of policy decisions and investment on businesses and their customers.
2. Harmonised delivery of quarantine and biosecurity arrangements – establish a National Pest Risk Assessment Framework which delivers a world class biosecurity and quarantine system to whole of industry.
3. Investment in on-farm support to address quarantine and biosecurity – the realignment of investment and a commitment by governments to support on-farm practices, innovation and incentives to adapt, manage and respond to biosecurity and quarantine.
4. Recognition of established industry best management practice – this

recognises and supports the Nursery Production Farm Management System (NPFMS) as a third market access instrument for the industry and investment in research, development and extension activities.

5. Implementation of a national greenlife producer communication and information scheme – this is designed to secure the reputation of the Australian NGI through knowledge based decision making.
6. Build greater stakeholder engagement and involvement to deliver a national communication network – this will assist in building industry confidence.

This Nursery Paper will explore Strategy 2 (market access) and 4 (Nursery Production Farm Management System (NPFMS) as a third market access instrument) in more detail.

Market access

Interstate biosecurity is a major issue for the Australian NGI production sectors with market access and cost minimisation priority areas requiring greater attention and resourcing by national and state biosecurity departments.

Currently there are significant differences between states and territories in the processes used to identify pest risks. These differences drive variations in the market access risk mitigation, compliance evaluation and treatment protocols established by each state and territory.

The present system employed by the commonwealth, state and territory governments to assess the risk of an emergency plant pest (exotic pest) is ad-hoc and lacks appropriate consensus amongst the various agencies. As an emergency plant pest can be viewed by different agencies as a different level of risk, a national emergency plant pest risk assessment methodology is needed to ensure the uniform application of emergency plant pest management strategies.

With interstate agencies recognising the value of on-farm self-certification for area and property freedom of plant pests, the NGI requires the development of interstate



certification assurance (ICA) arrangements for a number of emergency plant pests in Australia. This would allow growers to be trained to detect specific pests, enhance on-farm systems and meet self-certification requirements to minimise inspection fees. It would also release departmental officers from compliance action to undertake industry education, training and support, plus participate in pest surveillance programs across the states and territories. Furthermore, this increased industry skill level will value add the participation of the NGI to the state-based plant pest surveillance.

Interstate biosecurity agencies need to address internal resourcing and customer service issues as a matter of urgency. As a service provider charging fees for service, it is unacceptable that the current service offered is delivered in an unprofessional manner and lacks value for money. As government holds a monopoly over this service, industry cannot change or seek a more competitive bid due to poor service delivery. Similar circumstances exist for import and export of plant products.

Electronic document creation, recordkeeping and transfer for interstate plant movement must be an immediate target for investment by state and federal



agencies. The current process is paper based and costly for industry both in time and resources. With the international trade in plants fully supported by electronic documentation, it is clearly possible to implement such a system at a state and territory level to facilitate interstate trade. Further adoption of technology would allow for a web based data storage and retrieval system. This system would bring together all interstate plant movement requirements and be easily accessible to both industry and government.

As government continues to abdicate or devolve its responsibilities and reduce investment along the biosecurity continuum, industry is being expected to take over many activities previously in government hands (e.g. market access, pesticide registration and communication) or through increased on-farm compliance and fee for service.

This shifting paradigm is happening quickly and industry is struggling to keep pace. Government has not assisted industries to adjust to the new environment and in many cases is blocking industry attempts to meet new expectations. State, territory and federal governments need to provide adjustment packages to assist industry in the change process. This in turn is likely to increase the rate of change and maintain the continuity of the biosecurity continuum.

Over the years, the industry has seen inconsistencies in both the interpretation of inspection procedures and protocols as well as outcomes following post border assessments. This has resulted in significant delays in moving perishable plant products and in some cases, the loss of whole consignments.

Nursery Production Farm Management System (NPFMS) as a third market access instrument

The Australian NGI seeks recognition and support of its Nursery Production Farm Management System (NPFMS) by all levels of government. The NPFMS is an industry driven best management practice program providing production nurseries, greenlife markets and growing media suppliers with a framework for sound on-farm risk management in relation to biosecurity.

The NPFMS incorporates the nursery industry accreditation scheme Australia – best management practices (NIASA-BMP), EcoHort® (which promotes best management practices in environmental

and natural resource management) and BioSecure HACCP (which promotes best practice in pest and disease management and biosecurity risk assessment and management). BioSecure HACCP is a set of protocols and procedures enabling a business to manage biosecurity risks while establishing an effective internal quarantine process for both imported and exported plant material.

The BioSecure HACCP risk management system encourages a business to maintain the strictest internal quarantine procedures possible while recording the actions taken at critical control points. With improved hazard analysis and control measures in place, the business is better protected in the event of a biosecurity threat or impact. Importantly, the process will support future market access both domestically and internationally. BioSecure HACCP is a key component of the industry wide risk mitigation strategy designed to operate at a grower level by addressing issues such as monitoring and surveillance, traceability, access restrictions, importing and treating plant material.

Industry advocates recognition of the NPFMS as a third legal instrument in market access, as it provides an efficient mechanism for maintaining and/or gaining market access. By providing support services to industry, national and state agencies can have an active and positive role in driving change at the farm level. Currently, the Australian NGI is working closely with key government stakeholders to achieve this outcome for industry.

Next steps

The Policy Position was officially launched to industry at the Nursery and Garden Industry National Conference on Thursday 15 March 2012. The Policy Position has since been circulated to relevant stakeholders involved with the industry to ensure they are aware of industry's position on biosecurity and quarantine. The Policy Position is also freely available to download from www.ngia.com.au. In moving forward, the Policy Position should be utilised and referred to when discussing biosecurity and quarantine by all parties to ensure industry gains the desired outcomes.

Further information

For additional information, consult the following nursery papers which are all available electronically from www.ngia.com.au

- **The Nursery Production Plant Health & Biosecurity Project.** Issue Number 3. April 2012.
- **Biosecurity – what is it and what does it mean to the nursery and garden industry?** Issue Number 4. May 2011.
- **Plant health in Australia.** Issue Number 8. September 2009.
- **BioSecure HACCP.** Issue Number 2. March 2008.
- **Managing emergency plant pest incursions.** Issue Number 4. April 2007.

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