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ABGC TO JOIN DISCUSSIONS ON NEW TR4 PLAN

The Australian banana industry's peak body will participate in upcoming talks on a new operational plan for the ongoing response to banana plant disease Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4).

At its quarterly Board meeting held last week, Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) directors agreed the ABGC would represent banana growers in discussions on the plan.

Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) has been managing the response since TR4 was confirmed a year ago on a banana farm in the Tully Valley and during that time the ABGC has been providing advice on farm biosecurity issues.

ABGC Chair Doug Phillips said directors held discussions with senior BQ managers during last week's Board meeting on the TR4 response and the operational plan for its current, second phase. The response is now in a Management Response phase after the initial Emergency Response phase ended last year.

"The ABGC would like to thank Biosecurity Queensland for its work in managing the TR4 response over the past year and also thank everyone in the banana industry and our local communities for their biosecurity efforts," Mr Phillips said.

"During the past year, the ABGC's work has included representing the banana industry in discussions with BQ on the best way to control TR4 in North Queensland and to provide advice on how to maximise the success of biosecurity on and around banana farms.

"We now look forward to being involved in discussions on the actions that will be taking place under the new operational plan. These actions will be of crucial importance to the banana industry and our local banana growing communities as we continue the work to contain TR4 and reduce the risk of it spreading."

Mr Phillips said the ABGC Board had also discussed priorities for the TR4 response and would seek a review of the Biosecurity standards and guidelines document first developed in April last year by BQ with the assistance of the ABGC.

"The standards and guidelines document sets out quarantine standards for TR4-infested properties and guidelines for other banana farms and is designed to be continually updated. The ABGC believes it would be timely to conduct an update now, in conjunction with discussions on the operational plan.

The Board meeting also heard presentations from Tully grower Patrick Leahy and ABGC Research and Development Manager Rosie Godwin on a banana industry visit to two major international banana-growing regions affected by TR4, the Philippines and Taiwan. Both made the visit in February along with Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Principal Nematologist Tony Pattison.

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The two presented information on the development of TR4-tolerant varieties by the Taiwan Banana Research Institute (TBRI) that are being grown in Taiwan and the Philippines and banana production and biosecurity methods being used in disease-affected areas.

They also reported on the extensive spread of TR4 in the regions they visited and emphasised that containment must be the top priority for North Queensland.

Other issues discussed at the Board meeting included the other major disease incursion affecting the industry, Banana Freckle, which is currently being eradicated in the Northern Territory.

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