

27 January 2017

The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP
Minister for Agriculture
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Re: Australia's Future Biosecurity Strategy

I write regarding the recently released report regarding the future biosecurity for Australian agriculture, specifically in reference to the grain industry.

Grain Trade Australia (GTA) support the need for a nationally coordinated and appropriately funded plant biosecurity Research, Development and Extension (RD&E) system, and the need for a long term view of plant biosecurity to ensure sufficient investment in supporting the export capacity of the industry.

By way of introduction, GTA is the focal point for the commercial grains industry within Australia. It facilitates trade and works to provide an efficient, equitable and open trading environment by providing leadership, advocacy and commercial services to the Australian grain value chain.

GTA members are responsible for over 95% of all grain storage and freight movements made each year in Australia. Over 95% of the grain contracts executed in Australia each year refer to GTA grain standards and/or trade rules.

GTA members are drawn from all sectors of the grain value chain from production to domestic end users and exporters. GTA members are involved in grain trading activities, grain storage, human and stock feed milling. A list of GTA Members is attached.

1. The Need for a Biosecurity Strategy

As a major exporter of grain on the world market, the Australian grain industry relies on its ability to meet market requirements, be they quality or phytosanitary issues. To achieve this, the industry has a strong and robust supply chain designed to understand the quality of the product and ensure grain quality and integrity is maintained and aligned with customer requirements. This is complimented by a biosecurity system that has been extremely effective at restricting the entry into our grain supply chain of many of the pests¹ that are present in our export competitor countries.

Increasingly, markets are focussing on biosecurity issues and the industry faces greater challenges to meet importing country restrictions. The risk of pest incursions the grains industry faces is growing. An ongoing robust and effective biosecurity strategy in Australia will ensure that the benefits achieved to date, and in the future, ensure Australia's competitive advantage is maintained and enhanced.

Incursion of various pests, lack of research into their prevention and methods of control should they reach Australia and a lack of focus on a national approach to biosecurity are examples that will potentially lead to a loss in reputation, increased scrutiny by overseas governments and markets and ultimately cause reduced returns for the industry. Due to the increasingly competitive nature of the global grain trade, that hard-won reputation will be difficult, if not impossible, to get back.

There is a clear consensus across the grain and other plant industries, government and relevant research stakeholders of the need for a nationally coordinated and appropriately funded plant biosecurity Research, Development and Extension (RD&E) system that is sustainable in the long term.

¹ Pests includes insects, diseases, weeds, etc.

We note the draft report of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity Review recently released by an independent expert panel. The recommendations within that report are consistent with those of the plant industries to establish a permanent research body, with the panel concluding that “there is no lead agency, national prioritisation process or coordination for biosecurity research and innovation in Australia” and that “a new national entity for cross-sectoral biosecurity research and innovation would help provide leadership and coordination and better target investment”.

2. Future Biosecurity Strategy for Grain

Since 2005 much of the responsibility for managing and funding the nationally coordinated plant biosecurity effort in Australia for grain (and other plant commodities) has been undertaken by the Plant Biosecurity CRC and previously the CRC for National Plant Biosecurity.

Unfortunately, the Plant Biosecurity CRC will cease in the middle of 2018, with no arrangements in place to enable an ongoing national biosecurity focus and coordination. GTA believes that this will be a highly detrimental step as the organisation has played a key role in supporting the industry’s market access activities.

GTA notes that as part of its Commonwealth Agreement, the Plant Biosecurity CRC is contracted to develop an improved plant health RD&E system before the end of its term in 2018.

The report “Smart Biosecurity Science” recognises that Australia’s biosecurity is currently under increased pressure and investment in the key elements of plant biosecurity being Research, Development and Extension (RD&E) has declined in recent years.

A long term view of plant biosecurity RD&E is needed to ensure sufficient investment to support the export capacity of the industry.

The investment proposal arising from that report achieves the above goals for the industry. It outlines a process that builds on the existing Plant Biosecurity CRC and focusses on a longer term strategy.

On behalf of the grain industry, we urge the Government to accept the recommendations of the Smart Biosecurity Science report in full. Through a commitment to meeting its goals, not only will the grain industry, but all plant commodity sectors and Australia in general benefit.

I thank you for your consideration of this issue and would be pleased to provide further information if required.

Yours sincerely



Pat O'Shannassy
Chief Executive Officer

cc:

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, Minister for the Environment and Energy

The Hon Luke Hartsuker MP, Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister

Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources