

Following the fourth detection, the industry has been asking questions about what happens now with Panama TR4. We asked those questions to Biosecurity Queensland's Panama TR4 Program and here is what they had to say...

## Fourth detection

### **Will the latest detection change the way the Biosecurity Queensland's Panama TR4 Program (Program) regulates this disease?**

Farms with Panama TR4 still need to meet the biosecurity restrictions set out in a Notice of presence of Panama disease tropical race 4 (notice). Any changes to how the disease is regulated into the future will be done with industry through the Panama TR4 Program Management Board (PM Board).

### **If the disease continues to spread, will the government declare it endemic?**

Unfortunately, this disease will continue to spread. As to when it's declared endemic will depend on where it is detected and its range of presence. Currently the Program's regulatory response is to manage the disease at a farm-gate level with strict restrictions on a Panama TR4 infested farm, and surveillance on infested farms and those considered highest and medium at risk of disease detection. Fortunately, this disease has spread slower than any of us expected in 2015. Any decisions around the future management of Panama TR4 based on disease spread would need to consider the situation at hand, the level of risk to the industry, a cost-benefit analysis and what level of biosecurity response is now required. Any decisions on the future management of Panama TR4 by the Program would be considered and approved by the PM Board.

## Farming with TR4 & mixed crops

### Can you farm other crops or graze cattle on a farm with TR4?

Growing crops other than bananas, or grazing cattle on land affected by Panama TR4 can be possible if the requirements of the notice are met.

In mixed farming situations, an assessment will be carried out by the Program to determine whether the land could have been contaminated with Panama TR4 and biosecurity restrictions may be put in place. These assessments consider both a grower's right to their livelihood and the need to protect the industry from wider spread.

## Surveillance

### Does the latest detection change how surveillance is undertaken?

No. The Program's current tracing and surveillance strategy is based on risk exposure and allocation of resources.

The strategy is undergoing its annual review in consultation with banana growers, the Australian Banana Growers' Council, Agri-Science Queensland and departmental scientists. Any changes to the strategy would be approved by the PM Board and communicated to the industry.

Questions? Call Sarah Flenley, BQ, 0400  
867 264 or Sonia, ABGC 0428 038 330

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disease  
tropical  
race 4



## How do Program staff make sure they are not spreading the disease?

We have strict infield hygiene and decontamination (decon) processes to minimise the risk of spread. This includes a 3-step decon before staff enter and exit a banana farm, wearing footwear provided by the grower or doing a full decon of staff footwear, no Program vehicles entering a banana farm and all vehicles undergoing a full decon between banana growing areas.

We follow all reasonable on-farm biosecurity requirements.

## Panama TR4 Program

### Now that industry levies are contributing to the Program, what changes in spending have occurred?

When growers agreed to industry levies contributing to the Program, they said they wanted to make sure the Program was efficient and effective. This has always been a priority of the Program; we take the responsibility of managing public funds seriously.

In 2019, the Program successfully secured funding for the Program from both the Government and the banana industry until 2023. This means we can introduce greater efficiencies based on a longer-term funding arrangement.

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The Program has made savings by:

- Swapping rental vehicle leases in favour of Queensland Government vehicle leases and reducing the number of vehicles
- Reviewing and reducing decontamination practises
- Purchasing rather than renting secure storage containers
- Vacancy managing positions unless critical to the delivery of the Program
- Keeping cleaning and maintenance to the absolute minimum.

The Program will continue to implement efficiencies where possible through the reviewing of their annual business plans and strategies.

## Disease spread

**With four infested properties in the Tully Valley, is Tully River water considered high risk?**

Tully River water that is sourced downstream from an infested property could potentially be contaminated. However, there is no practical diagnostic testing system available for detecting Panama TR4 in water at this stage. What we have noticed is that the disease has been detected up hill and up river from the initial detection within the infested farms.

Anything that moves soil and water can move the disease, so it is best to take a precautionary approach and protect your farm with on-farm biosecurity.

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## What is the Program doing to protect the banana industry from the spread of Panama TR4?

The Program is focussed on control and containment of the disease through:

- Working with the Panama TR4 infested properties to minimise disease spread
- Visiting farms to check for signs of the disease – early detection is critical
- Working with growers to implement on-farm biosecurity measures and preparing growers at highest risk of disease detection by working through the notice requirements
- Providing information to growers, the banana industry and the wider community on Panama TR4 and how to minimise disease spread

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