

Australian

BANANAS



Volume 21

DECEMBER 2005

Australian Banana Growers' Council Inc



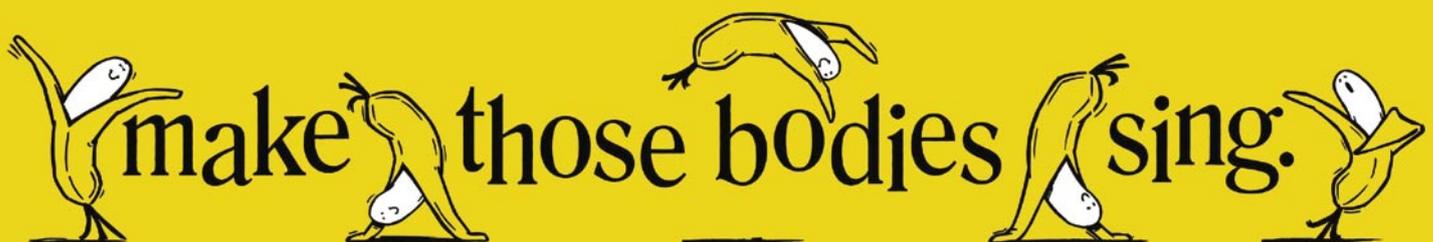
**We should all help
carry the weight.**

To ensure the on-going success of our industry, make sure you contribute your 25 cent levy. We shouldn't just rely on the goodwill of others either, we all need to contribute.

These levies fund a number of activities to build and support our industry for the long-term. Promotion activities receive 15 cents, five cents goes to the Banana Imports Fighting Fund, two cents to the Australian Banana Growers Council and three cents from Queensland growers only goes towards Plant Protection.

All growers have benefited from the recommencement of industry promotional activities last year. Your support is vital for the long-term success of our industry. Marketing campaigns gain momentum over time and it is vital that we view the campaign as a long-term investment.

So, ensure you make your contribution to the levy. For more information contact Australian Banana Promotions Company CEO Craig Allen or your wholesaler or marketing group.



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Patrick Leahy
Chairman

Shortsighted view prevails

As most industry people would be aware, earlier this month the national ballot held to gauge support for a compulsory levy was rejected by the majority of growers, with 57 percent voting against the levy and only 43 percent in favour.

I am concerned that this relatively strong no vote reflects a short-sighted attitude that does not auger well for the immediate future of our \$400 million banana industry.

Banana growers had been asked to vote on a proposed 1.2 percent ad valorem levy, with 0.8 percent of the levy funds to be invested in marketing and promotion and 0.4 percent in industry research and development.

We were asking growers to invest just 1.6c/kg of bananas (based on a sale price of \$18/carton) in their future and the majority of those who voted have rejected that.

The subject of compulsory national levies is always a contentious one in any industry so it is no surprise that the proposed national banana levy also had its share of detractors.

What I do find surprising is the fact that a majority of the growers that voted in the national levy ballot would choose to vote against something that would have provided funding to pay for the eradication of future exotic pest or disease incursions and compensate affected growers for crop losses.

I don't believe that the full implications of the levy decision will be immediately evident in the short term but I strongly believe that there will come a day when as an industry, we will be forced to confront the legacy of what I regard as our short-sightedness.

We are now left to contemplate things like how we make a career in bananas attractive to our best and brightest plant science graduates when there is no money for a banana research program?

This may not seem like a high priority to many now, but can you imagine our dilemma if there are no banana scientists left to assist in dealing with a future exotic pest or disease outbreak?

As a consequence of the levy decision we will remain solely reliant on voluntary funding to deliver promotion and plant protection related activities. I believe it is critically important that growers continue to support the work of the Australian Banana Promotions Company and the ABGC Plant Health Committee in these important areas.

The ABGC must now also take stock and review all options for delivering basic services in key areas.

We will commence this process by undertaking a strategic planning exercise early in the New Year when we will be seeking input from all sectors of the industry into the development of a new industry strategic plan.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people that contributed time, energy and expertise to the national levy process. Space prevents me from mentioning you all by name but without your efforts we could not have come this far.

Thank you also to my fellow ABGC directors whose resolve in support of the levy never wavered.

It is impossible to undertake fundamental reform of this nature without unity and single minded-commitment at board level.

Finally, a special thank you to my wife Ellen and family who took over my personal responsibilities whilst I spent much of this year on the road with the levy consultation process or pre-occupied with other ABGC matters.

industry

contents



COVER:
Trevor Black from Numulgi near Lismore in New South Wales. Photo by MARK DUFFUS.

Australian BANANAS is the biannual magazine produced by the Australian Banana Growers' Council Inc.

ABGC is funded by a voluntary grower levy of 2c/carton.

Articles appearing in Australian BANANAS do not necessarily represent the policies, opinions or views of the ABGC.

The R&D section of the magazine is jointly funded with HAL.

4 Australian BANANAS

industry

imports

research

markets

Banana grower Trevor Black rode 1900km to attend the Sixth Australian Banana Industry Congress in Cairns during August.

Trevor was keen to hear about the imports campaign, exotic diseases and other potential threats to industry, but equally keen to meet the challenge of a long-haul motorbike trip.

The Black family farm at Numulgi, 12km from Lismore in northern New South Wales, with three generations involved in the business – Trevor's father Frank, his brother Darren, and three sons, aged eight, 11 and 14.

Australian BANANAS Volume 21 DECEMBER 2005

Published by:

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CONTENTS

Imports campaign 5

ABGC directors 6
Industry awaits code of conduct 7
Congress action 8-9
Banana Family Fun Day 10-11
Banana Ball 12
Congress keynote speaker 13

Seeking causes for speckle 14
Organic matter impacts 15
Biological insecticide options 16-17
Re-engineering systems 18-19
Bioindicators of soil health 20
Using bacteria for benefit 21
Controlling corm rot 22
Freckle is on our doorstep 23
Biosecuring the future 24
Robots join sigatoka battle 25
Suppressing Fusarium 26-27
Increasing plant defences 28

Out and about at Congress 29
New CRC up and running 30
Harvesting support for 2&5 31
Tissue culture crusader 32
Tissue culture research 33
South African trip insights 34-35
Hydroponic growing in WA 36
ABPCL Chairman's Report 37-39
Radio promotion works 40
New BIPB meets in Tully 41
Machine export opportunity 42
ABGC Annual Report 43-45
New Products 46

Markets - Adelaide and Perth 47
Markets - Sydney and Melbourne 48
Markets - Brisbane and Newcastle 49
Markets - throughput summary 50
Innisfail Banana Race Day 51-52
Tweed Banana Festival 52

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Len Collins
Imports chair

Photos: (below) ABC Country Hour's Robin McConchie interviews Len Collins, and (bottom left) John Cahill with Jane Milburn and Courier-Mail business writer Liliana Molina.

Third draft tipped for mid-2006

The third draft Import Risk Analysis being produced by Biosecurity Australia is likely to be released before the middle of next year, according to our latest information.

There are nine permanent Biosecurity Australia staffers working constantly on the banana IRA as well as the import risk assessment panel.

We believe that there is still a lot of work to be done on the new draft, and May or June would be the earliest release date.

The delays are partly due to questions raised and information gathered by Biosecurity Australia at stakeholder meetings in Brisbane that were attended by ABGC representatives, as well as our scientific and statistical consultants.

We also understand that Biosecurity Australia is seeking to visit Philippines plantations so that its officers can see first-hand how any proposed risk mitigation measures, such as a chlorine wash, would work in that country.

This is encouraging because in the past we have been concerned that the Australian quarantine regulator was too ready to accept the Philippines' word on some proposed measures that clearly seem impractical and unworkable to Australian growers.

We are also in constant contact with Department of Primary Industries staff and recently met with staff from the Office of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries Gordon Nuttall to background them on the imports issue.

I can also report that ABGC Chairman Patrick Leahy and CEO Tony Heidrich did another round of meetings with federal politicians to update them on the imports situation.

It is more than 12 months since Biosecurity Australia announced that it would be producing a third draft IRA report and during that time we have watched the pork industry's case unfold.

Last month, Australian Pork Limited's long-running legal battle with the Director of Quarantine came to an end when the High Court in Sydney rejected APL's application to appeal a decision made by the Federal Court in October.

The Federal Court had upheld Biosecurity Australia's plan to allow foreign pork into Australia, despite claims by the industry that it would lead to the introduction of the piglet-wasting disease, PMWS.

Chief Justice Gleeson, Justice Heydon and

Justice Crennan rejected the pork industry's application to have the High Court hear the case, saying it was not a suitable matter for the court to consider.

I met the new chief executive of Biosecurity Australia John Cahill at the Rural Press Club's Ekka breakfast in August, at which Mr Cahill said BA is determined to lift its game.

Mr Cahill acknowledged rural sector hostility after a number of controversial import risk assessments during the past 12 months and the revelation that cartons of Brazilian beef had been dumped at the Wagga Wagga tip.

He was keen to make the point that there had been big changes made to Biosecurity Australia since last December, including greater independence from government.

Mr Cahill said the changes include: becoming a prescribed agency with financial autonomy; the appointment of an eminent scientists' group to ensure stakeholder comments are considered; and the establishment of a new centre of excellence for risk analysis.

I questioned Mr Cahill about whether these changes were just "window dressing" and he replied: "I don't believe it is window dressing but whether it goes far enough is a judgment that will be made as we go along."

"It is difficult to get to a point where we won't have disagreements between scientists and others about the content and assessment that we have taken. Our job is to work through that based on an objective assessment of the facts," Mr Cahill said.



ABGC 2005

Board: from left, Patrick Leahy, Peter Bale, Tom Day, Marc Jackson, Vicky Kippin-O'Connor, Cameron MacKay, Mark Reppel and Nicky Singh.

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Industry awaits code

Industry is awaiting the release of the Horticulture Code of Conduct for the fruit and vegetable industry. Following the public consultation meetings and a call for submissions in August, the final report from the Centre of International Economics (CIE) has now been handed to government.

CIE was engaged by government to develop a regulatory impact statement (RIS) and propose a Horticulture Code of Conduct for the industry.

The final joint submission presented to CIE by the Horticulture Australia Council (HAC) and National Farmers' Federation (NFF), and to which ABGC was a major contributor, outlined the industry's requirements for a mandatory Horticulture Code of Conduct.

It restated that the code should:

- ensure contractual clarity and transparency in the sale of produce by growers
- be based on the nature of transactions between growers and others rather than the 'labels' given to supply chain partners such as wholesalers, brokers, exporters, processors, retailers. For example - produce sales made through representatives of growers are agency transactions; and - produce sales made at an agreed price that subsequently re-sell for potential gain are merchant transactions
- specify 'minimum terms of trade' that clearly define the nature of produce sales transactions (agency or merchant) and distinguishes the obligations associated with each transaction type.
- include effective, affordable and workable dispute resolution processes.

Industry waits ... the status quo is unacceptable

Firstly and most importantly, the joint submission strongly opposed the 'hybrid umbrella' as put forward in the draft code by the CIE because it would perpetuate the status quo of the current trading ambiguity.

It is important that growers know whether their wholesaler is working for them as an agent or independently in their own interests as a merchant. This issue was behind the

commissioning of the code in the first place and it should be addressed by having clear agent and merchant definitions.

HAC and NFF also raised concerns about the ambiguity surrounding the transfer of title and risk in the CIE hybrid option.

Who the code should apply to

HAC and NFF supported the position that the code should cover the first transaction from the grower and that it should apply to all parties including, but not limited to, central market wholesalers, other wholesalers, produce merchants, brokers, retailers, exporters and processors.

Further consideration required

The cost benefit analysis provided by CIE in relation to the growers' option was questioned in the belief that it did not adequately account for the benefits that industry will gain by introducing contractual clarity and transparency that only the proposed growers' option provided.

Other issues for further consideration were also highlighted. These included the impact of the code on 'single desk' marketing arrangements, existing contractual arrangements and arrangements where growers agree to pool produce to meet specific market needs.

This position has been communicated strongly to government as part of the RIS development process.

Whilst industry still awaits the RIS and code being made available, ABGC looks forward to working with government to achieve a workable and effective code for our industry.

For copies of the joint industry submission please contact ABGC on 07 3278 4786.

ABGC President Patrick Leahy and CEO Tony Heidrich recently met Federal Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran in Canberra when the Minister sought the banana industry's views on the mandatory code of conduct, as well as the national levy and banana imports issue.

Marc Jackson is the banana industry's official representative on the code's grower review panel. ABGC also has its own Horticulture Business Code Sub-Committee, the members of which are Marc Jackson, Nicky Singh, Vicky Kippin-O'Connor and Tom Day.



Congress brings together

Irene Melita:
The speakers were fantastic ... every Congress I come to just gets better.

Robert Mayers:
This is my first congress but it won't be my last ... it is great to meet people involved in other parts of the industry.

Networking with friends, colleagues and contacts is always the most important aspect of banana industry gatherings and the Sixth Australian Banana Industry Congress was no different in this regard.

Congress had some excellent and challenging speakers who informed and inspired participants around the theme "determining our future".

This was not just a catchy phrase, it conveyed the resilience and independence inherent in our industry that insists on setting its own agenda, not responding to that set by others.

ABGC President Patrick Leahy said the quality of the speakers always defines banana congress as a benchmark for other industries, and he thanked the speakers for donating their time.

Speakers covered topics such as international fresh produce marketing trends, farm labour reform, the latest advances in banana research,

transport, packaging, supply chains and international production trends.

There were more than 300 delegates to the Sixth Australian Banana Industry Congress, with a few representatives coming from Western Australia, many from New South Wales and most from the north Queensland areas of Innisfail, Tully and the Atherton Tableland.

Mr Leahy said Congress had received great support from its sponsors, including major foundation sponsor Visy Board, and other major sponsors ABW, LaManna Bananas and HAL.

State Manager Queensland for Visy Board Peter Allen said the biennial three-day congress is a good forum for networking.

"We are a significant supplier to the banana industry therefore we like to stay involved and put something back in and help support congress in any way we can," Mr Allen said.



industry congress

Tony Heidrich 07 3278 4786



all sectors of industry



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10 Australian BANANAS

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Banana Family Field Day



Local schoolchildren were involved in the street parade and *Make those Bodies Sing* karaoke on 4KZ, women were inspired and feted at the Ladies Luncheon and all the while there were a multitude of presentations on banana topics.

Bands and singers entertained the crowds during the parade and again later that night with the Heartland Concert on the Visy Board stage at Tully Showground, which was attended by many local families.

The ladies at the luncheon enjoyed a beautifully presented meal and personal gifts and were inspired by keynote speaker Anne McKeivitt who has built an impressive international career after leaving school in country Scotland at age 15.

Special thanks to the band of volunteers who helped organise the Tully Street Parade, the Concert and the Ladies Luncheon.



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