



# A salute to leadership

By Jane Milburn



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the Australian Banana Growers' Council

**DISCLAIMER:** Although this book is intended to be an accurate account of a decade of advocacy surrounding the Philippines banana imports issue, it is not possible to mention all of the people and events that played a part in ensuring exotic pests and diseases do not enter Australia in imported fruit.

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# The here and now, 2010



Tony Heidrich

Australian Banana Growers' Council  
chief executive officer  
2002-2010

## A recent history

The past decade, by any objective measure, has been the most frenetic and challenging period in the history of the Australian banana industry and the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

Eradicating black Sigatoka from a major production area in a world-first achievement, seeing off the threat of imports, pushing through the devastation of Cyclone Larry and establishing a national levy on the second attempt may well have finished a lesser industry.

However the remarkable capacity of the banana industry to overcome adversity and to take on new challenges has positioned it as the powerhouse of Australian horticulture.

Other industries are now looking for bananas to take a more prominent role in national affairs and how we manage this obligation in a way that adds value is the subject of ongoing internal discussion.

One thing is certain, bananas will face more challenges in the future but we have never been better-equipped to deal with them than we are today.

## Black Sigatoka

The first challenge of this period was the outbreak of black Sigatoka in the Tully Valley in April 2001.

I don't think too many people would disagree with me when I say that conventional wisdom to that point was that if ever we had an outbreak of black Sigatoka in a main commercial production area, eradication would be impossible.

Fortunately industry leaders at that

time, including ABGC presidents Vicky Kippin-O'Connor followed by Gary McCudden, refused to accept this prognosis and armed with technical advice from Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries' plant pathologist Ron Peterson and his colleagues fought hard to secure a tripartite funding agreement to underpin an eradication program.

Despite its initial success, the funding agreement soon unravelled leaving industry with no choice but to foot the bill for the remainder of that eradication program. In many respects the program funding crisis paled in significance to the technical, logistical and community challenges the program faced.

Even now, it is difficult to look back and not be overwhelmed by the enormity of the task and the significance of what was ultimately achieved. Now that experience is held up as a textbook example of how to respond to an exotic pest outbreak and has the distinction of being the only place in the world where black Sigatoka has been successfully eradicated from a major production area.

## National Banana Levy

When the ABGC Board decided back in 2002 that the future prosperity of the banana industry was linked to the establishment of a national banana levy, no one could have foreseen that the process would ultimately take five years and two attempts to bring to fruition.

Imposing a compulsory levy on producers is a serious exercise and the Federal Government rightly insists that a detailed business case in support of the levy be prepared and that there be a comprehensive industry consultation process prior to any ballot.

Despite this, the first ballot was lost in December 2005 and much of the industry reacted with shock and dismay.

There would be no funding for badly needed research and plant health initiatives and the future of banana promotions was totally reliant on a voluntary levy, to which the majority of growers were not contributing.

At a meeting of concerned growers in north Queensland, it was resolved to develop an alternative levy proposal and run another



Prime Minister John Howard visited the Innisfail region shortly after Cyclone Larry hit.

levy ballot. There simply was no palatable alternative. The new proposal involved the more easily understood cents per carton model compared with the earlier percentage of sale price or ad valorum model.

The voting structure was reviewed and an alternative weighted voting system was developed which apportioned votes on the basis of the level of production.

On 5 June 2007, the second ballot voted overwhelmingly in favour of the new proposal and one of the most complex, challenging and potentially divisive issues this industry had faced was at an end.

The success of the second levy ballot can largely be put down to the work of two determined leaders Patrick Leahy and Nicky Singh who as ABGC president and vice-president respectively carried the debate to the masses and argued passionately for what they believed was an absolute necessity for this industry.

I have no doubt that in many years time, we will look back with appreciation at the foresight and determination displayed by these two leaders who ultimately set the industry on the path to a new golden age.

## Cyclone Larry

On 20 March 2006, a tropical cyclone named Larry was bearing down on the north Queensland coast and predicted to make land fall near Innisfail. At category five, this was the biggest cyclone to hit the area since cyclone Winifred in 1986 and the industry waited nervously.

When it eventually struck, barely a single banana plant was left standing in the entire wet tropics production region.

Damage to homes, sheds and infrastructure was extensive and widespread. Power lines were down virtually everywhere and localised flooding compounded the sense of loss.



From left, Member for Kennedy Bob Katter, Prime Minister John Howard, Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile and then ABGC president Patrick Leahy discuss recovery options after Cyclone Larry.

The scene of utter devastation occupied television news programs for several weeks and the entire disaster area became a magnet for politicians of all persuasions eager to help but quickly recognising that the unprecedented scale of the disaster warranted an unprecedented response.

In the hours immediately following the cyclone, the ABGC leadership group had activated its emergency response plan and was in constant communication with the

responsible politicians and bureaucrats to mobilise the initial recovery and in the subsequent weeks and months following up on the commitments that had been given.

Although this was a very trying time for industry, it could have been very much worse if it were not for the lobbying and guidance provided by the ABGC which ultimately led to a substantial industry recovery package which included a workers wage-subsidy scheme that allowed the majority of growers to keep valued workers employed until crop production could return to normal.

The combined industry and government response to this disaster is now regarded as a textbook example of how such disasters should be managed in the future.

## Banana imports

Without question, the greatest challenge the banana industry has ever faced was the proposed importation of bananas from the Philippines. No other single banana-related issue has attracted more widespread national and international attention or invoked such passionate community and political debate.

As chief executive officer, I rate the imports campaign as one of the most difficult but also one of the most rewarding challenges of my career.

There was a real sense of David and Goliath about the campaign, a relatively small industry taking on the collective might of the Commonwealth bureaucracy. It was a high-stakes game where the Commonwealth were dealing the cards.

An import application presents a huge challenge for any industry and having witnessed the inability of several other industries to respond effectively to the technical aspects of an Import Risk Assessment process, ABGC imports committee chairman Len Collins was adamant bananas would not suffer the same fate.

Although bananas had a very strong scientific case against imports, we had to prosecute that case effectively. Len set about building a team of scientific and technical specialists to collaborate on assembling the strongest scientific case possible.

Our commitment to developing a strong science-based defence from day one would pay huge dividends as the quarantine regulators clearly underestimated the capacity of the banana industry to respond in this way.

Former ABGC president Nicky Singh, Western Australia grower Bruce Munro and ABGC imports lawyer Stuart Clague visit Len Collins' plantation.



In fact, Biosecurity Australia was severely embarrassed on several occasions when the banana industry identified mistakes in its risk modelling.

The unprecedented public and political interest that arose around the banana imports issue gave new insight into how an issue can quickly gain traction in the media and how our political leaders are then subsequently drawn into the debate.

The level of public interest increased the stakes considerably, as every new development received extensive media coverage.

Fortunately Len had also recruited highly experienced media and political specialists who did an outstanding job in managing the communication aspects of the campaign.

Overlaying all of this was the IRA process itself, a complex administrative procedure that was bound by international trade law and treaties.

Ensuring industry's rights were respected in the conduct of the IRA process was the job of our legal team.

The success of the campaign was the result of strong leadership, autonomy of decision making, involvement of leading experts in science, law and communications, good administrative support and above all, sufficient funding to pay for it.

This book, A Salute to Leadership, records the events of the past decade as the imports campaign was guided by Len Collins as the dedicated and capable chairman of the ABGC imports committee.



ABC Queensland Country Hour executive producer Robin McConchie interviewed Len Collins on many occasions, this one was after Biosecurity Australia executive director John Cahill addressed the Rural Press Club's Ekka breakfast in 2005.

Right: ABGC commissioned award-winning cartoonist Rod Emmerson to present his take on the imports issue and published this artwork on the cover of Australian Bananas magazine in June 2002.



# The stage was set in 1999

## Imports strategy

The Australian Banana Growers' Council imports committee had six priority activities in 1999 that were under constant review as industry prepared for potential import applications. These were:

- Maintaining a national and international database of contacts
- Monitoring Federal Government quarantine policy and implementation procedures
- Undertaking an economic impact study of the effects of the importation of bananas and exotic diseases
- Educating politicians, business and government agencies, and the public about the Australian banana industry
- Organising study tours to countries viewed by Australia as high-risk
- Maintaining a written response plan for when industry received advice from government that it had accepted an import application.

## Study tour

In early 2000, ABGC imports committee chairman Len Collins led a study tour to the Philippines that included then chairman of ABGC Ron Gray, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers' board member Marc Jackson, plant pathologist Dr Ian Muirhead and entomologist Richard Piper.

Having experienced the devastation of bunchy top in the 1920s and recent problems associated with the discovery of papaya fruit fly and its successful eradication, industry remained determined to keep its current problems under control and to prevent new exotic threats from entering.



## Risk analysis process meeting

On 13 June 2000, the ABGC banana imports committee met in Sydney with industries that had experience with the import risk analysis process including Tasmanian salmon growers, Australian apple and pear growers and durian growers.

Mr Collins said the talks centred on the problems these industries had encountered when addressing imports issues.

He said: "We learnt a lot at this short meeting and will bear it in mind when the time comes for bananas to use this often-surprising material. We thank these industries for their time and assure them of our support at all times."

## IRA announced

On Thursday, 29 June 2000, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service advised the ABGC that it would conduct an Import Risk Analysis on fresh bananas from the Philippines.

The IRA was to include a study into the pest and disease status of the Philippines to decide if the importation of its bananas would be an 'acceptable risk' for Australia. Industry was gravely concerned that exotic pests and diseases could enter Australia on fruit, on the cartons, in the ships or on trash in the carton, or other means.

## Banana Imports Fighting Fund

ABGC immediately announced it would reactivate the voluntary Banana Imports Fighting Fund levy, which lapsed in 1992, at the rate of 1c per 13kg carton or the equivalent.

Over the years, the fighting fund had been used to send scientists and industry personnel overseas to monitor the latest

activity on black Sigatoka, Moko, nematodes, thrips and other pests and diseases.

Collection of the BIFF levy recommenced on 1 July 2000 and ABGC said the pool of money raised would be used to strategically manage industry affairs to growers' best advantage.

## Industry consultation

ABGC consulted with wholesalers and growers and gained strong support for the imports committee to 'do whatever it takes' to protect the industry from diseased imports. It conducted a series of industry information meetings in banana growing areas to explain the process and how ABGC was responding on industry's behalf.

In July 2000, after a meeting with Len Collins, Queensland Primary Industries Minister Henry Palaszczuk said the State Government would provide technical assistance to determine whether there would be an unacceptable quarantine risk if overseas bananas were allowed into Australia.

Minister Palaszczuk said industry could be assured that the Department of Primary Industries' considerable expertise in banana pests and diseases would be available to ensure the quarantine issues are rigorously tested in the Import Risk Analysis process.

Top left: Ian Muirhead and Richard Piper inspecting bananas for export at Davao port facility.

Above left: Lapanday Foods researchers Benny Corcolon and Dr Emily Fabregar with Richard Piper, Len Collins and Ron Gray.

Left: Len Collins with Norma Noble from Lapanday Foods.

## 2001 developments

The ABGC imports committee responded to an Issues Paper published by Biosecurity Australia which outlined key factors that were to be examined and determined by the Risk Assessment Panel. Much vital information was missing from the document, so much so that ABGC requested BA go back and redo it.

ABGC officially launched its imports campaign to keep imported diseases out of the industry on 6 June at the Fourth Australian Banana Industry Congress at the Cairns Convention Centre.

On 21 June, Mr Collins and then ABGC president Vicky Kippin-O'Connor hosted a breakfast for 20 federal Members and Senators in Canberra. ABGC distributed an information kit and also had private meetings with Larry Anthony and Bob Katter.

### Risk Assessment Panel

This was initially headed up by former Department of Primary Industries' scientist Dr Sharan Singh, and included Dr Rob Allen and Dr Brian Cantrell from DPI Queensland, Dr Bob Paton from New South Wales' Department of Agriculture, Mike Robbins from AQIS and horticulture consultant David Peasley.

The RAP conducted information tours in New South Wales and Queensland growing regions, and three members of the panel were scheduled to visit the Philippines to get first-hand experience of the differences between the two industries.

Three technical working groups were appointed to advise the RAP on the minute details of the issues:

- pathology
- insects and
- horticulture, environment and operation.

### Economic report grim news

A Centre for International Economics in Canberra report found diseased imports would peel \$918 million from the Australian industry in lost production, increased spraying and labour costs if black Sigatoka and Moko were introduced.

The report, commissioned by ABGC, also found that long-term production would be reduced by more than 20 percent and costs for growers would leap by \$3000 per hectare per year if these diseases became established in Australia.

# Harnessing expertise

One of the major strengths of the banana imports campaign was bringing together leading experts in their field to provide technical and professional expertise when required.



## Leader

Len Collins came out of agripolitical “retirement” to spearhead the ABGC campaign against imports from the Philippines.

As a large north Queensland grower based at Tully, Len had a substantial interest in ensuring the industry marshaled its resources against imports and the potential exotic pest and disease incursions that he believed would be associated with any decision to bring in fresh fruit.

Having been ABGC chairman for many years during the 1980s and ‘90s, Len was well-seasoned and knew many of the personalities involved.

His “whatever it takes” attitude and political savvy permeated all aspects of the industry’s campaign and he spent a lot of time and effort ensuring that no stone was left unturned.

Len had observed the pattern of decisions on imports of other products and insisted from day one that lawyers should be involved in the campaign.

“Although we understood that science would win this for us, not the lawyers, we wanted lawyers on board to ensure the industry was afforded due process,” Len said.



## Strategy

Tony Heidrich, as ABGC chief executive officer through almost all of the campaign, was charged with implementing and refining the strategy developed by the imports committee.



Knowing who was pulling the strings within the various agencies was important, as was knowing which buttons to push and when. “You had to judge when to go in hard and when to hold fire because you can often get more achieved through quiet diplomacy than you can berating people in public,” Tony said.

He said having a well-resourced fighting fund and total support from industry meant there were never any limitations in being able to tap into top quality expertise to get the job done.

“Communication was very important at key points in the campaign, with newsletters to inform growers and strategic media releases and media conferences to get industry messages out.”

“The trips Len and I did to Canberra to brief politicians from all parties were really valuable and I learned a lot from the Senate inquiry process.”

## Reports

Corrs Chambers' solicitor Stuart Clague was responsible for co-ordinating the input of the various scientific consultants engaged by the ABGC to mount a sophisticated and highly technical response to the IRA process.

With degrees in law and applied science (biochemistry and microbiology), Stuart was well-qualified to pull together several submissions to Biosecurity Australia including a response to the technical information paper, the draft IRA, addendum, revised draft IRA and final IRA.

This was to be Stuart's most significant case, in terms of time and commitment, since joining Corrs part way through his law degree.

"This continuity over the past nine years has meant I've got to know the banana case very well and I've learnt what Tony and Len need and how they want me to respond on their behalf," Stuart said.

Although bananas dominated his work at various points, Stuart also spends time advising clients on intellectual property and other matters.



## Disease

Decades of experience with the scientific aspects of quarantine meant plant pathologist Dr Ian Muirhead was well-placed to consult to the banana industry on the plant protection issues surrounding the import application.

Ian became a consultant in 1994 after 26 years with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries, during which time he was Director of Plant Pathology and a chair of the Banana Industry Protection Board.

"I find the banana industry's approach is very professional. They are always keen to get good scientific advice and then act on it," Ian said.

Ian has undertaken three study tours for the Australian Banana Growers' Council, the first to Central and South America in 1995 with Len Collins, the second to the Philippines in 2000 with Len, Ron Gray, Marc Jackson and Richard Piper, and the third to Central and South America with Raymond White in September 2003.

Now retired, Ian also consulted for a number of organisations and at one point was acting chief executive officer of the Co-operative Research Centre for Tropical Plant Protection based in Brisbane, which further expanded his invaluable network of contacts.



# Legal

Following changes to World Trade Organisation's rules more than a decade ago, Corrs Chambers partner Tom Brennan recognised that quarantine matters would become a significant area of specialisation for the legal firm.

Corrs invested in developing an understanding of this area and won the ABGC contract with the brief to uphold the interests of Australian banana growers at every step in the Import Risk Analysis process which spanned nearly a decade.

"The imports committee of ABGC was very clearly focused on ensuring the future security of the Australian banana industry," Tom said.

"This has been a very challenging brief for us because it is the first complete non-routine IRA conducted since the WTO changes."

Tom's previous experience working as chief-of-staff to former deputy prime minister Brian Howe and working in government and administration law, and his extensive Canberra connections, proved invaluable in the campaign.

"ABGC's assembled team of eminent scientists, all of whom are world experts in their fields, ensured the committee was able to run a highly professional campaign."



# Media



Media consultant Jane Milburn became involved with the banana imports' issue when working as a media advisor to Queensland Minister for Primary Industries Henry Palaszczuk.

Jane arranged an initial meeting between the Minister and Len Collins which led to the Minister hosting a breakfast at Parliament House in July 2000 to ensure State politicians were fully briefed on the Philippines application.

When Jane set up her media consultancy in October 2001, she was the logical choice to pick up the running on the issue and work closely with Len, Tony and the team on media and political aspects of the campaign.

"It's been great to work with such a united sense of purpose on behalf of the banana industry and be part of a professional team," Jane said.

Jane has an extensive media background, having worked as an ABC rural reporter and with newspapers such as The Townsville Bulletin and The Courier-Mail after completing a Bachelor of Agricultural Science at The University of Queensland.

Jane is currently on the Australian Rural Leadership Program, sponsored by Rural Press Ltd, and was recently granted life membership of the Rural Press Club of Queensland.

## Pests



Agricultural consultant Richard Piper has specific expertise in entomology and first-hand

knowledge of banana pests gained during a visit to the Philippines with ABGC in 2000.

For nearly two decades, Richard has operated his business, Scientific Advisory Services, in north Queensland providing on-farm monitoring of pests and diseases and independent advice on their control and management.

Earlier, Richard spent four years with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries working on an industry-funded project on integrated pest management in bananas.

"It has been very interesting and enjoyable to work with the scientific consultants that are part of the ABGC team and I do have faith in the IRA system," Richard said.

He believes, however, that hitchhikers such as frogs and rodents were worthy of more attention than they received in the initial draft IRA.

Richard is co-author of the book *Bananas: Insect and Mite Management*, has a Postgraduate Diploma in Plant Protection and a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours from The University of Queensland.

## Politics

Political lobbyist Col Parkes, from lobbying firm Gavin Anderson, facilitated Canberra links at very high levels and was in a position to monitor which way the wind was blowing when required.

Col played an invaluable role in being a two-way conduit of information during the various Senate inquiry hearings and parliamentary sittings.

## Statistics

QUT statisticians Professor Tony Pettitt and Dr Rob Reeves provided outstanding analysis to feed into the banana industry's response to various Biosecurity Australia reports.

In 2004, Biosecurity Australia questioned ABGC's claim that the plant-killing disease Moko will be expected to enter, establish and spread in Australia within two years from the start of any importation of Philippines bananas.

The claim was based on modelling undertaken by ABGC's statistical consultants - the same consultants who exposed a fault in Biosecurity Australia's risk modelling which led to the embarrassing admission by the quarantine watchdog that it had made a mistake in its calculations.

Biosecurity Australia had declared that ABGC's new claims on Moko disease were "simply not valid". However, Head of QUT's School of Mathematical Sciences Professor Tony Pettitt, independently reviewed the ABGC's modelling and said he considered it to be "mathematically valid".

## Background

Former banana industry hardhead Ross Boyle said experience gained during the earlier imports threat from Ecuador served the industry well in planning its response to the Philippines application. Eventually withdrawn, this application highlighted the need for vigilance.

As a member of the ABGC imports committee in 2000, Ross and Len developed the science-based campaign that successfully underpinned industry's response to the long drawn-out IRA process.

"We agreed to stick to the science, but we realised that if the Philippines resorted to politics, then we would have to match them," Ross said.

"I learnt a lot about this Machiavellian stuff from my involvement in sports administration and politics ... these are arenas where you can be a rooster one minute and a feather duster the next, which rapidly hones your instincts."

Ross spent 16 years with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries before moving to COD (now Growcom) for six years before becoming inaugural chief executive officer of the ABGC in 1992.

Ross has now left the banana industry and is running a small business at Murwillumbah in northern New South Wales.



## Global science

Dr David Jones has a global perspective on many banana diseases gained when travelling the banana world on behalf of the International Network for the Improvement of Banana and Plantain.

His international experience began while working for the Queensland Department of Primary Industries when he participated in banana-collecting missions to Papua New Guinea and Southeast Asia, and a banana improvement project in the South Pacific.

David trained in all aspects of plant pathology, especially plant quarantine, and is an expert in pest risk analysis.

He is editor of *Diseases of Banana, Abacá and Enset*, which is the standard text on banana pathogens and disorders, and a photographer of plant diseases.

While working on the island of St Vincent in the Caribbean, David was known locally as Banana Doctor.

David drew on his extensive background knowledge of banana diseases to help the ABGC in its campaign to identify the quarantine risks from imported banana fruit. Further information was gathered from international conferences he attended with the support of ABGC.



## Trade



Lisa Barker brought wide-ranging government and international trade law expertise to the Corrs legal team advising the banana industry on the Philippines imports issue.

She established the Corrs International Trade Law Practice Group, specialising in WTO matters and advising on the impact of international trade law on industry and governments in Australia and overseas.

"The banana industry stands out as an industry that has understood Australia's international obligations and the role that the WTO now plays in all trade matters, but also understands Australia's entitlement to the legitimate protections that exist within WTO agreements," Lisa said.

Prior to joining Corrs, Lisa worked in public policy positions, including as chief of staff to an Australian federal minister managing consumer affairs and government business enterprise issues, and as policy consultant to the then Australian Food Authority, reviewing food standards and regulatory issues.

She lived in Washington DC and New York City for about six years and developed extensive networks across the senior ranks of the United States administration.

## Stats

Environmental statistician Dr Ray Correll headed up the CSIRO Ecological and Environmental Risk Group in Adelaide, which analyses and interprets data for internal and external clients. He has since retired.

Ray began his career as a quantitative plant ecologist at James Cook University. He discovered number crunching later in life after completing a PhD and other studies in statistics.

"I've got the lovely job of interpreting figures after all the hard work of experiments and data collection has already been done," Ray said.

He has been associated with several projects similar to the IRA on Philippines bananas that involve interpreting figures creatively but strictly in ways that stack up against peer review processes.

Working in collaboration with David Pullar, Ray's risk assessment expertise enabled the ABGC team to refute a number of details in the various IRA reports and the Philippines submission.

"I believe we were able to quantify the very real risks, for more than one disease, that would be associated with unrestricted access of Philippines bananas."



## Frogs

Veterinarian Dr Rick Speare specialises in amphibian diseases and is based at James Cook University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

He says Australian frog species are already under threat from an exotic disease accidentally imported in the late 1970s and any new virulent pathogens would be quite devastating for local amphibians.

"It is critical that we keep other amphibian pathogens, particularly amphibian ranaviruses present in the Philippines, out of this country," Rick said.

"Very little is known about amphibian species and pathogens in the Philippines ... we can't be sure what is there because there have been no studies done."

As consultants to ABGC, Rick worked with colleague and amphibian expert Ken Aplin from CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems in Canberra to identify the dual risks presented by amphibians that have the potential to hitchhike into Australia hidden in banana cartons.

The pair also consult together on a number of international projects studying wild amphibians and associated pathogens in South Africa and South America.



## Risk assessment

David Pullar's horticultural and environmental consulting group, David Pullar & Associates, specialises in the provision of management and technical advice.

It was David's contacts, in-depth knowledge of the horticultural industry and direct experience with the New Zealand apple IRA that was of particular benefit to ABGC's imports committee.

David was deputy chair of the Horticultural Research & Development Corporation for six years and had two terms as Chair of the CSIRO Horticulture Sector Advisory Committee.

After graduating from La Trobe University with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science, David ran the family orchards at Ardmona and Cobram in north-central Victoria which specialised in the large scale production of apples, pears, peaches, plums and nashi fruit.

In 1990, the Ardmona and Cobram orchards were subdivided and sold.



# 2002-2003 activities

In February 2002, the ABGC upped industry investment in the campaign to keep Philippines bananas out of Australia by lifting the voluntary Banana Imports Fighting Fund levy to 10c per carton.

Mr Collins said industry had become increasingly concerned about the situation following a visit by Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Warren Truss to the Philippines and a planned visit by senior Biosecurity Australia officers in what appeared to be too cosy an arrangement.

By April, ABGC had received a written commitment from Minister Truss that any decision regarding the importation of Philippines bananas would be based solely on a scientific assessment of pest and disease risks.

In a media release, Minister Truss said "no deals have been done and no assurances have been given (to the Philippines) that the application to export bananas to Australia will be approved".

When Biosecurity Australia released its technical information paper in May, ABGC said it contained only half the promised information about the risks associated with importing bananas from the Philippines.

It contained details about a total of 182 pest interceptions on Philippines bananas imported into New Zealand from January 2001 to March 2002 but it did not contain any details about potential protocols and risk management options.

Mr Collins said "The toughest issues are not addressed and we are concerned that Biosecurity Australia has rushed the report through to meet certain arbitrary deadlines."

At a June stakeholder meeting in north

Queensland, the use of chemicals such as hydrogen cyanide and methyl bromide to control pests in imported Philippines bananas was raised.

Mr Collins said the meeting reinforced the council's view that the quarantine implications suggest there is no responsible way that Biosecurity Australia could approve banana imports.

## Draft IRA says NO

On July 1, 2002 the Australian Banana Growers' Council welcomed the draft IRA announcement by Biosecurity Australia to continue a ban on Philippine banana imports based on available scientific evidence.

Mr Collins said it was the only sensible outcome after two years of scientific evaluation proved there was an unacceptable level of risk of importing exotic pests and diseases along with the fruit.

He said the presence of 22 pests and diseases of known quarantine concern, and other unknown environmental consequences of "hitchhiker" pathogens in frogs and insects, were grounds for extreme caution regarding imports.

The BIFF levy was reduced to 1c per carton from November 1 and Mr Collins said growers' commitment in paying the levy had enabled ABGC to mount a strong and professional case against the importation of fresh bananas from the Philippines.

## 2003 - Uncertainty continues

More than 12 months after releasing the draft IRA, uncertainty continued in Australia's banana-growing regions as the

industry awaited a final determination. Biosecurity Australia had told industry that no new scientific information had been provided by the Philippines regarding crucial aspects of the exotic disease Moko that last year led to a draft Import Risk Analysis continuing the import ban.

Mr Collins said that because there was no new science, the Final IRA must endorse the findings of the Draft IRA which identified Moko, Freckle, black Sigatoka, Panama, Banana Bract Mosaic Virus, Banana Bunchy Top Virus, mealybugs, hard scales, fruit flies, mites and weevils as pests and diseases of quarantine concern.

"If the science hasn't changed then the decision should not change," he said.

From left, Professor James Dale, reporters Leonie Lyons and Richard Hudson with Len Collins broadcasting the ABC Country Hour from banana congress in Townsville in 2003.



## Raising political awareness

In October, a trip to Canberra by Mr Collins and ABGC chief executive officer Tony Heidrich provided heightened political awareness of the Philippines imports issue.

Mr Heidrich said the spectre of ship loads of imported fruit having to be treated with the toxic chemical methyl bromide in Australian ports and ongoing comments reported in the Philippines media had put the issue on the political radar.

In response to a Question without Notice in Federal Parliament from Member for Kennedy Bob Katter, Prime Minister John Howard said the government had not made a decision to "close" the Australian banana industry and "... I can assure the honourable member and the many other members who are interested in this issue that no decision has been taken".



In a November media statement, ABGC said the many millions of dollars invested in banana disease security and quarantine was in jeopardy unless the Federal Government continued the ban on imports.

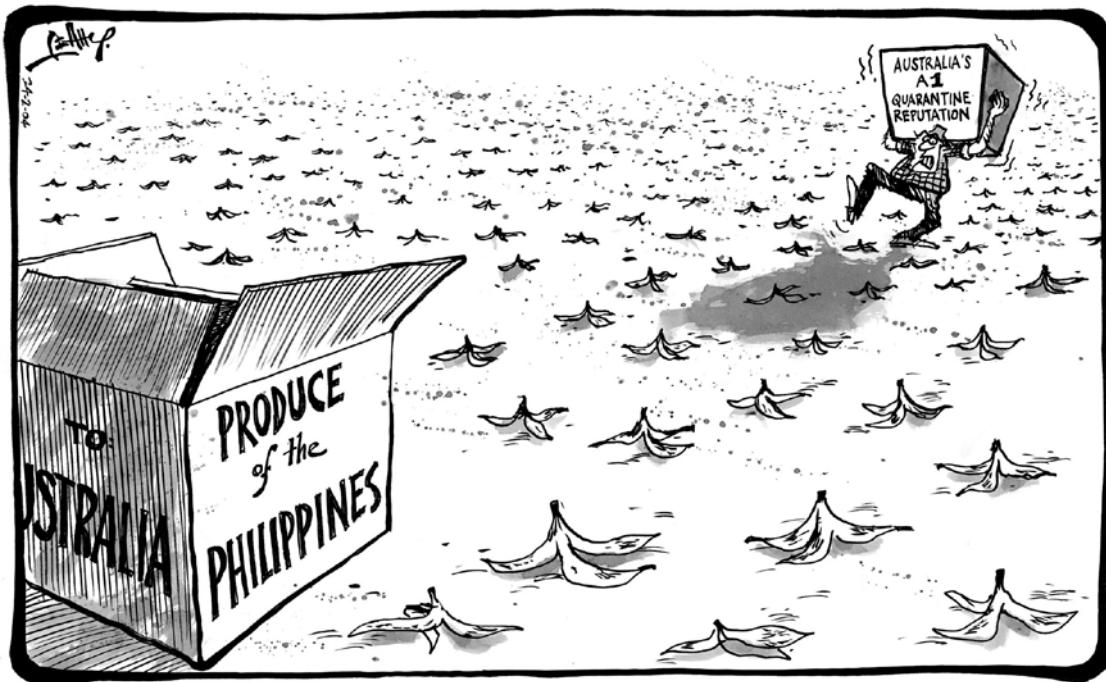
Mr Collins said Australia had invested heavily in maintaining clean and safe production systems through groups such as the Banana Industry Protection Board, the CRC for Tropical Plant Protection, the Northern Australian Diagnostics Network and the banana industry itself.

“Australian growers have a culture of quarantine that enabled them to effectively eradicate black Sigatoka in north Queensland

at a cost of \$20 million to industry and governments,” Mr Collins said.

“We recently sent one of our scientific consultants on a study tour to Central and South America and he reported that some growers there had to apply 52 sprays last year, often at intervals less than seven days, to contain black Sigatoka,” said Mr Collins, while in Canberra for a further round of meetings on the issue.

Democrat Senator John Cherry hosted a visit to Canberra that enabled ABGC to raise political and media awareness of the pest and disease concerns about imports.



Cartoon by Sean Leahy published in The Courier-Mail on 24 February, 2004

# A turning point, 2004

The year 2004 was a pivotal point for the banana industry as it sought scientific truth and justice.

In early February, the ABGC imports committee became concerned that the integrity of Australia's science-based quarantine system was being compromised by free trade pressures.

There was a sense that the Federal Government was preparing to back away from the July 2002 draft decision that banned imports from the Philippines on quarantine grounds, which would completely erode the import risk analysis process.

Given the weight of scientific evidence about the multitude of pest and disease risks, industry was of the view that it would be outrageous if the Australian Government rewrote the science and back-flipped on its original decision to keep the ban on imports in place.

The 2002 draft Import Risk Analysis said it was not possible to mitigate the risks associated with Moko disease, and nothing had changed because the only research conducted by the Philippines confirmed that banana plants can carry the disease for up to three months without showing visible symptoms.

At this time, Len Collins said "If the Federal Government does an about-face and allows imports, we can only assume that it is a political decision rather than one based on science because the science in support of the ban is just so strong."

"This would send a very bad, in fact a rotten message to all Australian primary industries."

February 19 - Revised draft IRA report released

When Biosecurity Australia announced on February 19 that it would allow potentially diseased bananas to be imported from the Philippines under certain conditions, industry was outraged.

In a media statement, Mr Collins said the revised draft IRA report was not based on sound scientific principles and the decision would put Australia's quarantine security into the hands of the Philippines.

"This is outrageous. The Philippines simply cannot be trusted on quarantine. They have no culture of quarantine. They have the worst banana diseases in the world," he said.

Industry said the quarantine conditions proposed by BA to mitigate against the risk of importing disease were unacceptable, unsatisfactory and unworkable, and that the decision showed that bureaucrats have caved in to trade pressure and adopted a "free-



trade at any cost" culture, preferring to negotiate market access rather than defend Australia's borders.

The ABGC said Australia was entitled to take a conservative approach to quarantine under the SPS (Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary) Agreement of the World Trade Organisation in an effort to keep our island nation free of exotic pests and diseases.

While its consultants began examining the details of the new report, ABGC shifted the campaign against imports into a higher gear by establishing the "Save the Aussie Banana" hotline and other groups began planning protests against the decision.

## February 25 - Grower meetings

After grower meetings in Tully and Innisfail, ABGC announced it would reactivate the Banana Imports Fighting Fund levy to 5c per 13kg carton of bananas sold in Australia to raise more funds to conduct



a forensic analysis of the revised draft IRA report.

At this point, Mr Collins said the banana industry had received support from across the political spectrum, including Federal Government backbenchers, in its stand against pest and disease-carrying imports.

Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries Minister Henry Palaszczuk asked his Department to review the revised draft IRA with the intention of lodging a formal submission.

## February 26 - Farm visit

On February 26, then Federal Opposition Agriculture spokesman Gavan O'Connor and his advisor Jack Lake, and Senator Jan McLucas visited Tully and Innisfail plantations, meeting local business people and leading banana growers.

Cameron MacKay with Senator Jan McLucas above, and left, with Gavan O'Connor.





Photo by Brian Cassey

## February 27 - Rally

The Banana Workers' Action Group led by Val Currie organised 2500 banana workers, farmers, business people and consumers to attend the Save the Aussie Banana rally in Cairns in a show of support for the Australian banana industry's fight against diseased imports. The rally commenced with a road convoy from Tully and Innisfail and concluded with a feast of bananas in Munro Martin Park, Cairns.

## February 27 - Briefings begin

At the same time, Len Collins and Tony Heidrich were briefing National Party politicians Senator Ron Boswell, former Member for Richmond Larry Anthony and Member for Cowper Luke Hartsuyker on faults in the risk assessment model and the dodgy science in the report.

This led to the announcement by the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport that it would hold an inquiry into BA's revised draft Import Risk Analysis on Philippine bananas because of concerns about the science.

Mr Collins said the risk mitigation measures proposed by Biosecurity Australia in the revised draft report were so vague that it was not even clear what they meant.

"There is no way BA or anyone else can assess quarantine risks adequately when the measures proposed to bring them in line with Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection are not explained," he said. The ruling that black Sigatoka was a leaf disease not a fruit disease was subjective and made a mockery of the strict quarantine and movement controls implemented during the 2001 Tully incursion that had cost Australian taxpayers and growers about \$20 million to eradicate.

During that incursion, government-appointed inspectors enforced domestic quarantine regulations that adhered to international

standards. It was unacceptable to the Australian industry that a lesser standard was being proposed in the Philippines, doubly so because it had not demonstrated a commitment to quarantine.

Mr Collins said all Australians must be concerned that Biosecurity Australia had watered down the nation's quarantine standards in that way because there were huge gaps in the Moko and black Sigatoka science, and the mealy bug measures were deficient and unlikely to be an effective quarantine treatment.

"The risk assessment in regard to hitchhiking mammals, rodents and amphibians is of grave concern. The report says all fruit would be subject to AQIS inspection on-arrival. What does that mean ... is it 100 percent inspection ... is it performed in a secure facility?"

Below left: David Pullar, Ray Correll, Len Collins, Luke Hartsuyker, Larry Anthony, Tony Heidrich and Senator Ron Boswell, seated, discuss errors in the IRA report.



## March 8 - IRA cracks appear

Cracks were already appearing in the report but ABGC was surprised and relieved when on March 8, leading and credible scientific criticism struck at the heart of the IRA report.

The Co-operative Research Centre for Tropical Plant Protection put out an official statement in which Dr Mark Fegan, a world leader in the area of Moko disease, said that facts and figures used by Biosecurity Australia were "... at best, questionable and lacking in scientific rigour".

Among other things, Dr Fegan said Biosecurity Australia's calculation of the number of banana bunches that will remain symptomless if infected by the Moko disease bacterium "... is a complete misuse of the original figure from what was an untested study anyway".

The CRC for Tropical Plant Protection is a co-operative venture between The University of Queensland, Queensland Department of Primary Industries, CSIRO, RhoBio (a private company), BSES, Australian National University, Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, Charles Darwin University and Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry - Australia (the department that developed the revised draft IRA report).

Mr Collins said "Biosecurity Australia has fudged the figures and is attempting to water-down Australia's justifiably conservative quarantine standards. But cracks in the science are now appearing and we feel vindicated by these observations from such a credible organisation as the CRC."

"We've been accused of crying wolf but it has now become obvious that this revised report has more holes in it than a block of Swiss cheese and that the pest and disease risks from Philippines bananas are insurmountable."

## March 16 - More cracks emerge

A week later, on March 16, a second scientific criticism rang more alarm bells on the report and called into question the integrity and professionalism of Biosecurity Australia.

International researcher based at Queensland University of Technology, Professor James Dale, said the science relating to Banana Bract Mosaic Virus was "fundamentally flawed" and "without reason".

In an ABGC statement, Mr Collins said when highly respected independent researchers from two august scientific institutions are raising serious concerns in relation to the scientific credibility of this decision, that has got to ring alarm bells for our elected Members of Parliament that this IRA is based on unsound science.

"The credibility of this revised draft IRA and its architects is being shot to pieces. We are now questioning whether BA can provide an objective assessment of any technical response put forward by the industry."

At all-party Senate inquiry hearings earlier in March, repeated questioning from Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee Chair Senator Bill Heffernan led to an admission by Biosecurity Australia executive manager Mary Harwood that: "It is possible for a [imported] fruit to have the Moko bacterium in it."

Senator Jan McLucas said Biosecurity Australia officials told the committee that no minutes or other records were kept of key discussions by the panel charged with assessing the risks of imports. In a media release, Senator McLucas said "... the evidence that Biosecurity Australia had presented at Monday [March 8] night's hearing showed limited, if nonexistent, transparency."



## March 17 - BA admits error

Then in a bombshell development on March 17, Biosecurity Australia admitted it had made a crucial error in the banana import risk computer model which left its credibility in tatters.

The ABGC said it regarded the error as so significant that the situation could only be remedied by a review of the science and modelling involved in the IRA by a fresh team of experts.

"We have high-calibre scientific consultants working with us on this issue and they recognised a serious fault in the model within days of the release of the revised draft IRA," Mr Collins said.

Industry concerns were magnified by two eminent scientists - Dr Mark Fegan from the CRC for Tropical Plant Protection and Professor James Dale from the Queensland University of Technology - who pointed out other faults with how the report dealt with Moko disease and Banana Bract Mosaic Virus respectively.

At that point, Mr Collins said in an ABGC media statement that he was certain more deficiencies would be revealed. "There are 22 diseases and insects of quarantine concern in the Philippines and of those, at least four diseases and one insect present grave risks for the Australian environment."

## April 3 - On with the show

Meanwhile ABGC set about informing urban Australians about the issue, beginning on April 3-5 at Sydney Royal Easter Show where it gave away more than 80,000 bananas to show goers as part of the Save the Aussie Banana campaign.

The Save the Aussie Banana team found there was great concern amongst consumers about Philippines imports, with about 75 percent of people already aware of the issue.

As ABGC continued to expose more errors in the import science via the media, Mr Collins said it was preposterous that Biosecurity Australia attempted to hose-down industry criticisms of another aspect of the revised draft IRA Report.

He said ABGC stood by its claim that the plant-killing disease Moko would enter, establish and spread in Australia within two years from the start of any importation of Philippines bananas.

The claim was based on modelling undertaken by ABGC statistical consultants - the same consultants who exposed a fault in Biosecurity Australia's risk modelling which had led to the



embarrassing admission by the quarantine watchdog that it had made a mistake in its calculations.

While Biosecurity Australia said ABGC's new claims on Moko disease were "simply not valid", the head of QUT's School of Mathematical Sciences Professor Tony Pettitt confirmed he had independently reviewed the modelling and stated it was "mathematically valid".

### April 13 - Minority report

There was more drama to come at the Senate hearing on April 13 when the ABGC was shocked at the disclosure in evidence at the inquiry that there was a minority dissenting report lodged by a member of the IRA scientific panel.

Inquiry witness Mr David Peasley told the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee hearing in Brisbane that he had submitted a minority report, on 30 June 2003, outlining serious concerns about aspects of the science relied on in the revised draft IRA report.

Mr Peasley, a specialist horticulturist, was one of seven members of the Import Risk Analysis panel.

He told the Senate Committee "On 1 December 2003, I forwarded my comments on the final draft IRA to Dr McRae [chair of the IRA panel]. I indicated that given the unlikelihood of agreement within the panel on the draft's content, and given the need for events to move on, I would support the release of the draft. I reiterated my inability to support the content of the draft."

Earlier, on March 8, Biosecurity Australia appeared before the Senate Committee and was repeatedly questioned about support amongst the panel for the revised draft IRA's recommendations. Biosecurity Australia



Len Collins, Ian Muirhead, Richard Piper and Marc Jackson prepare for the Senate hearing in Brisbane.

insisted that all seven members of the IRA team had agreed with the contents of the revised report.

The BA officers had been given repeated opportunities to qualify their answers on the status of the report but were adamant that it was unanimous.

Mr Collins said Mr Peasley's disclosure at the Senate hearing heightened banana industry concerns has about the entire IRA process.

## April 14 - Withdrawal request

On April 14, the Australian banana industry formally requested Agriculture Minister Warren Truss urgently withdraw the revised draft IRA and begin the process anew.

In a letter to the Minister, ABGC chief executive officer Tony Heidrich said the IRA process had, to date, contained errors and omissions of basic science, statistical errors and grave inadequacies in process and accountability that were confirmed by the April 13 Senate Committee hearing.

It asked that Minister Truss withdraw the revised draft IRA immediately and begin the process again, with BA being required to ensure the process adheres to established, accountable and transparent procedures, and takes proper notice of the science of banana diseases.

## May 9 - Report not signed-off

On May 9, controversy swirling around the ill-fated revised draft IRA report deepened with confirmation that a majority of the scientists on the panel did not sign off on the revised draft IRA report.

Mr Heidrich said the New South Wales Minister for Agriculture Ian Macdonald had told Parliament that NSW officials did not support the propositions contained in the February 2004 report.

Minister Macdonald said: "Let me make it perfectly clear, while some staff of the department sat on the expert panel and were consulted with, they were not authors of, nor did they sign off, the final report. Again I make it clear: the department does not support the propositions put, and continues to provide submissions against such findings".

Mr Heidrich said Queensland Minister

for Primary Industries Henry Palaszczuk had earlier told Parliament that the two Queensland scientists on the seven-member banana IRA panel had also not signed off on the report.

This accumulation of statements, as well as the minority report lodged in July 2003, brought further into question Biosecurity Australia's earlier evidence that the report was unanimous and that "everyone agreed with the report and with its release".

"There are seven panel members. It is now clear that the four independent members did not sign off on the report. The other three members are employed by the Federal Government and it would appear they were being influenced by matters other than science," Mr Heidrich said.

This revelation coincided with a peak science group declaring that scientific analysis of risk must have priority over trade imperatives or Australia will be exposed to great risks in future.

Mr Heidrich said these discrepancies magnified concerns voiced by the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, which represents 60,000 scientists and technologists, that "Australia exposes itself to great risk if we become complacent, fail to support relevant research and monitoring or allow trade considerations to undermine proper scientific analysis".

In a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties inquiry into the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement, FASTS said "Scientists (and producers) are concerned with Biosecurity Australia's increasing emphasis on a 'least trade restrictive' approach that has the potential to undermine the science base of IRA and attempts by Biosecurity Australia representatives to 'direct' IRA teams toward facilitating trade".

## May 13 - Clearly no consensus

Later in the month on May 13, another member of the scientific Import Risk Analysis panel revealed at a Senate inquiry that he had disagreed with Biosecurity Australia's February report that gave conditional approval to the importation of bananas from the Philippines.

Mr Bob Paton told a Senate hearing in Canberra "there was not a consensus view on a number of issues within the draft IRA", confirming comments made by another panel member Mr David Peasley at an earlier hearing.

Biosecurity Australia officials repeatedly claimed before the committee in March that all seven panel members agreed with the report.

Mr Paton, a New South Wales Department of Agriculture entomologist, said the February 2004 IRA report "has been withdrawn" and the IRA panel is working on an addendum that will recognise the risk for mealy bug is higher than previously thought.

The February revised draft IRA report had proposed that Filipino banana packers would inspect, brush and sponge between the fingers of 79 million clusters of bananas each year to control mealy bugs.

At the inquiry, the late Senator Jeannie Ferris questioned the mealy bug control measure.

*Ferris: "I'm just curious as to whether you agree with the industry when they describe that measure as laughable and whether ... there is a capacity to simply carry out that function and adequately protect Australia's banana industry?"*

*Paton: "I would prefer another treatment option ... perhaps fumigation or an insecticide treatment if that is possible ... a lot of that stuff, is really not practicable in an operational sense."*



The late Senator  
Jeannie Ferris



Senator Bill  
Heffernan

*Ferris: "What stuff ... brushing and sponging?"*

*Paton: "No the fumigation with an insecticide."*

*Ferris: "If that is not practical, and the industry thinks the other bit is laughable, what is the other option ... I suppose the other option is not to bring them in, isn't it?"*

*Paton: "If they can't manage it to achieve a suitable level ... then just don't bring them in."*

Regarding the proposal to manage pest and disease risks by restricting imports to non-banana-growing states, Mr Paton said he had "raised serious concerns" about that option.

He said the lack of border roadblocks between Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria meant that under current market systems "... it would be very difficult to see how, in the longer term, you could actually control that movement".

Mr Collins repeated his view that mounting evidence demonstrated there were serious process and science failures endemic in the banana IRA.



May 22 - Big footy show

While the concerted lobbying effort continued, the Save the Aussie Banana message was on show at a Cowboy's home game on May 22 when about 200 banana growers and supporters made a visual statement at Dairy Farmers Stadium in Townsville.

Photo by Chrissy Maguire





Photo by Chrissy Maguire





Significant national media coverage focused political, community and scientific attention on the multitude of problems with the revised draft IRA.

## May - Admission Senate misled

At about this time, the senior public servant overseeing the banana import risk analysis process admitted her evidence to the Senate rural committee inquiring into the Philippines imports decision was misleading.

At a Senate Estimates Committee meeting in Canberra, Biosecurity Australia executive manager Mary Harwood acknowledged evidence she gave on March 8 to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee may have left Senators with the impression the seven-member scientific panel unanimously agreed with the decision recommending imports proceed.

Ms Harwood conceded to Senators "Yes, I knew that there were panel members who held minority views. There were a couple of instances here [in March 8 Hansard] 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."

Mr Heidrich described Ms Harwood's admission as another example of the lack of transparency in the IRA process.

He said "It was only after the Senate inquiry process had revealed scientific dissent that we got to the truth of this matter. The Senate was misled, the industry was misled and the public was misled. This is appalling and any pretext that this decision is based on the collective wisdom of the scientific risk assessment panel is nonsense."

He said the Australian banana industry is still waiting for the addendum of revised pest and disease risks that were being reworked after Biosecurity Australia admitted to an error in its computer model, prompting the withdrawal of its February 2004 report on 17 March.

"This delay reinforces the degree of incompetence with which Biosecurity Australia has undertaken the banana risk assessment and ABGC believes this completely discredited process must be abandoned before Australia's international reputation suffers further embarrassment," Mr Heidrich said.

## May 28 - All the way to the PM

Concern about the entire process had attracted the attention on 2GB morning announcer Alan Jones who on May 28 extracted this comment during an interview with Prime Minister John Howard: "... 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".

In response, Mr Heidrich said in a media statement: "We certainly appreciate that the Prime Minister has acknowledged that Australia must defend our quarantine system to preserve Australia's pest and disease-free status. Australia is free of the world's worst banana diseases and the Australian banana industry has worked hard to keep it that way."



Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson was briefed about industry concerns.

## June 16 - Addendum added

In the following month on June 16, BA put out an addendum to its revised draft IRA report and while making a few relevant changes it still ignored the symptomless nature of two banana diseases, Moko and Banana Bract Mosaic Virus, and left the Philippines in charge of ensuring Australia's quarantine.

The addendum added an insecticidal treatment for mealy bugs, introduced risk mitigation measures for Banana Bract Mosaic Virus and strengthened the measures for Moko disease. But it did not address ABGC's concerns about the serious flaws in the science underpinning the report and the Philippines being handed responsibility for safeguarding Australia's quarantine.



All bananas  
eaten here  
are grown  
in Australia

Imports  
threaten  
our local  
industry

# NO BANANA IMPORTS

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No new pests and diseases  
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and media

## June 17 - Retailer kits

Industry responded on June 17 by taking its campaign direct to Aussie banana lovers with NO BANANA IMPORTS campaign resources being distributed nationally to independent fruit and vegetable retailers.

The Save the Aussie Banana retailer kits included t-shirts, bumper stickers, business cards, mobiles and posters to draw consumers' attention to the threat facing the Australian banana industry.

Mr Collins said "Consumers are vitally interested in where their food comes from and they don't want product that has been sprayed every week to control black Sigatoka leaf disease - which is endemic in the Philippines - and then dipped in insecticide to control mealy bugs to make it 'safe' to bring into this country."

"Our statisticians - the same statisticians who exposed the error in Biosecurity Australia's report - say 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."

At the time, Mr Collins said it was a sad indictment on the system that it was incumbent on industry to prove that Australia's quarantine regulator was making serious errors of judgment that would impact adversely on the future of the nation's \$350 million banana industry and Australian environment.

He said industry appreciated the support of the corporate and small-business sector - including cardboard companies, transport companies, banana wholesalers and retailers - in helping take its message direct to consumers and the Australian public.

"We encourage all Australians to become involved in this issue by expressing their concerns to Federal Members, Senators, talkback radio and newspapers because quarantine is an issue that ultimately affects all Australians," Mr Collins said.

"We will not allow unelected bureaucrats to ride rough-shod over an Australian industry, exposing it and the Australian environment to the worst plant pests and diseases on the planet."



## June 30 - More errors

On June 30, shortly after BA released the addendum of revised risks correcting earlier errors, the industry uncovered a significant new error in BA's revised draft IRA that profoundly underestimated the risk of the plant-killing disease Moko.

The new error involved the use of an invalid multiplication factor in the Moko risk formula that had led BA to conclude - incorrectly - that the risk fell below Australia's Acceptable Level of Protection against exotic pests and diseases.

Professor Tony Pettitt had advised the industry that there was no rational basis for the use of this multiplication factor and that no objective statistician could defend its inclusion in the banana IRA.

## July 2 - Errors acknowledged

By July 2, Federal Cabinet Minister Larry Anthony put on record his recognition of the "very serious" new error in the Philippines banana import risk analysis.

Mr Collins said the banana industry was now more determined than ever to see this fight through to its rightful conclusion because no Australian agricultural industry should be subjected to such a hopelessly flawed process ever again.

## July 12 - Opposition weighs in

The Federal Opposition weighed further into the debate in a July 12 statement released by Shadow Minister for Agriculture Gavan O'Connor which acknowledged the inadequacies and failures of the IRA process.

Mr O'Connor ambitiously announced that an incoming Labor Government would immediately direct that a new IRA be undertaken because the credibility of the current process was destroyed.

In response, Mr Heidrich said "The council has made repeated representations to Minister Truss about errors in the science, the risk modelling and the process by which Biosecurity Australia has conducted this banana IRA but our concerns are yet to be addressed."

"It is a relief to industry that the Federal Opposition recognises the seriousness of the problem and has committed an incoming Labor Government to begin the process afresh.

"It is now time for Minister Truss to acknowledge that the current process has been fatally compromised by the incompetence of Biosecurity Australia and insist that the banana IRA be withdrawn immediately before Australia's quarantine reputation is further eroded."

## July 15 - Changes announced

On July 15, Minister Truss announced IRA reforms which were welcomed by industry but did not go far enough.

Mr Collins said the proposed changes to the IRA process did not overcome the intrinsic problems with the banana IRA and did not address the latest error ABGC had identified with the risk assessment for Moko disease.

"We do welcome Mr Truss's proposal to remove quarantine decisions from the market access trade area of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, but this does not address our immediate concerns about the current banana IRA process."

"We also note the establishment of a standing group of (as yet unnamed) eminent scientists and we have written to Minister Truss seeking a meeting to clarify the precise nature of their involvement."

ABGC maintained the IRA should be wound back to a point in the process where all stakeholders had confidence in it.

## July 20 - Another show

At Innisfail Show, the Australian Banana Packing Championships became a showcase for the Save the Aussie Banana cause.



## August - Citrus canker threat

In early August as the Philippines continued to threaten a World Trade Organisation challenge to Australia's quarantine regime, the Australian citrus industry was counting the enormous cost and market dislocation caused by an exotic disease incursion.

ABC Radio reported Philippines Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for International Economic Relations Edsel Custodio was claiming Australia had been unfairly using its quarantine laws to act as a "de facto" trade barrier.

But Mr Collins said the citrus industry's clean-up of a citrus canker outbreak on an Emerald farm in central Queensland with Philippines connections was similar to that experienced by the banana industry in 2001 when it battled with a black Sigatoka leaf disease incursion in Tully.

"Eradicating black Sigatoka was a world-first achievement for the Australian banana industry and there were many people who thought it could not be done," Mr Collins said.

"This issue is not about trade, it is about keeping new pests and diseases out of Australia. The science clearly shows that Philippine bananas present a grave risk to our domestic banana industry and to the environment, and on that basis the existing ban on Philippine bananas should remain in place."

"I don't think you need any more evidence than the current citrus crisis to understand why we are so determined to preserve Australia's clean, safe food production systems."

## August - Benny amongst friends

During the Brisbane EKKA, hundreds of show goers queued up in the Horticultural Pavilion to sign the ABGC's Consumers Against Banana Imports petition.

Photos by Jane Milburn



Mr Heidrich said consumers were incredulous that Australian authorities would consider bringing in fruit that exposed Australia to new pests and diseases.

"There is overwhelming public support for our Save the Aussie Banana campaign to keep these new pests and diseases out of this country and we are very appreciative of that support," Mr Heidrich said.



## August 28 - Parade

On August 28, northern New South Wales growers, consumers, and then local Member of Parliament Larry Anthony and Labor candidate Justine Elliot rallied at the Tweed Banana Festival parade in Murwillumbah.

Banana grower from Chillingham and co-organiser of the Save the Aussie Banana float Maree Edwards said: "Banana growers are the new threatened species ... threatened by new pests and diseases that could be carried in on Philippines bananas if that proposal goes ahead."

Ms Edwards collected thousands of names for the Consumers Against Imports petition which was circulating in northern New South Wales banana growing areas and she thanked consumers for their ongoing support.

Three trucks decorated with bananas, banana farmers, NO BANANA IMPORTS balloons, corflutes and other signage, and a large number of people walking in Save the Aussie Banana t-shirts added colour and drama to the parade.



Photos by Jane Milburn



The Big Banana's Kevin Ruby with food commentator Peter Howard.

## August - Plan for new draft IRA

Eventually, in late August, BA announced in a memo that it would release a new revised draft report on the Philippines banana imports issue.

The memo said "Following a preliminary assessment of comments received to date and consultation with experts on the methodology used in the revised draft and subsequent addendum, Biosecurity Australia now advises that the IRA team will present a further revised draft IRA Report after full consideration of all comments received during the current consultation period (which closes on September 15). A 60-day consultation period will apply to the further revised draft report."



New South Wales grower Mick Gentle

## September 13 - Coffs gathering

On September 13, Coffs Harbour hosted a banana imports 'people power' forum where Len Collins and others addressed growers and members of the public at the Big Banana Forum ... as the unfolding citrus canker disaster continued to graphically demonstrate the devastation caused by disease incursions.



the names registered

At the Coffs Harbour forum hosted by well-known foodie Peter Howard, Mr Collins presented the Opposition Agriculture spokesman Gavan O'Connor and local Federal Member Luke Hartsuyker (Nationals) with copies of the Consumers Against Imports petition which contained of about 6000 Australians who registered their objection to imports.

## September 15 - ABGC response

On September 15, the ABGC lodged its formal stakeholder response which documented three key concerns about the revised draft Import Risk Analysis report.

- The IRA recommendation for imports was based on unsound scientific assumptions in regard to the five diseases and two pests that were of serious quarantine concern.
- The risk methodology adopted by Biosecurity Australia was flawed and did not provide a rational basis for determining whether the pest and disease risks meet Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection against quarantine threats.
- The recommended risk management measures are untested and would require entrusting Australia's quarantine security to Philippines banana exporters and workers.

## October - Perth support

In October, at Perth Royal Show industry mascot Benny Banana wearing his Save the Aussie Banana shirt was a big success at Perth Royal Show with fans of all ages flocking to give him a high-five or a cuddle and then signing the ABGC petition.



## December 2 - Proposed changes

On December 2, Minister Truss announced that a new independent agency would provide quarantine policy assessments and recommendations which took a conservative quarantine approach to protect Australian agriculture's favourable health status.

Mr Collins said "We welcome this move towards financial independence for Biosecurity Australia but the real test will be in how the new administration handles the legitimate and serious concerns raised by the Australian banana industry regarding bananas from the Philippines."

# Forever vigilant

## NSW lifts fruit movement bans

The intensity of ABGC publicity around the imports issue eased into 2005 to enable Biosecurity Australia to get on with the job of getting the science right.

Meanwhile, industry was focused on gaining official recognition for the world-first achievement of eradication of the leaf disease black Sigatoka from a major banana production area.

In February 2005, ABGC welcomed the lifting of bans on the movement of bananas into certain parts of New South Wales which was the last hurdle in industry's pursuit of an official declaration of pest-free area status for banana black Sigatoka in the Tully area.

The NSW Government Gazette on February 25 contained a special supplement revoking a clause in the Plant Diseases Act which has prohibited the movement of fruit into parts of New South Wales since the outbreak of the exotic leaf disease in Tully in April 2001.

This dove-tailed into the imports campaign. ABGC chief executive officer Tony Heidrich said "This achievement shows the lengths to which Australian banana growers will go to keep our plantations free of exotic pests and diseases. It also reinforces industry's determination to ensure the existing ban on imported bananas remains in place because such imports would inevitably carry in a plethora of exotic pests and diseases."

## Official pest-free area status

In March, Queensland Minister for Primary

Industries Henry Palaszczuk confirmed in Parliament that Tully area has been granted Pest Free Area status for Banana Black Sigatoka.

ABGC chairman Patrick Leahy thanked growers for their determined support for the eradication program and said the industry is justifiably proud that it achieved an outcome that many thought was not possible.

"We extend our thanks to the State and Federal governments for their financial support in the early stages of the eradication effort and to the Banana Committee of Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers (now Growcom) for releasing the \$1 million of growers' reserves that helped finance and co-ordinate the running of the final 12 months of the eradication program."

The source of the incursion in April 2001 remains unknown but once black Sigatoka was detected on three plantations, they were ploughed in and an intensive monitoring, de-leaving and spraying program began on all plantations in the Tully Valley.

## Cost-sharing agreement signed

In May, the Australian Banana Growers' Council became the first peak industry group to sign on to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, which is the new national cost-sharing agreement to deal with exotic plant pests and diseases.

The Deed was developed by Plant Health Australia, in close co-operation with the industry and government, and would help provide greater certainty in how the nation responded to future plant pest and disease emergencies.

## Cyclone Larry hits industry

On 20 March 2006, Cyclone Larry struck at Innisfail with ABGC president Patrick Leahy estimating there was 100 percent crop loss in the Tully and Innisfail areas, about 95 percent loss on the Atherton Tableland and about 80 percent loss in the Kennedy area south of Cardwell.

There was no crop insurance available for banana plantations only for farm buildings therefore the industry faced a huge financial and personal struggle to return production to its previous levels of 21 million cartons (about 250,000 tonnes or about 1.3 billion bananas).

"The majority of Australian bananas are grown in tropical north Queensland, so this is a complete disaster for our industry," Mr Leahy said.

Industry met with Prime Minister John Howard, Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran, and Queensland Primary Industries Minister Tim Mulherin to discuss support available for industry to rebuild.

## Fruit shortage causes pressure

In the aftermath of Cyclone Larry, banana prices soared as supply was limited mainly to sub tropical growing areas and small pockets of north Queensland such as Lakeland Downs which had escaped the cyclone.

This brought suggestions from some quarters that imports would be the answer.

Industry was somewhat reassured by Prime Minister John Howard's repeated public statements that there will be no change to the official import risk analysis process on imported bananas despite the wipe-out of

most of the Australian crop. As the severity of the plantation destruction sent banana prices skyward, industry was relieved the Federal Government reiterated there would be no compromise to the quarantine risk analysis process which protects Australia's pest-free status.

Mr Heidrich said media speculation that imports could be fast-tracked was



Len Collins, ABGC treasurer Cameron Mackay and Tony Heidrich at Innisfail during the Prime Minister's visit to inspect cyclone damage.

technically impossible because the pest and disease issues cannot be investigated - let alone overcome - in the immediate term.

"The current sugar cane smut incursion demonstrates Australia's vulnerability to exotic diseases, and we appreciate that Prime Minister John Howard and Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran have given a commitment that Australia's rigorous IRA process will not be compromised or changed in any way."

## Diseases require spray programs

On 20 June 2006, ABGC imports chairman Len Collins said all overseas banana producing countries including the Philippines are forced to spray their plantations on a weekly basis to control the leaf disease black Sigatoka, which is endemic in every country except Australia.

Mr Collins reiterated that diseases are a big problem for the banana industry. An alternative supply source of bananas at this time of cyclone-induced shortage might have been the Northern Territory, but for Panama disease being discovered there in the late 1990s when growers ploughed out plantations rather than risk spreading the disease nationally.

“Any suggestion of bringing imported fruit into non-banana growing areas has already been rejected as unworkable because of the lack of roadblocks within New South Wales, Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland to police intrastate and interstate movement of bananas by the public and fruit distribution centres, as well as the likely impact on backyard production,” Mr Collins said.

## Frozen bananas slip under radar

On 3 September 2006, there was publicity about a large volume of frozen banana pulp brought into Australia from Vietnam which took ABGC by surprise although it did not believe this was a breach of the commitment given by

the Prime Minister regarding fresh green banana imports.

ABGC imports committee chairman Len Collins said he was seeking details from AQIS about the type of pest and disease risk assessment that has been done and what steps were being taken to ensure the exporter complied with treatment protocols.

“ABGC believes the pulp importation is not a breach of the Prime Minister’s commitment given to growers at Innisfail after Cyclone Larry which clearly related to the ongoing risk assessment on fresh green bananas from the Philippines.”

“Prime Minister Howard said the IRA process would not be compromised or fast-tracked in any way, and to the best of our knowledge it has not been. Frozen banana pulp is a low-value item, and the treated pulp poses less of a disease risk than fresh bananas do.”



## Responding to revised draft IRA

On 1 March 2007, Biosecurity Australia released its long-awaited Revised Draft Import Risk Analysis Report for Bananas from the Philippines that outlined the disease risks and quarantine conditions for the proposed importation of Philippines bananas.

The Australian Banana Growers' Council said the proposed quarantine measures for the 27 pests and diseases of quarantine concern were unworkable and unenforceable.

Mr Collins said the import conditions Biosecurity Australia is proposing are experimental and effectively hand the responsibility for Australia's quarantine security to the Philippines.

"The report has proposed some on-the-

ground inspections and audits by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service but that will be for an initial period only, after which the Philippines will be largely responsible for compliance," he said.

"There is no way that AQIS, or anyone else for that matter, can police compliance with the proposed quarantine conditions in the Philippines. This proposal effectively amounts to self-regulation and is open to manipulation and abuse."

At a media conference on March 2, Mr Collins said the report was a huge blow to Australian banana communities.

He said the report acknowledges that it is an absolute certainty that Australia will face an outbreak of the diseases black Sigatoka and Freckle if imports are allowed without effective quarantine conditions.

"ABGC believes that there are no feasible quarantine conditions available to manage the risks posed by Philippine banana diseases and therefore the only logical solution is to maintain the current ban on imports," Mr Collins said.

## Scientific advisors meet

In the following week on 7 March, industry scientific and statistical consultants met to review the 530-page document.

Mr Collins said that at first glance, this





IRA report appeared to have conducted a more comprehensive analysis of the potential for entry, establishment and spread of the seven pests and diseases of quarantine concern than earlier reports (released in 2002 and 2004).

However, the IRA proposes the use of chlorine as a sanitising agent and research commissioned by ABGC and conducted by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries in 2005 had already conclusively demonstrated the ineffectiveness of chlorine under commercial conditions.

Another area of concern was the proposal to source Philippines fruit from a so-called "area of low pest prevalence" or ALPP.

"This is an experimental concept, about which there is scant detail in the IRA report, and requires the Philippines to assess the level of pests or diseases present. In ABGC's view this would rarely,

if ever, be verified on the ground by AQIS officers."

### Resounding YES for banana levy

On 5 June 2007, the ABGC announced that a national ballot had found majority support for a compulsory levy to fund banana promotion, research and development, and plant health-related activities.

ABGC vice-president Nicky Singh said the vote was a resounding yes, with 67 percent of the primary vote and 88 percent of the area vote being in favour of a national levy to collect 1.7c/kg levy on all bananas sold, with 1.16c/kg directed to promotion and 0.54c/kg to research and development.

Above, Len Collins at a media conference in Toowong Village after the revised draft IRA was announced and, left, briefing Senator Ron Boswell.

## Final IRA yes to imports

On 12 November 2008, Biosecurity Australia recommended in its Final Import Risk Analysis on the importation of Cavendish bananas from the Philippines that fruit could enter Australia if the Philippines meets risk management measures for seven pests and disease of quarantine concern.

Mr Collins said "We are concerned that the proposed quarantine measures are to be implemented by Philippine banana growers on farms which do not have a culture of quarantine and would be open to manipulation and abuse."

The IRA identifies seven groups of pests of quarantine concern, including Moko, black Sigatoka, Freckle and arthropod pests such as armoured scales, mealybugs, spider mites and thrips.

Diseases are a big problem for the banana industry. There are no control measures for Panama disease (*Fusarium* wilt) which decimated the Northern Territory industry, and Australia has spent millions of dollars attempting to eradicate Banana Bunchy Top Virus from sub tropical plantations in New South Wales and southern Queensland. Moko disease is endemic in the Philippines but control measures used there would not be viable in Australia.

Back in 2001, Australia spent \$20 million eradicating the leaf disease black Sigatoka from north Queensland plantations at Tully and to this day the source of that disease incursion is not known.



In the Philippines, banana plantations are sprayed weekly to control black Sigatoka.

## Industry appeals IRA decision

On 12 December 2008, ABGC lodged an appeal with the Import Risk Analysis Appeal Panel against Biosecurity Australia's decision to recommend the importation of bananas from the Philippines.

The ABGC alleged that there were a number of significant deviations from the defined Import Risk Analysis process which adversely affect the interests of Australian banana growers.

The ABGC also alleged that a significant body of scientific information relevant to the outcome of the IRA (namely information about the dispersal of black Sigatoka spores) was not considered.

Mr Collins said because all of the potential risk management measures for key

pests would need to be enforced on farms in the Philippines, he had no confidence in the decision by BA to permit imports.

ABGC chief executive officer Tony Heidrich said there was virtually no detail in the report about how the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service will effectively ensure that exporters comply with the potential quarantine conditions.

"It is a known fact that AQIS had problems monitoring compliance with quarantine conditions for a range of pests and diseases in Australia - including Equine Influenza - let alone in a country where systemic graft and corruption are a way of life," Mr Heidrich said.

The IRA appeal panel disallowed the appeal but acknowledged Biosecurity Australia had not fully met the requirements of the Handbook but that the deviation was not significant.

An appeal to the Eminent Scientists Panel was similarly unsuccessful.



## New Senate inquiry

The ABGC welcomed a new Senate Rural and Regional Affairs Committee inquiry into the decision, with hearings to take place in Canberra on Tuesday 24 February and Wednesday 25 February 2009.

The Senate helped expose errors in earlier IRA reports, and Mr Collins said it was some comfort to know that Senators would again probe the decision.

Len Collins addresses the media at Toowong Village after the Final IRA report was released.

## Industry deflated by decision

On 3 March 2009, the Australian Banana Growers' Council was profoundly disappointed by the Director of Animal and Plant Quarantine's decision to recommend the importation of bananas from the Philippines.

Mr Collins said because all of the proposed risk management measures for key pests would need to be enforced on farms in the Philippines, he has zero confidence in the decision.

ABGC chief executive officer Tony Heidrich said there are huge gaps in scientific knowledge of key pests and virtually no information about how the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service will ensure that Philippines' exporters meet required stringent quarantine conditions.

## Senate hearings

ABGC put its case to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee inquiry at hearings in Canberra on Wednesday 11 and Thursday 12 March.

Mr Heidrich said: "We are asking that AQIS articulate clearly on the public record exactly what quarantine conditions will be put in place, how they will be applied and what checks and balances will be established to monitor compliance in the Philippines."

This same committee had previously helped expose errors in earlier banana IRA reports, including gross underestimations of pest and disease risks as well as errors in the modelling used to calculate those risks, and industry said it was some comfort to the Australian industry that Senators will again probe the decision.

## Lack of quarantine detail

On 16 March, ABGC reassured local growers and consumers that the recent decision on imports was a policy paper only and contained no detail about how Philippines fruit can meet Australia's quarantine requirements.

Mr Collins told the Senate hearing that imports could not occur in the foreseeable future because there were no workable measures to successfully overcome identified pest and disease risks.

He said the Biosecurity Australia Import Risk Analysis final report was not supported by available science or any recommendations about how the pest and disease risks can be successfully managed.

"The IRA is supposed to be composed of three stages - pest categorisation, pest risk assessment and pest risk management and we made it clear to the Senate inquiry that Biosecurity Australia has failed to undertake the third stage of the IRA," Mr Collins said.

He said the Philippines had repeatedly failed to cooperate with requests from Australian authorities for specific information about quarantine measures, therefore Australian growers do not believe authorities should be actively facilitating market access.

Previous risk management measures proposed by Biosecurity Australia have been impractical, unworkable or just plain silly - for example, sponging and brushing between the fingers of 79,000,000 clusters of bananas to control mealy bugs.

## Quarantine bar set on high

At the Eighth Australian Banana Industry Congress on 5 June 2009, Mr Collins said the Federal Government policy determination permitting the importation of bananas from the Philippines did not mean Philippine exporters have automatic and unfettered access to the Australian market.

He said "There is a world of difference between a policy determination and the practical implementation of that policy."

"To gain access to the Australian market, a Philippines exporter will have to propose and then demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service the effectiveness of a multitude of quarantine measures under commercial conditions," Mr Collins said.

"In reducing the pest and disease risk on their export plantations to extremely low levels, these quarantine measures must be 100 percent effective, science-based and verifiable."

"It is worth noting that all costs associated with establishing the risk management regime are to be borne by the exporter, including the costs of stationing AQIS inspectors on the ground in the Philippines.

"In my view and the view of industry scientific experts, this represents an enormous challenge for Philippine banana exporters who have chronic pest and disease issues, do not possess a quarantine culture and to date have shown little capacity to undertake the scientific work that will be required to develop and establish a reputable suite of quarantine measures.

"Our battle has not ended with the conclusion of the formal IRA process and we will continue our campaign against imports on behalf of the Australian industry and consumers."



## Senate pinpoints inadequacies

The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee report tabled on June 25, pinpointed inadequacies in the controversial banana import risk analysis and recommended that more details on risk management measures and compliance be provided to the Senate by quarantine authorities before any import permits are approved.

The report specified that before any permit to import was granted, the risk management measures and operation plan must be subject to independent scrutiny.

ABGC welcomed this recommendation because industry concerns about the IRA process had repeatedly fallen on deaf ears.

The report highlighted the complete lack of details about how quarantine risks would be overcome in commercial conditions and the lack of procedural fairness afforded to stakeholders.

It affirmed industry's view that the actual pest risk management measures applied to imports would be proposed by the Philippines - which is effectively handing responsibility for Australia's quarantine requirements to another country.

## Private Members Motion

On September 7, Member for Cowper Luke Hartsuyker, who is based at Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, put forward a Private Members Motion on the Importation of Bananas in the Federal Parliament.

Mr Hartsuyker is recorded in Hansard as saying Biosecurity Australia's IRA on Philippine bananas "is long on rhetoric and short on detail, particularly in relation to the risk management measures aimed at preventing disease being imported into Australia".

Speaking on the Rural Report for ABC Mid North Coast in response, Minister for Agriculture Tony Burke said: "The restrictions are pretty tough and resulted in the Filipino banana growers claiming they would never actually get bananas into Australia. My intention is to make sure that we do not resile from those restrictions one iota. Every rule that is necessary to keep our biosecurity, needs to remain in place."

## Changes in national leadership

In September 2009, Tully grower Patrick Leahy was appointed chairman of the ABGC imports committee after veteran campaigner Len Collins stepped down from the role he occupied for nearly a decade.

Mr Heidrich said "Len came out of agri-political retirement in 2000 to put together a strong and cohesive team of experts to assist in the campaign against Philippines' imports which represent a significant pest and disease threat to the Australian industry."

"The strong focus Len placed on science and due process ensured Biosecurity Australia was held to account for its risk assessments and recommendations. His networks and relationships remain invaluable because Len is respected by all sides of politics and has a reputation which precedes him."

"Len will provide strategic input when required but is confident that his chosen successor will continue to implement the scientific, political, legal and public awareness campaign on behalf of the Australian banana industry."

Mr Leahy said "Although the IRA process is for all intents and purposes complete, I assure industry that the ABGC imports committee will remain vigilant."

# Len Collins

By friends and colleagues

## A monumental achievement

While Len Collins served on many committees over the years, his contribution to the Australian Banana Growers' Council imports committee stands out as a monumental achievement.

Len's love of our industry, his commitment and expertise stood him in good stead to take on this enormous challenge.

Len has for many years shown an unselfish dedication and professionalism in his dealings with the politicians, media and members of the ABGC during the imports campaign.

His solid understanding of our industry gave Len the ability to deal with government on major import issues. Only a person with Len's experience could have succeeded in convincing the powers that be, that it was madness to allow banana imports from a country riddled with major diseases which our country does not have.

Len's achievement did not happen overnight, it took many years of hard work to get the result that he did.

I know that Len has the appreciation of all his fellow growers and people who have worked with him over the years. His tireless leadership will be remembered by all.

The Australian banana industry has been given a new lease of life and hope for future generations.

I personally congratulate Len for a job well done. It is during tough times that true leadership shines best. I would like to finish on a quote made to me by the late Mort Johnson on the morning when Cyclone Larry was devastating far north Queensland.

Mort had come to Sydney Markets and I was taking him back into town. He had just finished a conversation with Len and then turned to me and said: "We can never repay Lenny for the work he has done in keeping the imports out."

Best Regards

Pat Arcella  
Arcella Banana Company

# A determined straight-shooter

If you were to describe Len Collins in a sentence it would have to include the words professional, straight-shooter, dedicated and determined. In my 27 years of Senate representation, I have never dealt with a more professional peak body than the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

I had known of the brothers Collins for years through the National Party. Len's reaction to the Philippines import application was to immediately contact all the Queensland Senators and set out in no uncertain terms what would happen to the banana industry if black Sigatoka and Moko and Freckle were imported into Australia. Len called upon the Senators to set up an inquiry.

The Senate committee that reviewed the Import Risk Analysis revealed a number of inconsistencies in the information.

Other information was gathered that allowed the banana industry to challenge the science and mathematics of the IRA.

Biosecurity Australia had to back track a number of times until they had to withdraw the original IRA and re-issue another.

Len Collins guided the Senate debate. It was a pleasure to deal with him and his professional approach.

His advice on matters of science, law and mathematics allowed us to question officers of Biosecurity Australia. We asked for information and we received it in a form that we could get answers from Biosecurity Australia and AQIS officers.

The banana debate started in 2000 and finished in 2009. During that time, Len Collins went all out in defending the interests of the industry.

Ten years is a long time to allocate to an industry matter. Len was flying to Canberra

and Brisbane, having private meetings with politicians, AQIS and biosecurity officers, lawyers and anyone else that would listen.

At one stage I told Len that this is the best peak body that I have dealt with. It should offer its services to other rural industries that are in trouble and set itself up as a professional gun for hire to these industries.

In February 2004, Biosecurity Australia brought down findings that allowed fresh bananas to be imported. Len would not accept that recommendation and fought it hard. At Len's request, another Senate inquiry was set up on the 27 November 2008.

A final determination occurred in March 2009 with Biosecurity Australia recommending that all inspections on farms, in packing sheds and in the Philippines' wharfs would have to be carried out by Australian quarantine officers in the Philippines.

This and other recommendations would make it very unlikely that Philippines' bananas would be imported into Australia. It is important to note that during the past nine years of debate, there has never been a banana imported into Australia.

Len Collins delivered in spades for the banana industry and those who make their living from it.

I congratulate the industry for its recognition of a great servant of primary industry and the banana industry in particular.

I salute him for his success. I enjoyed the experience of working with a thoroughly professional operator, straight shooter and a decent man.

Congratulations Len.  
Senator Ron Boswell

## Len stuck to his guns

Len Collins did a great job for the banana industry when he stuck to his guns and got out the truth regarding the imports issue.

It seemed as if the people making the decisions were trying to hoodwink us but Len did a good job of organising everything to make sure our side was heard.

He left no stone unturned and put in a lot of effort on our behalf. He was able to speak out and did everything to the best of his ability.

I am of the view that if you can't do it yourself, you support those who can. Len and I worked together for many years on the banana sectional group, and I thank him for the good work he did on the imports issue.

Geoff Bush  
banana grower  
Kennedy, north Queensland

## The Collins Factor

Having a strategic approach to policy and forward thinking was always a strength of the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

Rarely did the council have naysayers or directors who could not see the benefits in adopting a process of contingency planning for events that may impact on the industry as a whole. This does not just happen and any peak body needs to develop the ethos that enables its members to embrace this as an integral part of its management principles. That is what the council did early in its existence and it paid lasting dividends.

I don't think that Len came naturally to this thinking. It was not a style that he was used to as he had operated highly successful broad-ranging enterprises pretty much independently. He relied on his own instincts and an uncanny knack to read the markets in whichever industry he was dealing. So he obviously had a deal of self belief and confidence in his abilities to take the right course. But this had always been for the Collins' businesses and whilst he had an unsurpassed knowledge of the bigger picture of our industry and the Australian rural scene in general, it had been for the benefit of his enterprises.

One trait that Len Collins has in abundance is pragmatism. It is a trait particularly prevalent in the Tully sector of the industry I always found. Some other areas of the industry just didn't face up to issues that were certain to impact them with quite the readiness of the Tully growers. They procrastinated and nit picked. Don't get me wrong Tully was always wary and reluctant to commit early but they pretty quickly get the picture and when they do commit it is without waiver.

When Len Collins came to the chairmanship

of the ABGC, he had recognised that a peak body could actually achieve results for members. His involvement with various committees at COD/QFVG had shown him that outcomes were achievable so any previous cynicism evaporated quickly. Remember he single-handedly negotiated an arrangement after the collapse of COD that saw the Queensland banana growers maintain a financially viable position from which they could move forward.

That pragmatism shone through with Len stating all the way that "what was done was done. Past". All he could do was ensure that the Banana Group got every cent of its share of the wind-up. It was the first time that I witnessed the unflinching, uncompromising determination of a man on a mission.

The council had very good intelligence that the Philippines were likely to lodge an application to import quite early in the piece. We had been monitoring it for some time and gained valuable experience from the Ecuadorian 'application'.

The imports contingency plan was revisited and by sheer force of personality, Len sold the Banana Imports Fighting Fund (BIFF) levy to the growers and industry. Originally established in 1989 in the Ecuadorian campaign, this fund was the key to success. We were going to need large sums of money to fight this campaign so guaranteeing a continuing source of income was vital. Len never ever forgot this component and the added burden on growers. He constantly monitored their ability to pay and adjusted the amount accordingly.

Len and the council wanted a comprehensive strategy that detailed every step in the process to enable us to hit the ground running on day one. Our four-pronged

strategy of legal, scientific, economic and social impact (public relations) was developed. This was an indication of the precision with which Len wanted to mount our defence and the professionalism for which he was to become widely respected.

We were advised by politicians from the deputy Prime Minister down as well as senior bureaucrats not to take a legal path but Len remained convinced that this was a crucial component of the strategy.

It was to prove so correct. Displaying a noted integrity, he insisted that we brief five of the top law firms in the country and tender the business.

This led to a highly successful relationship with Corrs Chambers without whom we could not have achieved what we did. The contracting of highly respected professionals from all the relevant fields followed, often circumventing Biosecurity Australia in its efforts to engage these people. We got the best.

Delving into the minutiae of the issues was not Len's brief and as a good leader should, he left this to his staff and professionals. He quickly became the face of the campaign. For an intensely private person this was not an easy act. The amount of time he spent away from his family and business to ensure he remained across all the issues was enormous and his input invaluable. All of the consultants continually commented on "what a smart man that Len is" and constantly utilised his knowledge. Many thanks should be given to Sharon and the broader family for their unstinting support.

Public speaking is not an activity that comes easily to anyone. Len had little to no experience. As usual he confronted it and determined that it was a necessary activity required by the situation. He went on to master it in his own style. Another indication of the sheer tenacity

and dedication of a born leader.

Len is not a loud person. Unlike some he does not use a thousand words when one hundred will do. He is a good listener. He is decisive and I have never heard him express regret over a decision. His personal interaction with politicians was necessary and I suspect he even enjoyed this part. His quiet but determined demeanour ensured that we were listened to. In his own confident quiet way he could intimidate but never in a cocky fashion. I know that he was respected by all those whose path he crossed. His integrity was universally acknowledged.

Genuinely good company at social gatherings, many ideas and directions were hatched over meals and drinks. Len was probably at his best at these functions as he could relax, be himself and discuss issues his own way i.e. informally. He was adept at picking people's brains, getting to the point and discarding the non-useful. I know that I particularly enjoyed his company over a few drinks and did so often. We achieved a lot during these forums at Len's home-away-from-home, the Crest Hotel.

As Len would by now be telling me to wind up, I'll do so. He would probably have been gesturing to me to do that a page ago!

Whilst an incredibly hard and stressful campaign, this imports case brought out character in everyone involved. It created some enduring friendships and memories that will last to the grave. It defined people. It developed and nurtured people. It set people in new directions. It created history in our industry and in Australian primary industry.

How fortunate the Australian banana industry has been to have Len Collins.

Ross Boyle  
former CEO  
Australian Banana Growers' Council

## Mentor and industry guardian

Over the years, the banana industry has been kind to many people because there are a whole range of other sectors relying on its health and strength.

Many of us have benefitted but very few have contributed to the Australian banana industry at the level which Len Collins has to ensure its longevity.

Having known Len most of my life, I can remember the time Len devoted to his position at Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers many years ago.

It was not until recently, when I had a young family of my own, that I realise how valuable was the time Len spent away from Sharon and their children Len Jr and Kate and how selfless was his family in their support of Len's industry work.

In the past couple of decades, the family business L & R Collins has grown through astute and courageous business decisions coupled with hard work. To sacrifice time away on industry business at crucial moments cannot be underestimated.

Late one night while driving back from Cairns Airport in a tired state from attending meetings in Brisbane, Len was caught speeding. The three points he lost from his licence and the fine are things that are not compensated. Being with us earlier this year at the Eighth Australian

Banana Industry Congress while his only daughter Kate gave birth to her first child are sacrifices made in the call of duty.

When I accompanied Len to Canberra several years ago to distribute ripe bananas in the offices of Parliament House while he lobbied politicians and their staff, I gained an appreciation of the extent of the network he developed over the years.

The respect afforded to Len, from both sides of politics, is testament to the principled, persistent, intelligent and accurate debate that Len, and the team he strategically assembled, put forward over the years.

On a personal note Len, I thank you for your advice and support over the years. On many occasions you acted as my patient mentor.

On a wider note, thank you for what you have given to the banana industry and may your grandchildren benefit from your legacy.

Richard Clayton  
national sales manager  
MacKays Banana Marketing

## Bananas ran an impeccable campaign

Len Collins headed up one of the most colourful and effective community-based lobbying efforts I have seen in my 12 years in Canberra.

It was a deft combination of good science, good communication and good politics. As a result, the banana growers forced a complete review of the way Biosecurity Australia operated and got an outrageously flawed import risk analysis overturned.

He is one of the best rural lobbyists I ever dealt with. And he delivered a tonne of bananas to Senators and MPs out of my office. Although we all enjoyed the bananas, it took weeks to get the smell of bananas out of the carpet.

John Cherry

Australian Democrats Senator for Queensland and Senate Rural Affairs Committee member (2001-5)

Now executive director, Council of Mayors (SEQ)

## No nonsense style

I first met Len Collins 12 years ago when he was a part of the interview panel for the North Queensland Banana Industry Liaison Officer position for which I had applied.

Len conducted the interview in his trademark no nonsense style and I can remember thinking as I left the interview that if I did get the job, I could learn a lot from working with this man.

Len has the innate qualities of a natural born leader - a combination of quiet confidence, determination, decisiveness and clear thinking.

As I came to know Len better I also came to appreciate his many other qualities: his passion for the banana industry, his love and respect for family, his moral compass, his social conscience, his self belief and laser-like focus, his work ethic, his wit and good humour and especially his loyalty.

However I would regard Len's greatest quality as his ability to bring out the very best in the people around him.

If Len felt you were capable of undertaking an important task he would not hesitate to give you the opportunity to prove yourself,

even if you doubted your own ability to do the job you knew that Len believed in you and you worked damn hard to ensure his trust in you was not misplaced.

And on the rare occasion where perhaps things did not go according to plan Len never apportioned blame, we simply discussed what lessons had been learned and we resolved not to make the same mistakes again and we never did!

Len understands the role of leadership better than anyone I know. He genuinely engages with people, seeks their opinions and advice on issues but understands that at the end of the day the responsibility for taking the decision ultimately rests with the person in charge.

He never shies away from making a tough decision if he believes it is the right decision and once he has made up his mind he acts quickly and decisively.

I would not trade any of the experiences I shared with Len during the imports campaign for anything.

It was an absolute pleasure to work alongside him and I will miss his insight and guidance immensely.

All the best in your retirement Len, you and Sharon have earned it.

Tony Heidrich  
chief executive officer  
ABGC

## Debt of gratitude

I have known Len Collins since I started growing bananas nearly 20 years ago, but got to know him better in 2000 when I took on an industry position at a time when Len was the newly appointed imports committee chairman.

I remember the first time I had to get up and speak in front of the press at the launch of Plant Health Australia's cost-sharing agreement in Cairns where I was accompanied by Len Collins and Tony Heidrich.

The PHA spokesperson went first, then it was up to me to respond for the banana industry.

I was terrified, very nervous, my hands were all over the place, I had trouble with my papers and I was looking all about the room. Needless to say, I came across rather poorly.

When I returned to my seat, Len asked if I wanted some advice. His advice was to take a good grip on the lecturn firmly with both hands, lock your eyes on something or someone in the room and I would improve out of sight.

I took the advice and it has helped me over the years, however it has never stopped me from being nervous.

Len, I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank you for the help and support that you gave me during my time at ABGC.

My family and I, and the industry owe you a debt of gratitude for the work you have done over the past 20 years.

First, on the banana committee and the ABGC board and then to come out of retirement to chair the imports committee for nine years, to which you gave your time freely with no remuneration.

Although it was a long campaign, Len can be well-satisfied with the outcome.

The strategy and plans implemented by Len's team have been first rate and it must give him satisfaction to see some of those he strategized against fall by the wayside.

For an industry to succeed it needs people who are willing to be actively involved and Len Collins is one person who - without his commitment and dedication to our fight on the imports issue - we would, without a doubt, have imported bananas here today.

Len, enjoy your retirement it is well deserved but I still reserve the right to call on you for advice from time to time.

Best wishes and our thanks

Patrick Leahy

ABGC imports committee chairman  
ABGC chairman 2004-2007

# Respect and admiration

THANK YOU LEN.

These words are the simplest and best way of expressing our respect and admiration for your achievements.

Your bipartisan approach to politics earned respect as you put together a team of people which enabled you to demonstrate a sound scientific and reasoned approach to a very complex issue.

Because of your ability, you have helped avoid much potential destruction to our industry, our people and our environment. There are thousands of people who can go to bed at night and now be assured they will have a job to go to the next day.

It is rather sad that most Australians will not realise how much they owe to one person. But we do Len, and we thank you very much for your sterling efforts.

Robert MacKay  
MacKay Bananas  
Tully

# Thanks for the memories

Working with Len Collins during the past nine years as media advisor to the ABGC imports committee has been an inspirational experience, and a privilege.

Len always had the best information which was pure gold in enabling us to work the media angles.

We had the media conference formula down pat, at my local shops in Toowong Village, because we did so many of them.

This central location is just a few kilometres from the Mt Coot-tha TV studios and with each report we'd send out a media alert, whip up the banana banners as a backdrop for the cameras, get some fresh Australian bananas from Fruity Capers and away Len would go. Then, we'd go around the corner to do the ABC Country Hour.

Len became a seasoned performer after a few rounds of this, but I remember discussing our media plan ahead of the release of the first draft IRA when Len wanted a day to digest the report before doing any media.

He took a little convincing, but Len soon got the hang of what made a fresh and lively media grab, and he supported my drive to get industry's views out there as fast as possible with each new announcement.

Len always made himself available to me and to the media because he understood how we worked at all hours.

It says a lot about Len and Sharon that they willingly backtracked several hundred kilometres across the border from New South Wales to do another 'gig' at Toowong when the final IRA was announced at short notice in November 2008.

Through the years, we used various conventional and creative media strategies and I value the fact Len and Tony empowered me to do this important work.

Len was fun to be around and kept up with current news and events. This meant he was well-informed and able to see the big picture.

I will always remember the twinkle in Len's eye, and the cheeky boyish grin, as he let slip (if he wanted me to know) the latest tactic in this long-drawn out process. It was like sport to Len, but he played to win and it was great to be on his team.

Len will no doubt keep his finger on the pulse in coming years. It is the mark of a good leader to ensure there is a succession plan and Len has chosen well in Patrick.

Thanks for the memories Len. It's been great working with such a pro and I look forward to catching up around the banana traps for many years to come.

Jane Milburn  
media advisor

# The science perspective - Ian Muirhead

When the threat of imports first reared its ugly head, the industry needed a determined, far-sighted, knowledgeable and effective leader. "Cometh the moment, cometh the man".

Len Collins and I had previously worked together on quarantine diseases. I was Chair of the Banana Industry Protection Board and he represented the industry when black Sigatoka first appeared in Cape York and Moko was discovered in heliconias near Cairns.

Even then, it was apparent that management of these issues required more than just technical knowledge. People and their livelihoods were involved, and it required special skill to achieve the best result. We also learned that often there are no clear answers to technical questions, and, in the absence of certainty, it is wise to take a conservative approach.

The Australian banana market, while not large by world standards, attracted the multinational exporting companies that dominate the world trade. The first application to import bananas from the Philippines came in 1995, although Ecuador had previously made inquiries. Len realised then that the situation was potentially serious - and he was right.

The Australian Banana Growers' Council decided to send representatives to Central and South America to see first-hand what these pests were like. Len and I visited Honduras, Costa Rica and Ecuador in 1996. Colombia was also on the itinerary, but a drug-related bombing in the town hall in

Medellin a week before our arrival caused a rethink; there is a limit to unnecessary risk-taking!

That trip was an eye-opener. Black Sigatoka was sweeping Central and South American countries. In Costa Rica, under near-perfect growing conditions, growers were applying up to 50 sprays a year, and resistance to the main systemic fungicides was getting out of hand. Certainly other pests were important, but black Sigatoka was frightening.

I am sure that experience influenced Len's determination to push for eradication of the disease when it later entered the main production area in north Queensland, as well as his strong opposition to imports from countries with black Sigatoka.

The saga of the imports issue unfolded over more than a decade, and is perhaps not over yet. Len presided over three draft import applications, the establishment of the fighting fund, two Senate inquiries, dozens of high-level meetings with quarantine officials, many grower meetings, and two trips to the Philippines. Len led the fight from the front with determination and courage.

Early in the piece, Len realised that the science was important, but that success would also require legal involvement, political activity, and a first-class communications strategy. He identified and engaged experienced independent consultants and advisors to cover all four areas - from CSIRO, state departments, universities, and consultancies.

Others will comment on these aspects, but I believe that the legal involvement in particular strengthened the scientific case because it forced the system to take the industry's position seriously, and it required our scientists to construct the industry case in a consistent and formal format. The contributions made by Stuart Clague and Tom Brennan of Corrs Chambers were pivotal. So was the communications strategy led by Jane Milburn.

I also acknowledge the importance of the support given to all of us by the ABGC board and staff, and the growers. Tony Heidrich and Jann Bonsall, and before them Ross Boyle and his colleagues, organised a host of meetings and other things. These things don't happen just by chance, and we appreciated the assistance.

Tony shared the leadership role with Len, and participated in many of our meetings. Patrick Leahy became actively involved in the past couple of years. The board provided strong and consistent backing, and the growers provided much of the finance through levies. There would have been no campaign without this support.

One critical issue was the evolution of Australia's current system for assessing import applications. In the early 1990s, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service simply excluded imports of many horticultural and agricultural commodities because the risks from exotic threats were considered too great. This position became untenable when all countries were forced to justify quarantine restrictions, adopt formal risk assessment methods, and define an "Appropriate Level of Protection". Biosecurity Australia was born.

Risks had to be quantified, and this put

the cat among the pigeons because it was all new territory. ABGC had to endure the many attempts at developing the methodology. The banana industry, led by Len, played an important role because it was one of the few horticultural industries able to raise the funds to challenge the system when necessary; and it was necessary many times. The apple and banana industries together forged positions which set the stage for horticultural industries in general.

In 1996, Len and I visited export plantations and government organisations in the Philippines to make sure that we understood the pest issues and how the authorities were proposing to deal with them. On our first night in Mindanao we were invited to dinner, an event which turned out to be a formal meeting of the major exporter organisation and complete with pop-up microphones. Len was asked how he intended to respond to the import application. He looked the exporter straight in the eye and replied, "Just like you would do if your industry was under threat - we're going to fight it!" That broke the tension; they understood completely. The discussion proceeded civilly thereafter.

Len has always been a strong and loyal advocate of a scientific approach to the industry's pest and disease issues. He supported a later mission to the Philippines for both scientists and growers, and Raymond White and I visited Brazil, Costa Rica and Panama and Ecuador for an update on pest and disease issues.

He involved Ron Petersen, who had played a central role in eradicating black Sigatoka from the Tully Valley; Richard Piper on entomology; Dr Rob Fullerton, from DSIR in New Zealand; Dr David Jones, a consultant; Dr Mark Fegan, Prof John Irwin

and Dr Juliane Henderson (then) from The University of Queensland; Professor James Dale, QUT, as well as other biological scientists.

Len chaired all of our scientific meetings, and quietly encouraged us to think and work as a team. He listened while we debated the technical points in thousands of pages of carefully written scientific documents, sometimes point by point. By example, he ensured that we respected the skills and contributions of other team members, and that we challenged any weak points - whether in the documents from Biosecurity Australia, or in our own responses.

The friendships that developed between team members persist to this day. On contentious points, such as the effectiveness of a chlorine dip as a disinfectant, he asked us to prepare detailed reviews. When information was lacking, he commissioned additional research.

As the science of risk assessment evolved, Len realised that the mathematical aspects were central to the issue. This is a highly specialised subject. He thus engaged Dr Ray Correll and his colleagues from CSIRO, and later Professor Tony Pettitt and Dr Rob Reeves from QUT.

These specialists played critical roles, especially in identifying errors and general faults in the methodology being used by AQIS. Their work resulted in the withdrawal of one of the draft risk assessments, and significant amendments to others. Some of the scientific detail was well above my head, and I suspect Len's, but he backed his experts and the results are there for all to see.

From my point of view, I think that everything that could be done to protect the industry from exotic threats has been done. There may be more water to pass under this bridge, but regardless of the final outcome, I believe that the industry has been exceptionally well served by Len over this long campaign.

Len, I congratulate you on a job well done. Thank you for your loyal support and friendship.

Ian Muirhead  
industry consultant

## Reams of paper consumed

I began working for Len Collins in August 2000, knowing very little about the banana imports campaign and Len's role as ABGC imports committee chairman.

A few months later, Len and Sharon decided to take off with their caravan for some time off. But there was never a break for Len from his duties on the imports campaign. He would phone often regarding faxes and emails. Numerous reams of paper were printed - a copy for Len, and one for the file.

Over the past 10 years, Len had many trips away - often having gone to the farm early to organise workers then he would fly in with minutes to spare, checking for emails and faxes, collect his things and head off to the airport.

Having worked for Len on the farm for a couple of years, my husband Willie became farm manager in April, 2004. After a very

short initiation, Len was off to yet another imports meeting. While he was away, Len would keep in constant contact with Willie because knowing what was happening on the farm was also imperative to him.

Len has made a significant contribution to the banana industry, in particular the imports campaign. His dedication and tireless efforts to ensure the security of the industry are an inspiration for all.

During the time we have worked for Len and Sharon, they have watched our daughters grow and been involved in all our lives in a very positive and friendly way.

Both Willie and I feel that it is a great privilege to work for Len, and we hope to do so for many more years to come.

Denise Neibling

## Len is no fence-sitter

Every industry should have a Len Collins. He is the ‘bulldog guardian’ of the growers. He sees things before they happen and is always ready with a plan of action when the proverbial is about to hit the fan.

Len’s insight into the workings of politics and government agencies has been invaluable in managing difficult situations facing the industry.

He has earned respect from both sides of the fence - from growers who see Len as their leader in their fight against imports and from government who might not like what he says, but respect his ability to present a forceful yet well-researched argument on behalf of his fellow growers.

Over the years, Len and I did not agree on every issue, but the good thing about him is that he never leaves you wondering how he feels on an issue.

He is definitely not a ‘fence sitter’, nor does he make snap judgments without being able to support his case.

His sixth sense about issues is seldom off the mark and whether you agree with him or not, you certainly have to respect his insight, determination and backbone (I won’t say guts, Len).

The very best wishes for your roving retirement from the official side of the banana industry, however I suspect you will be like John Farnham and his singing comebacks!

Len just loves his banana industry and we thank him for his dedication and hard work.

Good luck Len.

David Peasley  
Horticultural Service Provider  
1 November 2009

## Len is a supporter of science

Len is a mountain of a man in so many ways. He is a successful farmer at Tully, a grazier on the wet coast and the inland, a leader of industry, and an inspiration to many.

Len is a believer in the importance of research to industry and I have had the pleasure, as a researcher, of working with Len in three areas - research projects, black Sigatoka eradication and banana imports.

He would always listen to any proposal put forward by researchers including long-term and short-term proposals, as well as both theoretical and practical proposals. Len was quick to identify the significance of each project and always supported projects with practical applications and a good chance of success.

Len has been involved with black Sigatoka for many years and believes that eradication of any disease detected is the only way to ensure the disease is kept out of Australian bananas. He was a vigorous supporter of surveillance programs and the importance of early detections. Len's support for the early programs, which aimed to establish a buffer zone free of banana plants susceptible to black Sigatoka throughout the Cape York area between the commercial banana areas and the Torres Strait/New Guinea areas where black Sigatoka is endemic, was a major contributor to the success of later, larger eradication.

He was always concerned that the disease would be carried by members of surveillance or eradication teams back to the production areas. He regularly reminded me that a researcher was attributed with introducing black Sigatoka into the banana areas in Central America from the Pacific area.

Len was a strong supporter of eradication programs and the need to rapidly destroy all infections detected. I remember in the Weipa eradication program, where costs were escalating rapidly and with the need to move quickly, we did not have time to follow procedures which concerned our bean counters in Mareeba and Brisbane. When Len visited the area and said not to worry about them and the cost, just get on with the job and make sure no plants were missed, we knew funds would be made available.

During the Tully program, Len was a rock of support from the beginning. He said we had to do something - we could not just sit on our hands and watch black Sigatoka spread through the industry. When I outlined our plan to eradicate the infection, he was not over-enthusiastic and it was not until the program was over and black Sigatoka was successfully eradicated that Len told me he originally thought the plan wouldn't work and he didn't think there was much chance of success. But in spite of his concerns, he gave us full support and that of the industry throughout the program even when the southern stakeholders withdrew support and cut the program short.

With the import battle, Len was a tower of strength in leading the fight against the importation of bananas from the Philippines. He was always putting forward ideas, giving support and encouragement. He may not have been able to follow all the details during many prolonged and very technical discussions but he was always able to quickly pick out the significant key points and areas to pursue.

Len assembled a team of people to dissect the arguments put forward by Biosecurity Australia in support of the importation of bananas from the Philippines. He had faith in these people and always gave them his complete support. It was obvious from the beginning that forces within Biosecurity Australia favoured the import of bananas but Len never took a backward step, pushing argument after argument against those in the agency.

Well done Len.

Regards  
Ron Peterson  
industry scientist

## A commanding presence

I used to be somewhat intimidated by Len. His commanding presence and manner of speaking meant I was in awe of him and felt that if I had something to say, he might come back with a response that would leave me embarrassed and belittled.

But in 2000, I had the opportunity to travel to the Philippines with him as part of an information gathering exercise and it was then that I got to know Len much better.

I learned he was quite a character and now hold him in high regard, as a friend and colleague.

He was very demanding in respect to punctuality, something which I soon got used to. He wanted us all together at breakfast time so that we could confer and organise ourselves for the day ahead and whoever was late getting there would be well and truly reminded by Len.

The first day we arrived in the Philippines, I got to see Len's manner in action. He pulled no punches at our first meeting with the banana exporters group, stating that the reason we were visiting the Philippines was to "prevent banana imports". While this was perhaps said somewhat tongue in cheek, it helped clear the air with everyone and from that point on, we went into an open and frank discussion regarding the import application with all those present.

I think Len gained the respect of all those present at the meeting with this statement, which I had expected might have produced the opposite reaction.

The very next day when confronted with a cancelled flight from Cagayan de Oro to Davao a distance of over 1000 kilometres, we faced the situation of having to wait

until fights resumed which meant we would have missed many of the meetings and visits planned for our time there.

Len decided to take up the somewhat unusual offer of a lift from a missionary we had met and we drove in his small van the length of Mindanao over very rough roads with some security issues.

This decision ultimately made the difference between a successful fact-finding trip and one that was less so.

Many of the scientists and growers we met subsequently were amazed that we had taken such a long and difficult route to visit them. They were impressed by the efforts we made and helpful in answering our questions and providing any information we needed.

Throughout the long process of the ABGC's fight against banana imports, there have been so many meetings, Senate hearings and teleconferences where I have seen Len undertaking his role as chairman.

The main thing I remember about Len during this time was his ability to grasp technical matters, regardless of whether they were mathematical concepts or pest and disease related issues, and then decide whether more resources should be allocated to teasing out a particular issue or whether this would be precious dollars wasted. The success of the campaign I believe was ultimately due to Len's ability to get value for the import campaign money.

I feel proud to have worked with Len and so many others involved with the imports campaign and personally thank him for the efforts he has performed so well for the Australian banana industry.

Len, I wish Len you well in future.

Richard Piper

agricultural consultant

## A leader with courage

A strong and capable industry is one that relies on its own resources, not handouts, and where the leading producers also give their time for whole-of-industry activities - to do the things that individuals cannot achieve on their own.

The banana industry is outstanding in this regard with a firm grasp on what is necessary to create its own future and Len Collins is a stand out, in very good company, in his selfless contribution to the industry.

I first met Len when, as managing director of Horticulture Australia Ltd, the Board of HAL visited far north Queensland. It was just on midnight with only a few people remaining when the real business was discussed. Len realized that the industry needed another addition to the list of very capable presidents of the ABGC to support his focus on preserving the disease free status of the Australian industry on the retirement of the current president.

Every great industry leader has succession planning for the industry under control and Patrick Leahy, his target, was keen to be further involved but clearly stated that he just could not make the time available with his own family and business commitments. Needless to say, Len had his way and his judgment was impeccable so Patrick in turn provided years of dynamic leadership to the industry including the introduction of levies to fund much needed national R&D and marketing activities.

It takes a leader with courage and tenacity to take on the government and at times to take on 'political correctness' and Len stood very tall in this regard, armed with conviction based on sound science and basic common sense.

He knew that the industry people he represented did not fear competition - but they did fear the introduction of exotic diseases that would make the industry non-viable. The banana industry being one of few to have faced the ravages of an exotic disease incursion and if my memory is correct the only one in the world to defeat black Sigatoka at enormous cost and then regain disease-free status.

Len epitomises leadership at a level that many aspire to but few achieve - a great strategist, a great innovator, a great mentor and a great orator backed up with a detailed understanding of commerce, science and the government combined with the capacity to inspire others. And, with all he has had to do on banana imports, he has also become a proficient bush lawyer.

Len is a great man to have on your side and the Australian banana industry is very fortunate to have Len as its champion. I, in turn, was very fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from a true leader - my thanks Len and very best wishes for the future.

John Webster  
CEO, Foodbank Australia

# Glossary

ABGC - Australian Banana Growers' Council

AQIS - Australian Quarantine Inspection Service

BA - Biosecurity Australia

BIFF - Banana Industry Fighting Fund

BIPB - Banana Industry Protection Board

COD - Committee Of Direction, then Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers, now Growcom

DPI - Department of Primary Industries

FASTS - Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies

FTA - Free Trade Agreement

HAL - Horticulture Australia Ltd

IRA - Import Risk Analysis

RAP - Risk Assessment Panel, which conducted the IRA

SPS - Sanitary and Phyto Sanitary Agreement (WTO)

WTO - World Trade Organisation

# Gallery of images



David Peasley, Cameron MacKay, Len Collins and Jane Milburn in Canberra for the September 2006 opening of the CRC for National Plant Biosecurity at Parliament House.



Right: Cameron MacKay and Len Collins with Federal Opposition Agriculture spokesman Gavan O'Connor at the CRC opening on September 2006.





Top left: ABGC office manager Jann Bonsall and Len Collins.

Left: Len presents Senator Ron Boswell with the ABGC industry award.

Above: Dennis Rigato, Len Collins and Barry Lowe at the Seventh Australian Banana Industry Congress in 2007.



Above left: Len Collins, Patrick Leahy, Senator Ron Boswell and Senator Barnaby Joyce.



Above: The Senators with Dennis Rigato. Below: Patrick Leahy and Mark Reppel with Len, Barnaby and Ron.



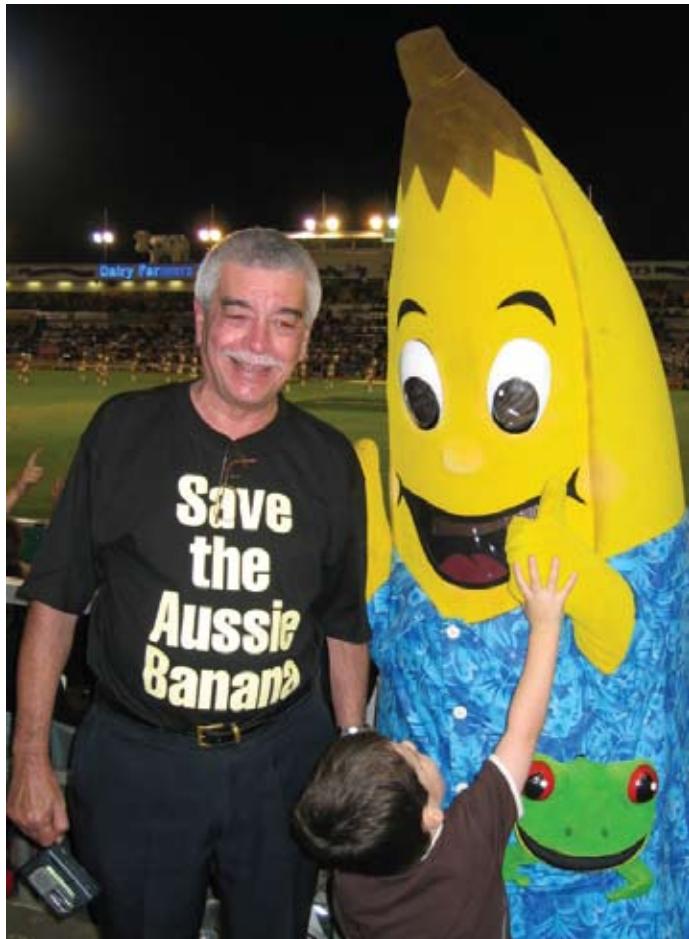


Right: Senator John Cherry, Member for Kennedy Bob Katter and Len Collins created some banana drama at Parliament House Canberra, thanks to support from banana growers, Richard Clayton and La Manna Bananas.



The Rural Press Club of Queensland tackled the banana imports issue on a number of occasions during the past seven years, with Biosecurity Australia executive manager Mary Harwood addressing the club in 2002, Senator John Cherry in 2004. New Biosecurity Australia executive manager John Cahill was guest speaker at the Rural Press Club's Ekka breakfast in 2005. After the Ekka breakfast, John Cahill caught up with Stuart Clague and Len Collins, right, and below with Jane Milburn, who was then RPC vice-president.





Helpers along the way: 4KZ radio announcer Greg Veluta with Benny, ABC rural reporter Richard Hudson interviews banana packing champion Jacqualin Tilt, and Benny hitches a ride home with Blenners.

