

INTRODUCTION

The Agricultural Produce Commission Stonefruit Committee is a committee of the Western Australian Agricultural Produce Commission (APC) representing more than 250 stonefruit growers.

Industry is being told at the State and Federal level that there is not enough taxpayer funds committed to cover the cost of government biosecurity efforts and that industry must take up the slack. The usual government response to such an issue is to hit growers with an additional levy or fee for service payment.

In Western Australia, the Agricultural Produce Commission Act 1988 provides a legal framework for producers to collect funds to provide for the development of their industry sector. A 'fee for service' is collected at the first point of sale of produce and directed towards research, marketing or other services as directed by the relevant industry committee, including biosecurity measures.

This is one of four legislated mechanisms to raise funds for biosecurity purposes. The others come under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 as Recognised Biosecurity Groups, Industry Funding Schemes and Declared Pest Rates. For example, in 2015-16 the Stonefruit Committee spent \$9150 of grower funds on a mite research project and an additional \$4000 supporting biosecurity consultations with the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) following an incursion of Queensland fruit fly in Perth in late 2015.

The Stonefruit Committee has committed to contributing \$19500 to DAFWA to support the subsequent eradication program, which cost in the order of \$750,000, including permanent staff salaries. The Pome Committee of the APC is understood to have committed \$28500.

Industry is now being asked to contribute to a permanent biosecurity fund by DAFWA to pay for further incursions rather than the current ad hoc system of voluntary contributions.

The obvious flaws in this system of raising industry funds are that the fees are voluntary; not all horticulture products are covered by an APC Committee; e.g. mangoes, kiwifruit; and not all Committees set a fee for service, meaning the rate is zero. These free riders are beneficiaries of DAFWA eradication efforts but not contributors.

Nor does this state-based model reflect the IGAB approach.

The Stonefruit Committee fears the current review of the IGAB will again place some growers at the disadvantage of contributing funds to biosecurity without sharing the load equally between risk beneficiaries, risk creators, government and the public, which benefits from a safe, high quality food production chain.

These industry contributions to biosecurity are in addition to the cost of on-orchard biosecurity protections. At the IGAB consultation in Perth producers were asked to detail the costs of pest control. The table below illustrates average costs for pest and disease control per hectare per annum in the Perth Hills, where Mediterranean fruit fly is endemic, showing production costs and stock losses equate to 27% of production.

STONEFRUIT PRODUCTION – AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME PER HECTARE	\$50,000
BIOSECURITY CONTROL COSTS/HA/PA	
Chemical/Biological products	\$3,125
Plant (Tractor, spray units, motorbikes)	\$750
Plant Maintenance (servicing, parts)	\$625
Wages (average 10 hours on pest control per week @ \$21 per hour)	\$1,365
Fuel (Diesel, petrol, oil)	\$500
Vermin (Guns, ammunition, baits, pellets, traps)	\$375
Bird Scaring Devices (Gas guns, electronic noise emitters, inflatable devices, artificial predators)	200
Netting (per hectare)	200
Shed (chemical storage)	125
Consultancy	\$250
Weed Control	\$250
Chemical certification training	\$62
Safety Apparel (carbon filters, masks, protective equipment)	\$125
Cost of damaged production	\$5000
Hygiene practices	\$250
Soil Management	\$250
Treatment costs of potential pests for export at point of storage/loading (M Bromide, Irradiation, Cold storage) \$1 per box @ average production of 2,000 boxes per hectare. Average 5% exported	\$200
TOTAL	13652
% OF INCOME/HA	27%

Comments on the IGAB

The IGAB is an excellent public policy document but after five years its effectiveness remains under-developed. The signing of IGAB brought together States and Territories (except Tasmania) to develop a unified position with the Commonwealth regarding biosecurity: A great ideal. However, Western Australia's experience has some industry sectors questioning whether WA should have followed Tasmania and remained outside the formal agreement due to the unique biosecurity status of the state which is not adequately recognised.

This immaturity of the IGAB means governments continue to have a fragmented approach to biosecurity with multiple agencies responsible for a range of plant, animal and human threats.

Two obvious shortcomings of the IGAB are that industry was not included, nor was Local Government, which has a frontline role and responsibility in managing biosecurity risks.

The Western Australian Government relied on the IGAB to include a Declared Pest Rate funding mechanism in the BAM Act which gives responsibility to all landholders and

managers, including local government for managing declared pests (which include weeds and pest animals) on their property.

Our Committee hopes this consultation process may see Government acknowledge there needs to be a much stronger link to establishing biosecurity goals with industry stakeholders and local government.

Also lacking from the current multi-agency approach is a co-ordinated and mandated response between tiers of government. The recent introduction of the Biosecurity Act 2015 demonstrated that there is no formal reporting mechanism existing between border controls by Australian Quarantine inspectors and State Inspectors to enforce WA Biosecurity import regulations. Informal networks are relied on to alert WA Inspectors of biosecurity risks. This is a “more by good luck than good management” approach to protecting WA’s unique biosecurity status.

The introduction of the Act and subsequent determination also left WA exposed as state-based import restrictions were not automatically included in the BICON, putting at risk regional freedoms that provide a market advantage to WA industry.

Concerted industry lobbying corrected some of the oversights delivered by the Biosecurity Act determination but not all. This is a major flaw in the development of biosecurity controls and points to a one-size fits all national biosecurity approach that gives precedence to international trade and devalues state area freedoms.

Conclusion

The Stonefruit Committee endorses the position of the WA Farmers Federation that industry does not need a new biosecurity levy.

Apart from State funding contributions industry pays levies including Plant Health Australia, Animal Health Australia, Declared Species Groups, land services/Shire rates, Industry Funding Schemes and contributions to Treasury through tax.

What is needed is a review to realign and consolidate current biosecurity plans and programs to maximise limited resources and funds and recognises that risk creators as well as the beneficiaries contribute to the cost of biosecurity.

Otherwise, the IGAB is a policy without practical effect.

To make the IGAB deliver on the principle that biosecurity is a shared responsibility consideration should be given to raising funds from risk creators.

International travellers already pay a small fee for biosecurity purposes. This should be expanded to include interstate air travel and a fee on the logistics chain - transport, wholesale agents and retailers - who benefit from bringing high risk products to Western Australia from interstate as well as overseas.