

NURSERY PAPERS

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Plant Health in Australia

Historically, interstate biosecurity risks within Australian horticulture have been focused on the produce from food based crops and the likely impact on state based primary industries. In recent years state biosecurity agencies have identified the increased pest risks associated with interstate green-life trade and are acting to minimise these risks through plant movement regulations. The nursery industry must adapt to this increased attention and enhanced regulatory pressure through professional on-farm monitoring, record keeping and pest management.

In this Nursery Paper Grant Dalwood, Nursery & Garden Industry South Australia (NGISA) Industry Development Officer (IDO) discusses plant health in Australia and the newly implemented South Australia Plant Health Act 2009 and how it affects those who are both exporting to and importing into South Australia.



Plant Health in Australia

Who oversees plant health in Australia?

Australia operates under a federated system of government and as such the nation's interstate regulatory controls have been developed within the individual States and Territories of Australia. Due to increased access to markets across Australia and the threat of new pest introductions via international trade and tourism biosecurity is raising its profile across all levels of government in Australia.

Each State and Territory in Australia has the constitutional right to enact biosecurity legislation and manage the risks associated with interstate trade as it see's fit. State biosecurity agencies have the roll to enforce regulations by way of Plant Health Standards (PHS), regulations, protocols, etc proclaimed by Acts of Parliament.

The development of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) has for the first time brought together industry and government in a clearly defined partnership agreement in managing biosecurity emergencies. Under this deed Plant Health Australia, a private entity owned by stakeholders, coordinates the relationship

between governments (state and federal) and peak industry bodies such as NGIA. These industry bodies and government agencies are formal signatories to the EPPRD and therefore are legally required to abide by certain obligations as identified within the deed.

Each State and Territory has the responsibility to manage their identified biosecurity risks through regulations and protocols that underpin their Plant Health Standards. Although this State-based system has many advantages when dealing with local state based issues, there are inconsistencies between states that have caused confusion amongst industry members as well as added business costs.

These regulatory anomalies have been recognised by federal and state governments and through the EPPRD it has been hoped that these differences would be negotiated into uniform protocols across Australia. To achieve this, under the EPPRD, the National Management Group (NMG) was established. The NMG consists of industry, commonwealth, state and territory

governments and has the role of developing national consensus on emergency plant pest management strategies. Since its inception the NMG has facilitated the majority of states and territories to combine to deliver unified positions on most emergency plant pests with only one or two notable exceptions.



Quality logistical and plant inspection procedures are important for good plant health procedures - Photo courtesy of Native Plant Wholesale

A look at the South Australian Plant Health Act 2009

As of August 1, 2009 the South Australia Plant Health Act 2009 (SA PHA09) became legally binding. It has similar, but individual demands for freighters, importers and exporters of greenlife. It has been part of the ideology of the Department of Primary Industries & Resources of South Australia (PIRSA) to create a set of protocols that:

- Are easy to work with (SA imports a large amount of green-life stock and

has extensive borders to all mainland Australian States) and cope with many different import/export scenarios

- Maintain consistency with the existing SA system so they do not create added administrative costs
- Protect the State's \$1.5 billion vine, fruit, vegetable and field crop sectors
- Maintain SA's fruit fly-free status

- Recognise national arrangements for plant produce exports so the State is well positioned to respond to incursions of plant pests and diseases
- Are in tune with ever increasing financial demands of supporting governmental systems
- Provide traceability of plant imports without undue hardship for stakeholders

Implications of South Australia's new plant health regulations

As mentioned previously, South Australia has extensive borders with all Australian mainland states and therefore industry deals with many different import and export regulations. Under SA PHA09, PIRSA has sought to strengthen the processes that are used on a daily basis for the clearance of commercial levels of non compliant plant stocks coming into the State without causing unnecessary administration or hardship.

Some of the main features of this Act that will affect the nursery industry are:

1. Transporters of all plants or host material must supply a manifest before reaching a border crossing

- The manifest gives PIRSA a clinical written document that a particular business has sent stock into SA. The manifest document is used as a reference so PIRSA can oversee the movement of plant stock into SA
- The responsibility is on the transporter to comply with these regulations. Those who do not abide by the regulations of SA PHA09 can be severely fined
- If a transporter can't produce a manifest or Plant Health Certificate (PHC) at a roadblock they can be delayed while a Quarantine Direction Order is issued which places plant product into quarantine until PIRSA is supplied with either document
- Infringement notices are likely to be issued if neither document can be produced after arrival or products without approval are released from quarantine
- For multiple deliveries, drivers will need a PHC for each consignee (if one is required)

- PHCs will no longer be accepted in envelopes or cartons, as each PHC and complete listing of plants must be produced at the time of importing into SA (if a PHC is required.)



Trucks lining up at a PIRSA border checkpoint - Photo courtesy of PIRSA



This type of display van used for Interstate sales will require a manifest on entering SA



Green-life stock with fruit attached that can be a host for fruit fly must have a Plant Health Certificate

2. The business (exporter) that is sending goods into SA must conform to all facets of SA's PHS

- Many plants and host material are free from import restrictions and can be sent into SA without a PHC
- Most areas of Australia are free from known outbreaks of pests and diseases that are deemed to be a risk to SA

However, PIRSA has set a list of pests, plants and zones in Australia, via its Plant Health Standards, that is specific and comprehensive in detailing the relevant requirements associated with importing into SA. The Standards and Regulations are consistently updated to reflect current circumstances, due to the ever evolving nature of problems encountered. Therefore, it becomes a major responsibility of the exporter to ensure the plants they are sending into SA are compliant. The consequences for offending have been reinforced by the new PHA Act and all required information is deemed to be published and accessible to all. Ignorance is not an excuse!

Some of the most commonly encountered PIRSA Standards for the Nursery Industry are;

- Plants that can be a host to fruit fly
- Plants from Victoria: (if grown in non-pine bark potting medium)
 - Must not come from within a 20km radius of a known Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) outbreak
 - Must not be grown within 50 metres from grapevines or a Phylloxera Infested Zones (PIZs)

- c) Citrus plants from Queensland
 - i. Must be free of fruit fly or certified from a fruit fly free exclusion zone
 - ii. Must be certified free of specified pests and diseases
- d) Grapevine material from PIZs and Phylloxera Risk Zones (PRZs) of NSW, Vic & Qld.
- e) Tomato plants cannot be shipped from certain areas in northern Qld.
- f) Date Palm off-shoots (Phoenix) are restricted from the Northern Territory
- g) General nursery stock from Qld – must be certified Red Imported Fire Ant free
- h) General nursery stock from WA must be certified Green Snail free
- i) Soil less potting media – any rooted plant may enter SA provided it is not restricted by any other provision of the Standard and is bare rooted and washed free of soil or is transported in a soil free medium such as pine bark or sand mix
- j) Certification is also required (varying in each State) for plants in earth soil that are grown under certain circumstances – for example; PEZs and PCNs, less than 50 metres from grapevines

This list is by no means complete so please consult the PIRSA Plant Health Standards regarding your obligations to supply a Plant Health Certificate (PHC) when sending plants to South Australia.



Palms and ferns from Queensland require a PHC for Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA)
- Photo courtesy of the Plant Place

3. It is mandatory that every Sth. Australian business purchasing Interstate plants become registered by PIRSA as an importer

This is a regulation for every green-life importer that is purchasing on a commercial basis. Private mail order or internet purchases are not required to have importer registration, whereas farmers purchasing re-vegetation stock for planting on private property are deemed as commercial users.

Yearly re-registration will ensure that parties have a clear line of communication. A major plus of this program is that, in the event of an incursion, all stakeholders can be notified quickly therefore limiting the severity of the incursion.

PIRSA will develop its data base of importing businesses by cross referencing against the freight manifests and on-the-spot checks.

4. Each business that imports Non-compliant stock requiring certification will be asked to nominate the way they wish to be audited by PIRSA upon registration

The interval of audits PIRSA deem necessary will vary with regard to the perceived risks. For example; a green-life market business that imports non-compliant stock many times a week, all year around, will be deemed as a higher risk than a production nursery that purchases non-compliant stock to pot on once or twice a year.

The two options open to importers are both charged at a fee for service rate;

- a) **Direct inspection** of stock by a PIRSA officer of each shipment that requires compliance certification cannot be on sold before it is inspected. PIRSA officers are trained to pick up a wide range of pests and diseases. Subsequently, stock being sent to SA will be under much closer scrutiny and not only will infringements result in heavy fines, but stock may also be sent back, quarantined or confiscated.
- b) **Import Verification Compliance Agreement (IVCA)**. This is PIRSA's preferred option and is open to importers who require a compliance

certificate (PHC). The IVCA is a written contract between PIRSA and the SA importer in which the onus of inspecting stock is deemed to be the responsibility of the importer. Subsequently, stock can be received and on-sold or potted up immediately. The importing business must maintain records pursuant to each delivery, including a comprehensive list of the stock purchased, the freight company along with the PHC (if required).

Points to take into account include the following;

- i. It is deemed to be the responsibility of the importer to notify the authorities of any breach of the Standards, thus the need for all exporters Australia-wide to supply stock of unquestionable quality and standard, this will reduce importers risks and compliance work load.
- ii. PIRSA will conduct regular audits at the IVCA registered premises of each Importer (as deemed necessary by level of risk). Any irregularities found will be reported and questioned with DPIs interstate
- iii. The IVCA will affect commercial importers such as fruit and vegetable wholesalers and retailers, garden centres, chain stores, plant hire, turf, bulbs, production nurseries and all businesses importing possible plant and host material. Refer to the SA PHS.
- iv. Each importing business must designate responsible people with the role of signing off on the receipt of goods that require verification. If PIRSA are onsite, that person must be the contact regarding important stock. These people should be trained to identify pest and plant problems and be conversant with PIRSA Plant Health Standards.

The new Act also further reinforces the labeling of plants and plant products. It is PIRSA's responsibility to maintain the credibility of labeling, including true to variety, plant breeder's rights (PBR), weights and measures, and origin of stock.

How will this new Act affect the Nursery Industry in Australia?

The SA PHA09 will provide a means for PIRSA to tighten up many areas of concern regarding importing plant material into SA.

A major aim of the new Act is to conform to the national arrangements for plant produce exports so the State is well positioned to respond to any future incursions of plant pests and diseases. The protocols to enforce the regulations do not aim to inhibit trade between States, but to alleviate the concerns many exporters have in needing to spray and treat every shipment of stock regardless of whether it could be a host to a problem pest or disease.

The positive implications of SA PH09 are:

- Knowledge of Australia's Plant Health Standards
- Industry best practice
- Post harvest treatment of stock for sale – dispatch efficiencies
- Traceability of stock at all levels of production - from propagation to point of sale
- Freight and logistics of plant material – best practice and credibility
- Infringements and fines
- Plant Health documentation - partnerships with Primary Industry
- Responsible inspection of stock at the point the stock is received
- Reporting of infringements
- Compliance auditing

NGIA Programs that will help

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia and its State Associations, with the assistance of Nursery Industry Levy funds via Horticulture Australia Ltd, has recognised the need to be proactive in this area and has developed a number of programs that deal directly with many facets of plant health within Australia.

PIRSA has extensively reviewed the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA), Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS) and BioSecure *HACCP* guidelines. Exporters that meet the guidelines and give full consideration to the relevant Plant Health Standards will have no concerns when it comes to interstate deliveries into SA. Subsequently, South Australian NIASA and AGCAS accredited businesses that trade with other such entities, interstate, will be shown lenience regarding auditing frequency and charges.



References

EPPRD

<http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/go/phau/epprd>

Nursery Paper April 2007, Managing emergency plant pest incursions

PIRSA

<http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/planthealth> or phone 1300 666 010

Conditions of Entry for Plants into SA

http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/8492/plants_general.pdf

Plant Health Standards

http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/7767/plant_quarant_stand.pdf

What can you do?

- Download the standards and ascertain if you are affected by them. Remember many plant types are not required to be verified
- Look closely at the NGIA programs AGCAS, NIASA and BioSecure *HACCP* - they are designed as management tools to assist the Industry.
- Update procedures regarding dispatch and receipt
- Advertise to all in the logistics cycle that you are part of the Nursery Production Farm Management System developed by NGIA (incorporating NIASA, EcoHort and BioSecure *HACCP*)
- Train your staff in identifying pests and diseases and understanding the importance of their role in the supply chain
- Be aware that if you send sub-standard stock to your interstate customers it will only waste your time and money if returned.
- Make sure that you use only reputable freight companies that conform fully with the relevant legislation
- If exporting to South Australia provide correct and relevant paper work
- Don't try to cut corners in the process. Be accountable!

More Information:

For more information contact your State or Territory Nursery Industry Development Officer.

For information about the South Australian Plant Health Act 2009 contact:

Gary Cox
Leader - Market Access & Certification.
State Quarantine Services
Plant Health Operations, PIRSA
ph 1300 666 010