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2020 vision for Australia's plant biosecurity system

It's rare to see governments and industries all agreeing on how best to support agriculture, forestry and the environment but that is exactly what has happened with development of Australia's first National Plant Biosecurity Strategy.

The Strategy, released today, has the endorsement of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, state and territory primary industry agencies, and Australia's major plant industries. It is the culmination of more than three year's work by Plant Health Australia (PHA) who coordinated its preparation and reflects the inputs of hundreds of expert stakeholders.

In presenting a vision for the national plant biosecurity system the Strategy looks at the challenges Australia will need to overcome in the next 10 years and what steps will need to be taken. Realisation of this vision will better protect Australia and Australians from the negative impacts of plant pests, benefit market access for plant products, sustain Australia's high quality and reliable food supply, and preserve environmental health and amenity.

The Strategy's call for improved national coordination and cooperation is the key according to Plant Health Australia (PHA) Chairman, Dr Tony Gregson AM. "While jurisdictions and industries have made separate commitments to biosecurity through various plans and programs, we now have a cohesive national strategy. By engaging all stakeholders we have developed a common understanding of the areas of potential weakness in our pest, disease and weed defenses and what we need to do to address them."

The importance of Australia's plant biosecurity system and the many pressures it faces was recognized in the 2008 independent review into Australia's quarantine and biosecurity arrangements – the *Beale Review*. Since then, the Australian Government has been progressively implementing a range of high level reforms. The National Plant Biosecurity Strategy complements and supports the Beale Review and this process of reform. "The National Plant Biosecurity Strategy is not the only vehicle for delivering essential reforms but it will play a vital part. I call on everyone who took part in the Strategy's development, and those with an interest in plant biosecurity, to get behind it," said Dr Gregson.

Dr Gregson points out, "Biosecurity is very much on the radar right now given the increased public and media interest in the issue of global food security and some high profile incursions we have seen here in Australia. While our geography provides many natural advantages in keeping threats at bay we cannot afford to drop our guard. There is just too much at stake. Production from Australia's plant and forestry industries alone are worth \$25 billion annually, and we have a priceless environment to protect. With 60,000 km of coastline and hundreds of serious exotic plant pests, it is no small task."

"Among the myriad of challenges, there is ever increasing and more rapid movement of people and produce across state and national borders. More than 1.8 million containers of cargo and 150 million mail items arrive in

Australia each year. Even with a world standard border biosecurity system their remains a risk that exotic plant pests will breach our natural and man-made defenses with catastrophic consequences.”

“We are also facing challenges with climate variability and climate change which are predicted to see pests expanding beyond their knowrange into new environments, extending losses to plant production and the environment.”

At the same time there are fewer people being trained in plant biosecurity—the number of graduates from university agricultural programs is declining. “The signs are that we will have shortages of specialists in key disciplines in the future which could affect our ability to manage serious plant pests in a timely manner and minimize impacts on farmers and communities” he said.

Though endorsement of the Strategy is a good start perhaps the more difficult task lies ahead, according to Dr Gregson. “The Members of Plant Health Australia have endorsed the Strategy, paving the way for further cooperation between plant industries and governments. Now that we have agreed direction, the next job is to set out a plan and timetable for action. As recommended by the Strategy, PHA will lead this work. To get off on the right foot I now call on all stakeholders to support the next phase as we move to develop an implementation plan.”

The National Plant Biosecurity Strategy is available on Plant Health Australia’s website at www.phau.com.au/NPBS

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BACKGROUND INFO:

Plant Health Australia (PHA)

PHA is the national coordinator of the government-industry partnership for plant biosecurity in Australia. As a not-for-profit company, it services the needs of its Members and independently advocates on behalf of the national plant biosecurity system. PHA’s efforts help minimise plat pest impacts, enhance Australia’s plant health status, assist trade, safeguard the livelihood of producers, support the sustainability and profitability of plant industries and the communities that rely up on them, and preserve environmental health and amenity.

Visit www.phau.com.au for further information.