

SA GROWER

Potato protocols amended

POTATOES SA

BY ROBBIE DAVIS, CEO

LATE last month I was invited to address 200 delegates at the National Biosecurity Committee's 2018 National Biosecurity Forum in Canberra.

My topic was 'Prepare: Business continuity and producer readiness'. I was able to demonstrate the perfect example of working very closely with our state and federal governments' — biosecurity agencies, the committees under them, and with industry bodies and their stakeholders to achieve practical, logical, workable outcomes that actually sustain trade.

It is essential that we liaise and problem-solve more closely at all levels as the agencies are working to protect our industries. If they do not have an understanding of the issues and, more importantly, industry needs, biosecurity agencies cannot help us be sustainable and enter and then sustain export markets.

I believe it is often industry's fault if biosecurity protocols and quarantine meas-

ures are deemed ineffective, inadequate or unfair.

One of the national biosecurity principles is that biosecurity is a shared responsibility among all system participants, and I couldn't agree more.

Since the 2017 detection of the exotic tomato potato psyllid in WA, industry stakeholders in the eastern jurisdictions have been concerned about the impact of regulatory movement conditions on produce that may spread the pest if it is detected across the respective jurisdictions.

Discussions held collaboratively between the Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority (formerly ViCSPA) and Potatoes SA with their respective state jurisdictions resulted in the October 2017 request to the Plant Health Committee to take into account the economic impact of imposing regulatory conditions on the movement of potato tubers between jurisdictions.

The potato industry in the eastern states is entirely dependent on the unrestricted



Potatoes SA is the voice for seed producers, growers, fresh market, packers, processors, marketers, exporters, wholesalers and retailers.

movement of material across state borders and regions.

Interruptions to the supply of potatoes through trade restrictions imposed by a biosecurity threat, such as TPP, would devastate businesses, resulting in a national shortage of potatoes but, more importantly, the closure of businesses and decimation of the industry.

Finally in October this year, the PHC accepted the 'Block of 4' or 'Eastern block' approach to an incursion of TPP in NSW, Qld, Vic or SA. This means that the four states will trade as one – a

harmonised logical, sensible, rational approach.

Specifically for potato tubers, PHC took into consideration the following:

- Potato tubers are not traded with green leafy material
- Potato tubers are not a direct vector for TPP
- WA had demonstrated CLso (the bacterium associated with zebra chip) freedom through nationally-endorsed surveillance and testing protocols
- All jurisdictions will collaborate in an ongoing

TPP monitoring program

- A CLso preparedness plan is to be developed, taking into consideration the unique situation Australia finds itself in of having TPP but no evidence of CLso.

It is critical that business continuity is maintained.

So what would have happened if there had been an incursion on the eastern seaboard in the past 18 months?

If a psyllid was found in, say, Ceduna, the South Australian borders would have shut to the north and to the east. The costs would be significant.

- Seed: Huge impact on interstate production capacity
- Processing: Major impact on processing capacity as four of the five largest processors are reliant on interstate transport of potatoes. The impact between March and June would equal \$42.5 million
- Fresh: Daily loss of \$2.2m and annual losses of more than \$400m annually.

This decision is a significant economic win for the Australian potato industry and demonstrates the essential collaboration required between the public and private sectors.

It is up to industry to provide the issues, concerns and economic relevance to the regulators so that this information forms the reason for protocols, and the logic for de-regulation in some instances, to allow business to continue and Australian agribusiness to thrive.

In fact, the experience in WA to-date has indicated that the cost impact has come from trade restrictions more than from TPP management.