**MEDIA RELEASE August 2023**

**New quarantine plant testing to accelerate genetic gains**

* Improved plant testing technology has been developed through a four-year project that reduces the number of tests required while greenlife waits in quarantine
* It will deliver key potential benefits for the industry including improved access to imported genetics and significantly enabling the greenlife industry to remain competitive domestically and globally
* The technology has already been adopted for testing Prunus, Rubus, Fragaria, and ornamental grasses in Post Entry Quarantine (PEQ) facilities. Growers importing such species will automatically see the benefits of this more efficient process.

Australia’s greenlife industry now has improved access to new, imported plant genetic material thanks to better plant testing technology used in Post Entry Quarantine (PEQ) facilities.

Greenlife Industry Australia CEO, Joanna Cave, said timely and safe access to new plant genetic material is crucial for the greenlife industry to remain profitable, sustainable, and internationally competitive.

“Depending on the commodity, imported plant species may spend between three months and two years in Post Entry Quarantine (PEQ) facilities undergoing pathogen testing,” Ms Cave said.

“This can impact the ability of plant industries to quickly adapt to new global market opportunities and access new varieties.”

Project leader, Associate Professor Roberto Barrero from Queensland University of Technology, said the technology is an accurate and scalable diagnostic platform for PEQ to expedite phytosanitary screening.

“It uses high throughput sequencing, also referred to as Next Generation Sequencing (NGS), which offers a reliable, and cost-effective method to identify many plant pathogens in a single test,” Assoc. Prof. Barrero said.

“In partnership with quarantine agencies in Australia and New Zealand, the project developed an end-to-end workflow and standard operating procedures, which are based on international best practices, to enable the adoption of NGS technology for phytosanitary screening of exotic pests in PEQ facilities.”

Hort Innovation General Manager Trade and Biosecurity Research and Development, Mila Bristow, said the program brings many benefits to the nursery industry.

“The technology developed by the project will deliver key potential benefits for the industry including improved access to imported genetics, cost saving for PEQ testing and significantly enabling the greenlife industry to remain competitive domestically and globally,” Dr Bristow said.

“Further, we envisage that this new capability will enhance Australia’s biosecurity system safeguarding domestic plant industries from exotic pests and enabling plant industries to gain accelerated access to new plant genetics to facilitate their access to high-value market opportunities.”

Ms Cave said the concurrent phasing out of glasshouse-based woody and herbaceous indexing is a direct benefit of the deployment of this technology, leading to more glasshouse bench space availability.

“Having the option to import a larger volume of plants can enable industry to breed plants with different genetic properties,” Ms Cave said.

“There’s enormous potential for the Australian industry grow its export markets.

“In the year ending June 2022, Australia continued to import more than it exported with $47.8 million of nursery products reaching our shores, including high value genetic material from places like the Netherlands and Taiwan.

“There are opportunities for Australia to export more nursery products to global markets. In the 2021–22 financial year, Saudi Arabia was the largest export market for Australian nursery plants, receiving 15% of our exports.”

The new technology was developed through the project, *‘Improving plant industry access to new genetics through faster and more accurate diagnostics using next generation sequencing (NGS)’* (MT18005).

The four-year project was funded by Hort Innovation, using the citrus, table grape, raspberry and blackberry, fresh and processing potato and nursery research and development levies and contributions from the Australian Government.

**For more information on the project, please head to the Hort Innovation website here:** <https://www.horticulture.com.au/growers/help-your-business-grow/research-reports-publications-fact-sheets-and-more/mt18005/>

**ENDS**

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

Ingrid Lee-Scott, Dentsu Creative Public Relations
M: 0410 047 767
E: Ingrid.Leescott@dentsu.com