

Second Meeting  
Geneva, 6-10 December 2004

Meeting of Experts  
Geneva, 19-30 July 2004  
Item 5 and 6 of the agenda

## **Disease Surveillance in Australia: Plant Diseases<sup>1</sup>**

**Submitted by Australia**

### **I Introduction**

1. Plant Health Australia (PHA) is a non-profit company limited by guarantee, formed in 2000, to develop a whole of industry and whole of government approach to the development, coordination and implementation of plant health policies and management programs.

2. By working in a partnership with industry and government, PHA coordinates and brokers policy and manages projects that enhance the ability of the Australian agricultural sector and government to effectively respond to and manage the risks of exotic and emergency pests that affect commercial crops. PHA complements the work undertaken by Australian and state/territory agriculture departments and plant industry in regard to plant health. PHA works closely with its members as well as committees and statutory bodies involved in plant health, industry research and development (R&D) corporations, Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), and other related organisations in the development and coordination of national plant health projects and policies.

### **II Exotic Plant Pest Hotline (national awareness project)**

3. Early detection is the key to mounting appropriate and effective responses that have the best chance of eradicating or minimizing the impact of exotic pests. In many cases, exotic pests are not detected until they have been present in Australia for many years. PHA has been negotiating a nationally coordinated awareness and reporting system, with arrangements now in place to provide

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<sup>1</sup> The following extracts relevant to plant health surveillance projects are drawn from the *Plant Health Australia Annual Report 2002/03*, which is available at:

[http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/corporate\\_documents/uploads/030929\\_Final\\_PHA\\_AR\\_02\\_03.pdf](http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/corporate_documents/uploads/030929_Final_PHA_AR_02_03.pdf)

for prompt and efficient investigation of suspected pests. This includes:

- (a) the development and resourcing of a single phone number to report suspected exotic plant pests;
- (b) negotiating consistent arrangements with state agriculture agencies for handling and follow-up of calls;
- (c) contracting the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to develop and evaluate an e-mail system to distribute details of high-priority pests to interested industry contacts; and
- (d) developing and implementing associated industry awareness strategies and material in conjunction with industry associations.

### **III Development of a nationally coordinated plant pest surveillance system**

4. Delivery of surveillance/monitoring programs involves a diverse range of individuals and organisations including industry, private consultants, and governments (state/territory and Australian). Surveillance and monitoring activities are crucial for:

- (a) management of pests that affect production;
- (b) supporting national and international trade (where it is dependent on pest-free status);
- (c) early detection of exotic pests; and
- (d) preventing the introduction/spread of exotic pests.

5. State based surveillance and monitoring programs have been developed over a number of years to meet specific requirements within jurisdictions, but there is no national policy on roles and responsibilities, funding options, methodologies or agreed national reporting systems. This project will examine funding options, stocktake existing surveillance and monitoring programs, develop the widest possible surveillance network, and evaluate methodologies that may allow for more cost effective surveillance activities. The surveillance network will also link with PHA projects to develop industry biosecurity plans, development of pest free areas and to establish a national diagnostic network.

### **IV Human resources involved in diagnostics**

6. In 2001, PHA commissioned a study to review the human resources involved in diagnostic science. The study, however, expanded to cover wider issues in diagnostics, such as infrastructure and funding. The study's report made key recommendations on greater national coordination of diagnostic capacity. Recommendations from this report also led to PHA holding an international workshop, *Developing a World Class Diagnostic Network*, to progress key issues in terms of diagnostic networking and accreditation.

### **V Workshop—developing a world class diagnostic network**

7. PHA held a workshop in conjunction with the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Plant Pathology in New Zealand (February 2003), to identify the requirements for maintaining an effective and responsive diagnostic capacity for exotic plant pathogens. The workshop involved discussions by leading plant pathologists on key requirements and potential issues involved in establishing a

national plant diagnostic network in Australia. The outcome of the workshop was a report making recommendations to enable further progress towards a world class diagnostic network for Australia.

## **VI Development of diagnostic capacity**

8. Development of diagnostic capability for exotic plant pests has been hampered by its noncommercial, specialised nature. Through this project, PHA has established an initial target list of serious exotic pests that affect multiple plant industries, and commissioned the development (or finalisation) of diagnostic procedures for the nominated pests. The intention is to address serious exotic threats for which there is no Australian diagnostic standard. While standards to date have been developed for a small number of identified high priority pests, additional diagnostic standards will also be identified and addressed as PHA members progress individual industry biosecurity plans.

9. PHA will continue to commission and maintain national diagnostic protocols and standards for accurate identification of priority threats through the industry biosecurity planning process. Completed standards will be made available from the PHA web site and via other appropriate means. Participants at the *Developing a world class diagnostic network* workshop agreed on the need to develop a world class diagnostic pathology and entomology diagnostic network in Australia and to develop a laboratory based accreditation scheme. In June 2003, based on workshop recommendations, PHA secured Commonwealth Budget Initiative funding for projects in both areas. PHA will progress options for a national network of plant diagnostic laboratories. A diagnostic network backed up by diagnostic standards will help ensure diagnostic advice received in emergency management situations is both accurate and timely. PHA will also begin developing options for an appropriate plant diagnostic laboratory accreditation system (covering both entomology and pathology).

## **VII Australian Plant Pest Database**

10. Australia has a number of reference collections that include pest records, with collections held by a large number of organizations across the country. Only a relatively small number of these collections have transferred information into databases that are readily accessible by agencies and organisations involved in plant health. To help address this situation, PHA began development and implementation of the Internet-based Australian Plant Pest Database (APPD) to link existing plant pest databases held by various agencies across Australia. PHA is continuing to work with stakeholders to incorporate existing databases and pest records into the APPD. Some 675,000 records are expected to be available by June 2004.

## **VIII Plant health expertise register**

11. Currently, there is no single comprehensive register of plant health expertise documented in Australia, meaning identification of relevant expertise often relies on informal networks. While a number of organisations maintain individual lists or databases of plant health practitioners, these are not necessarily comprehensive, up-to-date, or validated. PHA is seeking to identify relevant Australian expertise for inclusion in a web based expertise register, with the potential for

international linkages to be established in the longer term.

## **IX Other activities**

12. Members of the PHA management team provided input into meetings of the National Information Managers Technical Group (NIMTG). The NIMTG includes IT staff from state/territory agriculture agencies, which are collectively developing a coordinated national information system to aid emergency response activities.

## **X Further information**

13. Along with ongoing enhancement and development of the APPD, PHA intends to consult with members regarding information needs, and enhance and promote the PHA web site as the national information site for plant health management in Australia,

<http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/>.

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