



Patrick Leahy

## Imports issue all-consuming

**T**HE past year is one most banana growers would like to forget. Prolonged periods of oversupply and low prices, and the renewed threat of imports, have taken a toll on growers both financially and emotionally in all areas of Australia.

Despite this financial strain, we need to stay united and to finance our Council's fight against imports. I urge all growers to pay their ABGC and BIFF levies because your support is needed to guarantee your future in this industry.

### Imports

We are now smack in the middle of the fight of our lives in attempting to keep out imported bananas.

This has absorbed an enormous amount of the Council's time and resources.

Through its lobbying effort, the Council was instrumental in the establishment of a Senate inquiry examining the recommendation by Biosecurity Australia to import bananas.

The Senate inquiry has revealed a series of irregularities in the Import Risk Analysis process and heard evidence that a senior public servant overseeing the IRA gave misleading evidence.

The Council's technical consultants identified an error in the risk model, which BA acknowledged and has now apparently corrected with an addendum released on June 16.

The addendum has added an insecticidal treatment to control mealy bugs, added risk mitigation measures for banana bract mosaic virus and strengthened the measures for moko.

Inside you should find a NO BANANA IMPORTS bumper sticker, compliments of Amcor Fibre Packaging. Amcor is providing a range of printed resources and caps, and Visyboard Innovative Packaging Solutions is providing *Save the Aussie Banana* t-shirts for retailer kits now being distributed to independent fruit retailers.

**More information, see pages 3-6**

### Industry review

In our last issue, I laid out a proposed time frame for implementing the recommendations of a comprehensive industry review undertaken last year. Unfortunately the imports issue has set back our timetable but a new draft ABGC Constitution has been developed and will be approved by the Board shortly, which will trigger elections for positions on

the new ABGC Board. Details about the review are contained in the enclosed newsletter.

### Banana pathologist appointed

The CRC for Tropical Plant Protection has recently employed a full-time banana pathologist to finalise banana diagnostic tests it has been developing during the past several years.

The CRC developed the diagnostic test that facilitated the eradication of black Sigatoka from the Tully Valley. Although the CRCTPP will terminate in June 2006, it is envisaged that the banana pathologist position will be needed to maintain a banana disease diagnostic capacity. Discussions are taking place with Plant Health Australia and the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries about how this position could be funded into the future. **See page 25 for details.**

### Banana waste project

The ABGC in partnership with Ergon Energy has obtained a Queensland Government grant to investigate the viability of turning banana waste into electricity that could be used to power packing sheds or sold back to Ergon as green electricity.

This project attracted considerable media attention, here and overseas, after it appeared on page 4 of The Courier-Mail on June 1.

**More details, see page 21**

### Congress in Cairns in 2005

The Australian Banana Industry Congress, the industry's flagship event, is less than 12 months away and will be held from June 2-4 next year.

The ABGC Board is keen to make Congress accessible to as many growers as possible by making the opening day a Field Day at the Tully Showgrounds on Thursday 2 June, before moving north to Cairns for Friday and Saturday concluding with the Third Banana Industry Ball on the Saturday evening.

The expanded Field Day concept will include interactive business sessions with the latest products and services on display. The day will conclude with a large barbecue and entertainment spectacular.

Put those dates in your diary now!

Hearty thanks to all growers and workers who made up the *Save the Aussie Banana* contingent at the Cowboys' home game on May 22. Thanks to Des and Diana Rackley, Val Currie, Don Pollock and Nev Pedersen for organising tickets and shirts. Also thanks to Greg Worth from ABC Bananas for providing the banana truck and MacKays for providing bananas.

We received fabulous regional media coverage for this latest investment in the *Save the Aussie Banana* campaign and this led to an approach from the DMG radio network which wants to help give the campaign another boost.

**Photos, page 3 and inside back cover.**

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Growers' Council.

### Banana medicinal magic

Those keen on natural remedies say that a small piece of banana skin taped to a common wart (verruca vulgaris) can reduce it in size or remove it altogether.

Cut a piece of banana skin just large enough to cover the wart and secure it with a plaster or surgical tape so that the inside of the banana skin is touching the wart. Change it every day for two weeks.

Other medicinal uses of bananas can be found at <http://www.banana.com/medicinal.html>



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2 Australian BANANAS

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TWEED Valley  
Banana Festival  
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Morgan and Phil  
Taylor at the  
recent  
Murwillumbah  
premier of Phil's  
documentary  
*Taylor Made*.  
Photo courtesy of  
the TWEED  
DAILY NEWS.



# imports committee

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Len Collins

*PHOTOS:  
Helping Save the Aussie Banana (clockwise from below):  
Dedicated Cowboys' fan Mad Dog, 4KZ's Greg Vuleta and banana workers' leader Val Currie, grower Tom Harney and the Amcor crew, and Tully footy fans Barry and Cindy Barnes.*

## IRA addendum misses the mark

WAS it an amazing co-incidence or an extraordinary attempt at manipulation?

• June 16 – there was a **State of Origin clash** in Brisbane (perhaps Biosecurity Australia thought we would be napping and the media/public would be preoccupied?)

• June 16 – there was a **Senate inquiry hearing** scheduled at which Biosecurity Australia bureaucrats would be asked to explain their earlier misleading evidence about scientific agreement on the revised draft Import Risk Analysis (maybe they thought the addendum would distract the Senators from their earlier evidence?)

And so it was that on June 16 – after giving 30 minutes notice to industry – **Biosecurity Australia released its addendum** “fixing up” its mistake in the risk model in the revised draft IRA for Philippines bananas.

We are critical of the way this IRA has been conducted and of Biosecurity Australia’s failure to recognise the serious quarantine issues associated with Philippines bananas.

It is our view that Biosecurity Australia has gone to extraordinary lengths to get the pest and disease

risks below Australia’s Appropriate Level of Protection despite a lack of scientific evidence to support such findings.

When you track – as our lawyers and scientists have – the pattern of the changes BA has made to the various risk measures in the models, it is patently obvious that they are being driven by a desire to ‘get these bananas under the bar’.

The IRA report is peppered with the words ‘least trade restrictive options’ in an obvious attempt to deliver an outcome that satisfies the Philippines instead of safeguarding the Australian environment and the Australian banana industry from exotic pests and diseases.

Modelling by ABGC statisticians who exposed the error in Biosecurity Australia’s report is showing that within two years of the commencement of imports, moko disease will arrive in Australia and within two and a half years freckle will arrive.

It is a sad indictment on the system that it is incumbent on industry to prove senior public servants are making serious errors of judgment.

**Senate inquiry, pages 4-5**

## Go bananas .. go Cowboys

BANANAS had a strong and visible presence at the Cowboys’ home game on May 22 when the north Queenslanders were narrowly beaten by the Penrith Panthers in Townsville.

More than 250 banana industry people, in the Eastern Terrace and in corporate boxes, carried the *Save the Aussie Banana* message on their sleeves ... well their chests really.

The *Save the Aussie Banana* campaign aims to ensure Australians know what is happening in the banana industry. We have a strong scientific case on our side ... and the Cowboys too!



## Senators seek truth on science



*Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee members (from left): Senators Bill Heffernan, Jeannie Ferris, John Cherry, Jan McLucas, Ron Boswell and Kerry O'Brien*

The revised draft IRA report recommended Philippines workers inspect, brush and sponge between the fingers of 79 million banana clusters each year to ensure they are free from mealy bugs.

Straight-talking chair of the Senate inquiry, Senator Bill Heffernan, has said: "That is bloody bullshit".

The addendum released on June 16 has since added the requirement for an insecticidal treatment in the Philippines to ameliorate the mealy bug problem.

**T**HE Senate inquiry into the banana Import Risk Analysis is parliamentary democracy at work.

Without this inquiry, it is possible that industry's concerns about the scientific and process deficiencies in the banana IRA would have been kept under the carpet.

Below are the answers senior Biosecurity Australia officials gave at the first hearing (March 8) when questioned about scientific agreement among the seven-member IRA panel on the report.

*Dr McRae:* The document that was released was agreed to by all seven members of the IRA team. All seven members agreed that this document should be released to the general public for comment.

*Ms Harwood:* We expect our expert panels to continue until they are, together, satisfied that this is their collective and unanimous assessment of risk.

*Ms Harwood:* And that is what they did with this report: they all agreed that this was the report that should go out as the judgment of risk and recommendation of measures in relation to bananas from the Philippines.

*Dr McRae:* There were seven members of that team and I chaired it (the RAP). The report was unanimous. In other words, every one of those seven people agreed that we should release the document with the text as written.

*Ms Harwood:* Yes. They agreed with this report and they agreed with its release.

*Ms Harwood:* Everyone agreed with the report and with its release.

The unequivocal message was ... the scientists agreed with the report and its recommendations.

But at subsequent hearings, the committee heard evidence from two scientists who said they did not agree with the full contents of the document.

Then late last month, at Budget Estimates

hearings when the Senate rural committee had the opportunity to question Biosecurity Australia's executive manager Mary Harwood about her earlier assertions that all the panel members agreed with the report and its recommendations, she admitted her evidence was misleading.

*Ms Harwood:* I could see (in March 8 Hansard) a couple of instances where my responses could be read as giving the impression that all members agreed with the entire contents (of the IRA).

*Ms Harwood:* I acknowledge that a couple of times my answers may be construed as reading that 'all members agreed to all'.

*Ms Harwood:* ... there are a couple of instances here where I have used words which I acknowledge can be construed as meaning that there was an agreement with the entirety of the report, as distinct from releasing the report.

*Ms Harwood:* Yes, I knew that there were panel members who held minority views.

*Ms Harwood:* ... but on preparing for this hearing I read my answers again and I can see that they can be construed as meaning that they agreed to the entire contents of the report as well as with the report as for release. I acknowledge that.

Questions to Ms Harwood included this exchange:

*Senator O'Brien:* I am troubled by the specificity of the question: How many people disagreed? and your response: I did not say anyone did.

*Ms Harwood:* That is a true statement. I did not say anyone did.

*Senator O'Brien:* But it is a statement which, more than any other, could be construed as encouraging the committee to believe that there was no disagreement within the panel.

Labor Senator Kerry O'Brien later told the ABC's Country Hour that Ms Harwood had been "less than fulsome" in her admissions.

## Double standards on disease

**A**S sure as night follows day, banana leaf trash gets caught between the fingers in a bunch of bananas.

North Queensland growers have had fruit rejected by Western Australia because particles of trash were found in banana consignments.

Leaf trash is banned because of quarantine restrictions put in place to protect the Western Australian industry from the threat of black Sigatoka.

This disease was eradicated from north Queensland's Tully Valley in 2003 after a determined \$20 million effort, but precautionary quarantine restrictions remain in parts of Australia.

That said, how can black Sigatoka be a non-quarantine issue for Philippines bananas where the disease is endemic and they spray 52 times a year to contain it?

At the stroke of a pen, between draft one and draft two of the IRA, Biosecurity Australia slashed the black Sigatoka risk assessment from High to Extremely Low.

This is an incredible 1700-fold reduction in disease risk. The revised draft IRA changed 14 out of the 31 total steps involved in risk calculations.

No wonder, when pressed by Alan Jones on 2GB radio, **Prime Minister Mr Howard said: "Can I just say that we have not made final decisions on allowing imports of bananas and I know that there is still a lot of debate going on and we've said, repeatedly, if there is scientific evidence presented which is to be preferred to the scientific conclusion that's been reached, well, obviously, that will influence our final decision."**

There are many people – scientists included – who did not believe the Australian banana industry could eradicate black Sigatoka.

Tully did, in what is a world-first achievement that is a credit to the north Queensland community.

The black Sigatoka scientific "trickery" contained in the revised draft IRA is just one of the many faults in the report that the banana industry is determined to expose.

The addendum has done nothing to address ABGC's concerns that the Philippines is being handed responsibility for ensuring that Australia's quarantine requirements are met.

It is unacceptable that legitimate scientific concerns have been ignored by unelected bureaucrats sitting in judgment over such matters. The process provides no transparency or accountability. We are now looking to our elected representatives to act before it is too late.

• At the April 13 Senate inquiry hearing, Dr Chris Hayward – who has worked with Biosecurity Australia on the banana IRA – said Moko is an earthborne and waterborne disease that is controlled in the Philippines by digging out infected plants and surrounding soil to a radius of six metres, filling that area with rice huts and burning it to pasteurise the soil.

*Senator Boswell* then asked: If you transferred that to Australia, would you say that it was practically impossible to control?

*Dr Hayward*: I would agree with that. Up to about eight years ago the Philippines were using fumigation.

*Senator Boswell*: But I just want to get your view on whether it is practically impossible, and you are saying that it would be practically impossible. Is that correct?

*Dr Hayward*: It think it would be.

*Dr Hayward* went on to say: "Jamaica now has moko disease. It is the first country in the western Caribbean to find it. They believe it was brought in on planting material three years earlier. It is too late; you are not going to eradicate that."

*Senator Boswell*: "Exactly. Dr Hayward, from the evidence you are giving you seem to be an advocate of not bringing bananas in. Since you have been here you have given us every reason not to bring them in."

---

**ABGC thanks Blenners for transport assistance with the imports campaign**

Blenners

# imports

save the aussie banana bites

email: [abgc@abgc.org.au](mailto:abgc@abgc.org.au)



Anthony Holman

“The retailer kits are available to all banana retailers interested in communicating the *Save the Aussie Banana* message to banana consumers.”

## Agri-Aide provides \$20,000 benefit

TULLY is bananas, with some sugar and cattle on the side (we're a bit biased, naturally).

That's why Tully businesses are so strongly behind the Australian Banana Growers' Council's campaign against imports.

Through the hard work of Karen Hardy, the Tully Chamber of Commerce and local businesses, the April Agri-Aide Concert generated \$20,000 for the ABGC campaign.

ABGC thanks all those involved in the concert, and the sponsors, for getting behind our industry.

## Slogan searching

DON'T tamper with banana quarantine is still a hot favourite, but other suggestions include:

Moko is not a pop group

Don't bend the rules on banana imports

Don't slip up on banana imports

Just DON'T do it

Imported bananas have no a-peel

Email your ideas to [theidrich@abgc.org.au](mailto:theidrich@abgc.org.au)

**ABGC thanks Harker for transport assistance with the imports campaign**

Harker

## Retailer kits spread the message

THANKS to significant corporate support, the ABGC imports committee is rolling out retailer kits to spread the message that *NO BANANA IMPORTS means no new pests and diseases for Australia*.

Imports committee member and wholesaler, Anthony Holman, said the kits are designed to ensure this message is seen by consumers buying bananas at independent fruit and vegetable retail outlets.

We know from our activities so far that Australians are right behind the Australian banana industry in its campaign to keep out imports that will inevitably carry new pests and diseases into Australian plantations.

We have 500 retailer kits which contain *NO BANANA IMPORTS* mobiles, bumper stickers, business cards and caps printed by Amcor Fibre Packaging as well as two *Save the Aussie Banana* t-shirts printed by Visyboard Innovative Packaging Solutions. Thank you to Amcor and Visyboard.

The retailer kits are being distributed around Australia through the banana handlers' network coordinated by Tony Imeson at Australian Banana Wholesalers who is contactable on 03 9689 3233.

Your bumper sticker should fall out of this magazine but if you or your friends and colleagues want more, then please call Kym McMeeken at ABGC on 07 3213 2405.

## Australian Banana Packing Champs in July

THE indefatigable Des Rackley is still on the case, with the Australian Banana Packing Championships happening at Innisfail and District Show on Thursday and Friday, July 15-16.

Teams are to be outfitted in *Save the Aussie Banana* t-shirts as they compete in two divisions, namely cluster packing and hand packing.

There's a total of \$4000 prize money to be won, and spectacular brass banana trophies, thanks to local agricultural distributor Frank Lowe and Sons.

The Publicans' Challenge is a new celebrity event, which will draw publicans from Babinda, Tully and Innisfail into the fold along with 4KZ's Greg Vuleta and ABC Cairns rural reporter Richard Hudson.

Chief judge is Mark Spagnolo, who also happens to feature as our grower profile in this edition, see page 9.

We hope to have a photo spread of the champions in the next edition of Australian Bananas magazine.

## Banana brand-building resumes

**T**HE National Australian Banana Promotions Committee held its first meeting on May 28, after lengthy discussion and negotiation over its composition, responsibilities and funding collection.

The new committee comprises six grower representatives and six wholesaler representatives, with Craig Allen as its chief executive officer. Mark Spagnolo (Kalbo Pty Ltd) was elected chairman of the committee comprising Greg Bradshaw (PW Chew), Gary Fattore (Chiquita Foods), Ashley Flegler (Flegler Farming), Tom Harney (ATM Bananas), Anthony Holman (John Holman & Co), Peter Lahey (Sth Qld Banana Ripeners), Barrie MacKay (MacKay Estates), Steve Nunn (Quality Produce International), Tony Schirippa (LaManna Bananas), Nicky Singh (M & M Singh) and Greg Worth (Australian Banana Company).

The committee has a wealth of industry and marketing experience to draw on in devising its revitalised promotional strategic directions and objectives for the industry.

It is no secret that since the industry ceased national promotional activities, consumer demand levels for bananas have dropped off. This can be backed up by historical market arrival figures and the associated selling ranges. For example, 100,000 cartons supplied to the Melbourne Market in the past (with supporting promotional activity) produced a \$12-\$18 selling range. At the time of writing this article just over 100,000 cartons into Melbourne produced a \$8-\$12 sales range.

The difference can be attributed to a drop in primary demand for bananas (that is the level of total demand for all brands within the banana product category). Major corporations such as McDonalds, Coke, etc direct a large part of their promotional expenditure towards maintaining consumer preference and therefore demand for their products.

In the past, the banana industry has led the fresh produce industry with respect to the use of an innovative integrated promotional campaign. The industry promotional activities have successfully raised consumption levels and driven a period of growth since their inception, particularly in the '90s.

It is this successful track record that has laid the foundation for the current national promotions committee to build upon. The industry has one of the most widely remembered and universally liked TV commercials at its disposal. *Make Those*



*Bodies Sing* is right up there with *We're happy little Vegemites* and other iconic commercials in the country. Recent research has revealed *Make Those Bodies Sing* is fondly remembered and we should capitalise on its strong emotive message to keep Australian bananas front of mind and the number one choice of Australian consumers.

Modern marketing is all about brands and brand building. The Australian banana brand has had over \$17 million invested in it so far, establishing considerable equity in the brand. This brand equity needs to be fully utilised by the industry. The Australian banana brand provides differentiation from other competing fruit and snack food products, and will be a valuable asset to the industry, provided the industry communicates these brand values and consumption benefits to consumers.

The new committee has a strong strategic focus towards a national TV promotional program to ensure bananas are kept front-of-mind by consumers. A national radio campaign, which has not been done before, is also planned as a tactical backup to the TV campaign. The radio campaign will target specific groups where banana consumption is believed to need improvement.

The committee is dedicated to working closely and transparently with industry stakeholders to achieve its objectives via an efficient and effective promotion program that ensures the position of bananas as the number one fruit. In doing so, we will lead the fresh produce sector in the promotion of our product. We need the industry to commit to unity to provide adequate funding for the achievement of promotional objectives to ensure continued industry growth and prosperity.

**PHOTO:** At the May 28 meeting were (from back left) Anthony Holman (John Holman & Co, Melbourne), Tony Imeson (ABW Secretariat, Melbourne), Nicky Singh (NSW grower), Ashley Flegler (Qld grower), Barrie MacKay (Qld grower), Peter Lahey (Sth Qld Banana Ripeners, Gold Coast). Front left Craig Allen (CEO), Greg Bradshaw (PW Chew & Co, Sydney), Mark Spagnolo (Chairman and Qld grower), Tom Harney (Qld grower).



# industry

letters

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*Dear Editor*

Write to  
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Bananas  
magazine:  
PO Box 309  
Brisbane  
Market Q 4106  
or email  
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abgc.org.au

Constructive  
letters only,  
maximum 150  
words

Letters  
published at  
editor's  
discretion

## Parker Poynt farewell

IT is nearly 18 years since we moved to Kununurra. What a town of hope and inspiration!

We were told very early in the piece that bananas could not be grown here. Well we showed them that we could, and very successfully too.

All we had to do was to get everything right! We have fought with harsh weather, low prices, inexperienced staff and isolation, but the hardest thing to fight has been our politicians and their policies.

When you are asked to fight for your livelihood and the only weapon you can use is "science", it makes it very hard to win. When you aren't allowed to address economic, environmental and social issues, you will never be able to win. You may achieve strategic wounds, but they only survive and come back stronger.

I wonder if we suggested importing politicians, and only addressed it from a scientific point of view, could those politicians fight it? While fighting with one hand tied behind our backs, some of us have explored other opportunities and lifestyles.

I am led to believe that only two or three banana farms in Kununurra will continue on after 2004. Having said that, the banana industry here

still has potential. The area is well suited to such crops and we are blessed with an abundant water supply. Financial viability, a sustainable labour force and some young enthusiastic new farmers will no doubt see a resurgence of the industry in this area at some time in the future.

**Quentin Parker  
Parker Poynt Bananas, Kununurra**

## Save the Aussie Banana

AT the Royal Easter Show recently, six of us from the north coast of New South Wales, along with a group from north Queensland, travelled to Sydney to raise the public profile of the important issues around the proposed importation of bananas from the Philippines.

After three days at the show handing out beautiful Aussie bananas and talking with people, two things really stood out. These were the appreciation people have for the efforts of our campaign, but more importantly the amazing level of awareness amongst the general public as to the plight of the Australian banana grower with respect to imports. Hearty cheers to the crew from north Queensland.

**Geraldine O'Flynn, secretary  
Brunswick District Banana Growers Assoc**

Chiquita