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A NOTE FROM THE CEO

Leanne Erakovic

The Australian Banana Growers' Council has one clear purpose – it's right there in our name. We stand with the Australian banana growers.

By delivering projects, guiding policy and advocating for your interests at every opportunity, we aim to help you create a sustainable, profitable future.

None of that has changed, but there's one clear threat to that long-term vision right now: imports.

In September, the Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry announced they were conducting a review of quarantine arrangements to allow fresh Cavendish bananas into Australia from the Philippines. Building on the comprehensive campaign led by Len Collins in the early 2000s, we have come out swinging and – as ever - backed by science.

Much of our initial work has taken place in the halls of Parliament House. I want to tell you that – overwhelmingly – the vast majority of politicians are behind you. What this means as part of the technical risk assessment is unclear, but the support for Australian growers, your quality, safe produce and the contribution you make to the economy is strong.

We've been shouting it from the rooftops (and in the media, at meetings, on social media and more): imports are unnecessary. We have more than enough supply. Importing bananas poses an unnecessary and very real biosecurity risk to every Australian grower. I've attended ABGC's industry meeting and every one of the Department's information sessions (most recently in Western Australia) and I hear and share your concerns.

It's largely thanks to ABGC members that we find ourselves on the front foot – membership has ensured we have established relationships in Canberra to build on and that we are well versed in getting our issues on the table.

You can read more about our advocacy and initial response to what will be a long campaign from page 10.

While we've been vocal on this issue, and on others that matter to you, I also want to draw your attention to work happening behind-the-scenes to benefit your banana business. ABGC's Industry Strategy Manager Michelle McKinlay has been leading this space for about a decade now, and she's reflected on some of the very tangible results of her project on page 31.

On a lighter note, make sure you check out the pictures from our trip to NSW in September on Page 39 and from our AGM on Page 17. Thank you to those who took time out of their schedules to catch up.

I hope you find time to rest and celebrate this festive season. It's been a privilege working with you in 2025. I'm ready to hit the ground running in the New Year – I'll see you there.

The ABGC thanks its Affiliate Members for their support of our industry.

CHECKING IN WITH THE CHAIR

Leon Collins

In the past few months, I've spoken to many of you about the looming imports assessment. From old friends across the supply chain through to new ABGC Members (and some new to our industry altogether) - there's a real sense that we are heading into the unknown.

Regardless of the outcome put forward by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – and I'm confident that we have science on our side for that – this creates huge uncertainty, with no set end date. I'm hearing, as you no doubt are, that people are putting projects on hold and sharing concerns about decisions made in the current market which could now completely change.

I'm working closely with the Banana Imports Chair, Paul Inderbitzin, and ABGC CEO, Leanne Erakovic, to position the banana industry in the best possible way for this fight. Politicians' offices are not my natural habitat, but I've been pleased to see that most are receptive to our concerns and willing to listen.

In order for us to keep the pressure on, you might have heard that the Banana Imports Fighting Fund will be open for contributions from 1 January. I'd encourage you to lend your support as every dollar goes towards securing our future through advocacy and getting the right expertise on board. We have a large amount of support among MPs and the banana industry is well positioned to take on any battle that may be thrown our way.

You can find out more about the No Banana Imports campaign from page 10.

Change in the West

I want to say a huge thank you to our former Western Australian Director Doriana Mangili for her dedication to the ABGC Board and the banana industry more broadly. We're all better off for having had Doriana as a Director, and I've no doubt we'll continue to work together into the future. The silver lining to Doriana's departure, of course, is that we have the pleasure of welcoming Chris Collins to the WA/NT director position. Chris, who grows in Carnarvon and chairs the Sweeter Banana Co-Op, will be a huge asset to our team and industry.

Thoughts with Darwin Fruit Farms

At the time of writing this column, Tropical Cyclone Fina had just finished tracking across the Top End. First and foremost, it's good to hear that people – including the team at Darwin Fruit Farms – were safe. But a loss of 40 per cent is no small hit, and our thoughts are with them as they get into recovery and replanting. It's an all too timely reminder to make sure you're prepared for wild weather, and there are some tips on page 16.

So long, 2025

Finally, as we head into the silly season, I want to take a moment to wish you and yours a very safe and happy festive period. I hope you all get some rain for Christmas, because as a grower in North Queensland, you couldn't get a better present, especially lately...

ANNUAL BANANA VOLUMES

The national banana levy collected by the Federal Department of Agriculture is compulsory for commercial banana growers. It is 2.19 cents per kilogram of bananas sold.
The dollars collected show an estimate of production for the previous financial year. Right is a table of the levy-based banana volumes. For non-industry participants, please note this is an approximation of production, but not all bananas grown are sold, i.e. some don't make the retailer-required specifications. Also, there is a lag factor, in that levies paid on June sales (at least) are paid in the following financial year.
ⓘ Most commercial banana growers in Australia pay the banana levy – but there are some exceptions. Essentially, a producer of bananas (the person who owns the bananas immediately after harvest) is liable to pay the levy. A producer will NOT be liable for levies if, in a financial year, the total quantity of bananas sold by retail sale amounts to less than $100 of levy.
More detail on exemptions from paying the levy and other information can be found at agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/levies/rates/bananas

Years ending 30th June (in '000 tonnes):	
2014	371
2015	371
2016	393
2017	414
2018	388
2019	372
2020	382
2021	403
2022	375
2023	371
2024	369

BANANA LEVY RATE

The make-up and purpose of the various components of the Banana Industry Levy are as follows.

Levy Amount	Purpose
0.50c /kg	Plant Health Australia (PHA) levy: The Department sends the funds to PHA, for the ongoing containment and management of Panama Tropical Race 4 disease, and to conduct activities that aim to improve biosecurity within the banana industry.
1.69c /kg	Hort Innovation (HIA) levy. The Department sends the funds to HIA for R&D and Marketing: 0.54 c/Kg is for Banana R&D, which is matched dollar for dollar by the Department and 1.15 c/kg for Banana Marketing

Total = 2.19c /kg* (32.85c per 15kg carton).

The Banana PHA levy currently funds the containment of the first TR4 infested farm that the industry purchased and the industry's part of the cost-sharing deed with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for TR4 containment. It also funds the pre-existing commitments – Torres Straight Exotic Fruit Flies Eradication Response, PHA membership/ meetings and Government levy collection.

Further information: Leanne Erakovic, ceo@abgc.org.au Phone – 07 3278 4786.
More info on the levy rate: https://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/levies/rates/bananas

After an announcement at Banana Congress earlier this year, Leon presented Barry Lowe with his Life Membership of ABGC at the recent Annual General Meeting.

TOP END BANANAS COP CYCLONE DAMAGE

The farm that supplies almost all bananas purchased in the Northern Territory's capital has suffered at least a 40 per cent crop loss as a result of Tropical Cyclone Fina.

Darwin Fruit Farms (DFF) is located in Lambells Lagoon, just over 40 kilometres from the city.

Passing Darwin as a severe Category 3 storm, Fina brought strong winds and more than 400mm of rain to the site.

The DFF team, part of Premier Fresh Australia, were safe throughout and worked tirelessly to prepare the farm in the lead-up.

Preparations included cutting leaves off where possible (limiting wind resistance) and harvesting what they could beforehand.

Some blocks were completely devastated while, incredibly, others remained relatively unscathed. Infrastructure was undamaged.

Farm Manager, Mark Smith, said fruit would need to be accessed from Premier Fresh's Queensland farms to maintain supply in the Top End while they're getting back to full production. This will ensure Darwin consumers don't have any trouble finding their favourite fruit – and they can rest assured their local bananas will be back on shelves as soon as possible.

Image via Bureau of Meteorology and Darwin Fruit Farms.

NEW FACES IN BMP TEAM

ABGC's Banana Best Management Practice team has welcomed some new faces to their Far North Queensland-based team recently.

Zoe and Laura bring a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the banana industry.

Zoe Holmes

I'm a freelance communications and engagement professional born and raised in Mission Beach. I help organisations tell their stories with authenticity and impact. After several years leading communications in local government, I now work with clients including the Australian Banana Growers' Council, creating content that connects with rural and regional communities. I'm excited to start my journey with the Best Management Practice Team and share stories that celebrate growers, highlight innovation, and showcase the industry's commitment to sustainability.

Laura MacGillycuddy

From Swiss greenhouses to the tropics of Far North Queensland, my journey's been anything but straight! After years studying and researching plant health in Switzerland, I traded snow boots for steel-caps to join Sugar Research Australia, where I spent years tackling soil-borne pests and diseases.

Somewhere between nematodes and nutrient trials, I fell in love with the FNQ landscape — and the people working so hard to protect it. I've spent the last few years working alongside the team from the Banana Nutrient Rate Trials to better understand the nutrient, sediment and pesticides losses from banana paddocks.

Now, stepping into my new role with the Australian Banana Growers' Council, I'm excited to bring my scientific background and enthusiasm to the banana industry - helping grow a stronger, more resilient industry!

HORT REPORT

In 2024/25, Hort Innovation invested $171.2 million across more than 400 projects, supported by levies, Australian Government contributions, grants and co-investment.

Growers are welcome to read the annual report online by scanning the QR code.

SUPPORTING GROWERS, STRENGTHENING BIOSECURITY

When you talk to Maurice Thompson, ABGC's Grower Support & Engagement Officer, one thing becomes clear: he believes good biosecurity starts with good relationships.

Maurice has recently joined the Grower Support team, bringing with him not only years of practical biosecurity experience but also a genuine passion for working alongside growers to solve challenges together. He first got involved in biosecurity while working on the banana freckle response in the Northern Territory. Over the next six years, he played a vital role across multiple responses, including green myrtle virus, browsing ants and Asian honeybee.

After his time in the NT, Maurice returned briefly to help inspect newly planted banana blocks and confirm disease clearance before moving to Queensland. For the past seven years, he's worked in local government across Southern Downs, through to Mount Isa, coordinating environmental and biosecurity programs.

From tackling weeds to managing feral pigs and wild dogs, Maurice has led teams on the ground, always focused on practical solutions and collaboration with landholders.

"My idea is to give full support to growers," he says. "That might mean taking a phone call, or it might mean visiting them on-farm. It's about being available and helping them work through the stress of dealing with TR4 - whether that's keeping it out or containing it on their property."

YOUR ABGC REPRESENTATIVES

Doriana Mangili believes all banana growers should consider spending some time on the board of the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

Doriana stepped down as a Director in November, having served since 2020. While her presence will be greatly missed, the position will be ably filled by recent industry Award of Honour recipient Chris Collins.

A Carnarvon-based grower who chairs the well-known co-operative, Chris is well versed as an industry advocate and brings years of experience to the role.

"I'm looking forward to sinking my teeth into some of our industry's big challenges – and I know I've stepped into this role at a time when we're facing some of our biggest yet," he said.

"I'm proud to represent Western Australia and I'll be sure to take on Doriana's role of regularly reminding Queenslanders about the benefits of our subtropical growing regions and the tasty bananas we produce."

The board executive remains the same, having been elected for another term:

- Leon Collins, Chair
- Stephen Lowe, Deputy Chair
- Andrew Serra. Finance Risk and Audit Committee, Chair

Carnarvon grower Chris Collins has taken over from Doriana Mangili on the ABGC Board.

From left to right: Andrew Serra (QLD), Gary Fattore (QLD), Stephen Lowe (QLD), Leon Collins (QLD), Doriana Mangili (outgoing, WA) and Stephen Spear (NSW). Not pictured: James Howe (QLD) and Tayla Mackay (QLD)

BANANAS IN THE COMMUNITY

Mission Beach Sailing Regatta

"We were so proud to showcase the banana industry at this year's regatta! Two boxes of Eco Bananas disappeared over the two-day event — a clear favourite with sailors, volunteers and competitors alike. We even kept them chilled so everyone could enjoy a cold, healthy, locally grown, package-free snack as they signed on and off for their race sessions.

Our junior fleet was especially excited, with banana-themed prizes proving a huge hit. "

Carmen Walker
Secretary, Mission Beach Sailing Club.

School Saavy

"Thank you to Australian Banana Growers and Australian Bananas for their generous donation of pencil cases, water bottles, and banana savers, helping keep our delicious Aussie bananas fresh and ready for fruit break time at school!

Your kindness means more children across the region will start the school year with the essentials they need to grow, learn, and thrive. Every little bit helps!"

Penny Trickey,
Centacare, FNQ.

Aussie Bananas on the run in California

Australian Bananas were on show in Anaheim, California, with Naomi Abbott and Barrie Mackay taking part in the **Race for a Healthier World 5K run** during the International Fresh Produce Association event in October.

The Foundation for Fresh Produce brought together colleagues from across the global fruit and vegetable sector for the run, which followed a 5 kilometre course along the Santa Ana River Trail.

Innisfail United Summer 6s Soccer

There was no missing the 'Banana Boys' at Castor Park in Mourilyan!

AUSSIE BANANAS FLEX IN FNQ GYMS

Strong community spirit and a love for our iconic fruit brought National Banana Day to life on October 8.

Tully's Tweak Fitness and The Shed in Mission Beach joined the national campaign, generating authentic local content that resonated across social media.

A big shoutout to Naomi Brownrigg (Sellars' Bananas) for donating a box of perfectly ripe bananas for smoothies and photo ops, and to Jen Crema (Crema Bananas) for helping spread the word. Steve Lizzio (MBL Bananas) went above and beyond — he brought a busload of kids, fresh bananas, and two of his star team members. Together, they lifted weights, carried banana bunches and fully embraced the celebration.

Thanks to Thomas Flegler for joining the campaign this year. NRL Dolphins jerseys and yellow Australian Bananas merch was signed for keen kids, and there was lots of cheering during the banana bunch sled races.

The day was a vibrant celebration of community, fitness and our locally grown bananas.

More on National Banana Day on from Page 36.

Naomi Brownrigg (Sellars' Bananas) donated a box of bananas to the celebration.

Tully grower Jen Crema and Max Orsmond getting ready for the day with banana smoothies.

Tom Flegler and Mission Beach State School students at The Shed.

Banana bunch sled races were a crowd favourite!

PUTTING BANANA FRECKLE IN THE CONVERSATION

Having a conversation with your staff about the importance of reporting anything unusual in your banana plants is just as important as it's ever been.

The risk of exotic pests and diseases is ever present, and early detection is critical to limit the impact.

Banana freckle poses a significant threat to Australia's banana industry. The fungus *Phyllosticta cavendishii* causes banana freckle disease in Cavendish and non-Cavendish varieties and is found in the Northern Territory.

Visit the Better Bananas website for more information to help guide a conversation on banana freckle, including what you and your staff need to look out for.

Symptoms of banana freckle on a leaf of a cultivar in the Cavendish subgroup. Image shows raised spots that feel like sandpaper to the touch.
© Department of Primary Industries

FERAL PIG FIGHT

ABGC has been working collaboratively with growers and industry stakeholders, including Cassowary Coast Regional Council, to fight feral pigs in Far North Queensland.

Feral pigs wreak havoc on crops, property and the environment – and they can spread soil-borne diseases like Panama TR4.

Industry supported council in their region-wide aerial pig cull last month.

On top of this, ABGC (Grower Support – Biosecurity) coordinated a Tully-focussed cull to reduce the risk of disease spread. Keep an eye on ABGC communications for updates as these efforts progress.

More information:

- **abgcgrowersupport.com.au**
- **cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au**

CHLORPYRIFOS CANCELLED

As at 30 September, all uses of chlorpyrifos in bananas were cancelled. You can find out about other options, research and more, by scanning the QR code.

STOP THE BANANA SPLITS

Split banana peels can significantly reduce marketable yield, yet can be easily avoided via the application of calcium nitrate fertilisers throughout the crop growth cycle.

According to Yara Regional Sales Manager, Paul Crack, splitting is associated with low levels of calcium in plant tissue.

"Calcium is an important part of the cell wall structure and acts as a glue that binds the cell walls together," he says.

"Calcium uptake can be restricted during cold winters, rapid plant growth and competition from high rates of applied potassium.

"Inadequate calcium reduces the stability and integrity of plant cell walls, making fruit more prone to splitting, curling, bruising and breakdown."

Bananas need an adequate supply of calcium throughout the whole crop growth cycle.

"Plant uptake is maximised when applications are timed to coincide with new root growth," Paul says.

"Most uptake occurs before flowering and it is important that a soluble form of calcium is applied early in the growth cycle of both plant and ratoon crops.

"Water-soluble forms of calcium are most effective at providing plant-available calcium."

YaraLiva NITRABOR, YaraLiva TROPICOTE and YaraTera CALCINIT all contain 100% water-soluble calcium.

YaraLiva NITRABOR also contains boron, which plays an important role in maintaining good cell wall elasticity.

One trial demonstrated that a standard fertiliser program that included adding YaraLiva NITRABOR increased average fruit weight by 15% compared to a standard program that included ammonium sulphate.[1]

All three contain 15% nitrogen, mostly as nitrate.

"Nitrate nitrogen is readily available for plant uptake, is not subject to volatilisation losses and does not cause soil acidification," Paul says.

"When application rates are matched and timed to plant requirements, nitrogen use efficiency will be optimised and loss minimised."

For more information about nutrition programs to optimise marketable yields in banana crops, contact your local Yara representative or visit yara.com.au

About Yara

Yara grows knowledge to responsibly feed the world and protect the planet, to fulfil our vision of a collaborative society, a world without hunger and a planet respected. To meet these commitments, we have taken the lead in developing digital farming tools for precision farming and work closely with partners throughout the whole food value chain to develop more climate-friendly crop nutrition solutions. In addition, we are committed to working towards sustainable mineral fertiliser production. We foster an open culture of diversity and inclusion that promotes the safety and integrity of our employees, contractors, business partners, and society at large. Founded in 1905 to solve the emerging famine in Europe, Yara has a worldwide presence with about 17,000 employees and operations in over 60 countries.

More information

Paul Crack , Yara Crop Nutrition, 1800 684 266
Paul.crack@yara.com

1. Reference: C.B.I. Banadex + Yara Colombia, 2001.

DEFENDING AUSTRALIA'S BANANAS

ABGC LAUNCHES COORDINATED FIGHT AGAINST IMPORT THREAT

Australia's banana industry has spent decades building a world-class, reliable domestic supply, backed by robust biosecurity.

So when the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) announced its long-anticipated review of market access for Philippine banana imports at the request of the Philippines Government, the Australian Banana Growers' Council was ready—strong, coordinated and already mobilised.

The ABGC, working closely with the industry's Banana Imports Committee, has led a proactive, highly visible campaign to reject the potential of banana imports, and protect grower livelihoods, regional communities and Australia's biosecurity integrity. Central to this has been a targeted media and advocacy effort designed to put the industry's concerns front and centre—and it has delivered impact across the nation, from Parliament House in Canberra to regional newsrooms in key banana growing regions.

A media blitz with national reach

In line with DAFF's announcement on16 September, the ABGC rolled out a comprehensive media strategy that ensured every major newsroom in the country understood the risks and impact to our domestic industry associated with the review.

A national media statement set the tone early, outlining the industry's clear and united opposition to banana imports. On announcement day, ABGC CEO, Leanne Erakovic, fronted a press conference at the ABGC headquarters in Brisbane, drawing cameras from Channels 7, 9, 10, ABC and Landline.

Over 150 pieces of media coverage followed across television, radio, print and online platforms. The messaging was consistent, firm and widely echoed: imported bananas pose unacceptable biosecurity risks, threaten thousands of regional jobs, and undermine one of Australia's most important agricultural industries.

Driving political engagement

Alongside public communications, the ABGC has launched an intensive advocacy campaign to ensure every relevant political decision-maker understands what is at stake. In the latter half of 2025, more than 25 federal Members of Parliament—including ministers, shadow ministers, crossbenchers and regional representatives—have met directly with ABGC leadership, with access described as "unprecedented".

This includes direct engagement with the Minister for Agriculture Julie Collins, the Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, and influential Opposition and crossbench voices such as David Littleproud, Bob Katter, Senators Matt Canavan and Susan McDonald.

Strengthening industry unity

The Banana Imports Industry Meeting in Innisfail on 24 September brought together more than 130 growers and stakeholders. Held just eight days after the DAFF announcement, it demonstrated strong industry unity, enabled direct updates on the review process, and reinforced ABGC's leadership.

Coupled with regular stakeholder emails, social media updates and member communications, growers have been kept fully informed—and united—in the response effort.

A strong start to the fight ahead

The ABGC's approach—strategic, rapid and disciplined—has ensured the banana industry had a powerful early voice in shaping the national conversation. Media coverage has been widespread, political engagement deep, and industry unity strong.

This is only the beginning of the fight, but the message is already clear: Australia's banana growers are organised, visible and determined. Under the leadership of Paul Inderbitzin, Banana Imports Committee Chair, ABGC CEO Leanne Erakovic and Chair Leon Collins, the ABGC has made it unmistakably known that the industry will defend Australia's healthy, robust domestic banana sector—and will not step back from the challenge ahead.

INSIDE THE DAFF REVIEW

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS—AND WHY THE INDUSTRY MUST REMAIN UNITED AND VIGILANT

Australia's banana growers are facing one of the most significant biosecurity challenges in decades.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's current review of quarantine arrangements—triggered by renewed pressure from the Philippines to permit banana imports—has the potential to reshape the future of the industry.

For growers, packers and supply-chain operators who live and breathe this industry, understanding the scale and seriousness of this review is essential. This is not simply a bureaucratic exercise - it is a high-stakes process with real implications for farm businesses, regional communities and the national economy.

New push, decades of pressure

The current review is the latest instalment in a long-running effort by the Philippines to access the Australian market. Their campaign began in 1995, was technically approved in 2008 but never commercially viable due to strict biosecurity conditions, and re-emerged in 2018 with a request to ease those requirements.

Then, in early 2025, the Philippines escalated its demands—seeking not just alternative biosecurity measures, but access for an additional cultivar and a new export province. This move dramatically widened the scope and increased the pressure on Australia to reassess the application under its WTO obligations.

DAFF has since completed a preliminary review and officially allocated resources to push the assessment into its next phase. That is where Australia—and the ABGC—stand today.

How the DAFF review works

DAFF's assessment process is tightly governed by protocols. While thorough, it does not automatically favour Australian interests. That's why the ABGC is staying deeply engaged.

Key parts of the process include:

Hazard Identification

DAFF identifies pests and diseases associated with Philippine bananas—including pathogens like Moko and Black Sigatoka, which have devastated industries across the world and remain absent from Australia.

Technical Assessments

To understand risk on the ground, DAFF is conducting technical visits.

DAFF visited farms in North Queensland in November to understand local production practices, see biosecurity in action, and understand key risks. A technical visit to the Philippines—delayed to early 2026 due to extreme weather—will analyse conditions in farms, packhouses and export facilities. The ABGC is closely monitoring each step to ensure the reality of growing systems overseas is properly scrutinised, not assumed.

Determining the risk

DAFF examines the likelihood of pests entering, establishing and spreading in Australia. The ABGC consistently reinforces that risk ratings must reflect the on-the-ground experience of growers—not hypothetical assumptions or unverifiable offshore compliance regimes.

Risk-Management Measures

If imports are to be considered, DAFF must outline enforceable conditions. The ABGC argues that past experience with imported products has shown enforcement gaps, variable offshore compliance and insufficient audit capacity. The Council is making it clear: weak or unenforceable measures are unacceptable.

Public Consultation

While our campaign will be consistant throughout this process, the key time for official consultation will be at the release of the Draft Risk Assessment, expected late in 2026 or early 2027. This is where the ABGC's national advocacy will be critical. ABGC has already positioned the industry as the leading authority on the risks, ensuring growers' real-world experience is front and centre.

What's at stake for the industry

Australia's banana sector is globally unique.

- We remain free of Moko, Black Sigatoka and several other destructive diseases.
- The industry supports 18,000 jobs, 540 farms, and thousands of associated businesses.
- Domestic production consistently meets consumer demand—over five million bananas per day.

The introduction of even one exotic pathogen could trigger decades of containment costs, lost production, and irreversible regional damage.

A vocal, uncompromising advocate

CEO Leanne Erakovic has repeatedly reinforced the importance of a science-driven, transparent process—but one that fully reflects the realities of farming and biosecurity risk.

"The stakes are high," she says. "We will not allow theoretical risk assessments to underestimate the catastrophic consequences a single breach could have on our industry and regional communities."

The ABGC is ensuring that DAFF and the Federal Government understand:

- There is no domestic need for imported bananas.
- Australia already enjoys a reliable, year-round, high-quality supply.
- The industry has invested millions in biosecurity—and expects the same vigilance from regulators.
- Any decision that undermines Australia's disease-free status would be unacceptable.

TIMELINE

KEY MILESTONES AT A GLANCE

1995 — The Philippines seeks access for Cavendish bananas

1999 — The Philippines prioritises request

2000 — The import risk analysis (IRA) formally commences

2003 — The Philippines lodge a WTO dispute regarding measures affecting horticultural imports to Australia, including bananas – case remains dormant

2008 — The IRA report is completed

2009 — Federal government makes a policy determination on the import of bananas

Nov /Dec 2018 — The Philippines requests that Australia consider alternative measure for the three pathogens of concern (Moko, Black Sigatoka and Banana Freckle)

September 2025 — Public notification that DAFF is conducting an assessment of alternative measures for bananas from the Philippines

ABGC industry meeting – over 100 growers and supply chain representatives attend in-person and online

October 2025 — DAFF in-person meetings – NSW & QLD

November 2025 — DAFF in-person meeting – WA

First half 2026 — Technical visit to the Philippines*
Issues paper released*

Late 2026 / Early 2027

Draft report released*

The draft report will be open for consultation for a minimum of 60 days and is the key opportunity to assess and counter DAFF's recommendations.

*Subject to change

2009 determination: if the Philippines wishes to export bananas to Australia, it would need to demonstrate that the required risk management measures can be achieved under commercial production conditions on an ongoing basis.

Representatives from ABGC attended every one of DAFF's in-person meetings to support growers and raise industry concerns.

In Innisfail, the current Banana Imports Committee was joined by former BIC Chair Len Collins. After successfully delivering the previous imports campaign, Len has a wealth of experience and knowledge to share. He's pictured outside Brothers Leagues Clubs (second from right) with ABGC CEO Leanne Erakovic, BIC Chair Paul Inderbitzin and ABGC Chair Leon Collins. Leanne, Paul and Leon make up the current Banana Imports Committee and are the driving force behind industry's action against imports.

You can read DAFF's notes for all in-person sessions at agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/policy/risk-analysis/plant/banana-philippines

A planned technical visit to the Philippines late in 2025 has been postponed due to severe weather resulting in a State of Emergency. It is now proposed for early 2026. The visit will be used to gather information on commercial production, pest management and export practices for Cavendish bananas.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- **ABGC website: abgc.org.au**
- **ABGC Members' Portal: abgc.org.au/sign-in**
- **DAFF website: agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/policy/risk-analysis/plant/banana-philippines**
- **Sign up to receive ABGC emails: communications@abgc.org.au**
- **Sign up to receive DAFF emails: plantstakeholders@aff.gov.au**
- **Contact: noimports@abgc.org.au**

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1 MAKE SURE YOU'RE SIGNED UP FOR ABGC COMMUNICATIONS

Send an email to communications@abgc.org.au if you're not receiving e-bulletins.

2 BECOME AN ABGC MEMBER

Don't start 2026 on the sidelines. Make sure you are part of the action and receiving exclusive updates on ABGC advocacy by becoming a member.

3 WRITE TO YOUR MP

Growers are encouraged to send a letter to Members of Parliament to add even more weight to ABGC's already intensive lobbying initiatives.

You can download a template at abgc.org.au or by scanning the QR code.

4 CONTRIBUTE TO THE BIFF

The banana industry has a track record of uniting behind a cause – and the Banana Imports Committee is calling for your support in 2026.

From 1 January, the Committee will be accepting voluntary contributions to the Banana Imports Fighting Fund at 0.5 cents (1/2 a cent) per kilogram. This will remain open for one year, until 31 December 2026. It equates to 7.5c per 15kg carton.

Your voluntary contribution will help BIC execute our science-backed argument, through lobbying, targeted research and more.

How do you sign up?

Visit abgc.org.au/banana-imports-fighting-fund to complete the online form or download a copy.

You can either make payments directly to the Banana Imports Fighting Fund or via your agent/wholesaler. Payments are either monthly or quarterly.

How will the funds be managed?

The Banana Imports Committee is responsible for the Banana Imports Fighting Fund account. Administration will be handled by ABGC, but it is not part of the ABGC budget. It functions separately.

Funds will be used for a range of purposes, including but not limited to:

- Materials to promote the 'No Imports' cause
- Advocacy and lobbying activities
- Research and expertise as required

Growers turned out in force for DAFF's in-person information session in Coffs Harbour, NSW

AT WHAT COST TO INDUSTRY

While growing bananas in Australia isn't without its challenges, the absence of Black Sigatoka and Moko – and many other devastating pests and diseases – means less cost, less chemical and an all-round healthier crop. Put simply: the presence of these diseases would make many farms unviable. It's timely to remember what's at stake when it comes to these two diseases.

Black Sigatoka

Cost benefit of being black Sigatoka free: $80 million p/a

Black Sigatoka or Black leaf streak is caused by a fungus called *Pseudocercospora fijiensis* (previously called *Myscosphaerella fijiensis*) which belongs to a group of pathogens that cause leaf disease in bananas. It is related to Yellow Sigatoka and Emusae leaf spot. Black Sigatoka has a fast developmental rate and defoliation is much faster than for Yellow Sigatoka. Therefore, its control requires very frequent application of fungicides resulting in a high economic en environmental burden.

The impact of Black Sigatoka is through early death of leaves reducing yield and the green life of fruit causing premature ripening of the fruit.

Symptoms

- Small reddish-brown flecks at the underside of the third or fourth leaves at the early stage
- Flecks grow to form narrow streaks with grey or light brown centres or black margins parallel to the leaf vein
- Streaks grow into dark brown to black lesions with water-soaked borders surrounded by a thin yellow halo
- Centres of lesions become depressed and turn grey
- Many spots close together will cause large dead areas and collapse of the leaf
- Under heavy infection no streaks are formed but large areas of the leaf turn black and die
- Close inspection of the lesions reveals the production of spores

Symptoms can appear similar to those produced by Yellow Sigatoka (present in Australia) and Eumusae leaf spot (not present in Australia).

How it spreads

Spread of the Black Sigatoka fungus is by movement of infected plant material (mainly leaves) and by spores produced in the dead grey areas on the upper leaf surface.

Two types of spores are produced on the leaves. Conidia are formed first and are water dispersed over short distances within plantations, while ascospores are formed in older lesions and are mainly wind dispersed over larger distances between plantations.

Where is Black Sigatoka overseas?

Black Sigatoka is currently found in most parts of Asia (including the Philippines), PNG , Africa and Latin America and has been found in the Torres Strait. Mainland Australia is free of Black Sigatoka. There have been several outbreaks in Northern Australia in the past, but the country has been officially free of the disease since 2005 thanks to the determined efforts of banana growers resulting in the first ever successful eradication of Black Sigatoka from a banana production area.

It is currently the main plant disease affecting banana plantations in Latin America where around 30% of production cost in commercial plantations is spent on regular fungicide applications to control it.

Moko

Cost benefit of being Moko free: $134 million p/a

Moko is caused by a bacterium called *Ralstonia solanacearum* which belongs to a group of pathogens that cause bacterial wilts in banana. It is related to banana blood disease. When the disease occurs on cooking bananas of the ABB and BBB type it is called 'Bugtok'.

Symptoms

- Rapid yellowing, wilting and collapse of leaves
- Wilting of small suckers
- Premature fruit ripening and splitting
- Premature ripening fingers in an otherwise green bunch
- Fruit pulp turns yellow to brown grey and results in a firm rot of the fruit pulp
- Blackening and shrivelling of flower buds
- Vascular tissue of the stalk shows brown discoloration when cut
- Internal yellow to brown discoloration of the pseudostem

How it spreads

The Moko bacterium can be spread in infected plant material, fruit, soil, water, insects and pollinators. The pathogen can survive in the soil for more than a year. Heliconia species are a known host of Moko. Once Moko enters a banana plantation control becomes very difficult, requiring labour intensive and expensive management in the form of strict sanitary and biosecurity measures on farm. This is due to the ease with which the bacteria can spread via insects and cultural practices such as deleafing, bunch pruning, bell removal involving cutting tools.

Where is Moko overseas?

Moko disease originates from Latin America and is currently also found in the Philippines and in peninsular Malaysia. Australia is free of Moko disease.

Information provided by Prof André Drenth, University of Queensland

GROWER ADVANTAGE: YOUR MEMBER-ONLY ACCESS

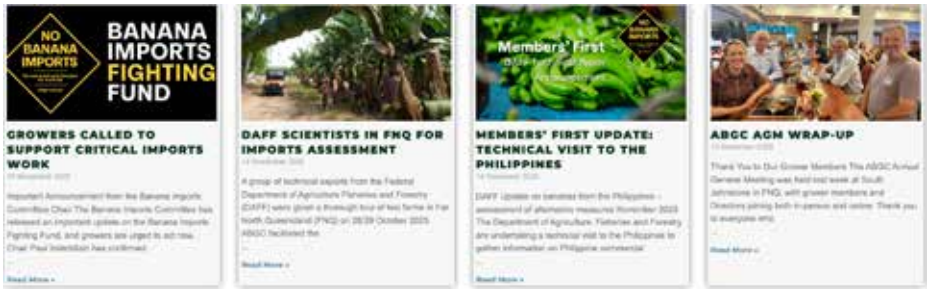
ABGC Members benefit from timely, practical and industry-specific information that helps support farm businesses, protect the industry, and strengthen grower voices in national conversations.

Recent member-only content highlights the breadth of insight and advocacy available to those within the ABGC network.

One feature provided growers with an early look at upcoming research into worker disengagement within the PALM scheme. Led by the Australian National University, the study aims to better understand on-farm experiences and identify solutions that support both workers and employers. By sharing updates, inviting grower input, and connecting members directly with researchers, ABGC ensures employers' experiences shape broader discussions.

Environmental stewardship remains a key focus. Members recently received an update on ABGC's proactive, behind-the-scenes work on waste and waterway stewardship. This member-backed leadership strengthens partnerships, sets industry standards, and promotes responsible waste management to protect the industry's social license.

Biosecurity remains one of the industry's most critical priorities, and members gain exclusive access to detailed reports on high-level engagement with government and councils. A recent update covered ABGC's strengthened collaboration with the Cassowary Coast Regional Council, including a farm visit, constructive discussions about TR4 risk management, and agreed actions to enhance contractor inductions, land-access protocols, and disaster management processes.



INSIDE THE NO-IMPORTS FIGHT

ABGC members receive priority access to detailed information and advocacy updates on one of the biggest issues facing the industry — the ongoing fight to prevent banana imports from the Philippines.

Through member-only content, growers stay informed about:

On-the-ground engagement with DAFF

Members received insights into the recent FNQ farm tours with DAFF scientists. These visits allow growers' concerns about biosecurity, production practices and risk management to be conveyed directly to decision-makers.

Industry unity: Calling on retailers

ABGC has urged major retailers to stand with industry against imports. Members gain access to key correspondence and policy positions, keeping them informed about the collective effort required to protect Australian growers.

Direct channels for member input

Growers can contribute questions, concerns and local knowledge via noimports@abgc.org.au, ensuring industry feedback is captured and represented throughout the review.

BOOSTING THE BRUCE

ABGC welcomes the unveiling of the next 22 safety upgrades to the Bruce Highway, with more than $500 million allocated to the projects by the Queensland Government.

ABGC has been one of a number of voices advocating for improved conditions on the important freight route, with safety and reliability being key concerns. Details of this announcement, and the upgrades, can be found here: statements.qld.gov.au/statements/104057

WILD WEATHER AND BIOSECURITY

Extreme weather is part of life across Australia's growing regions, with strong wind, flooding, land slips and fire all posing a threat banana farms.

In Far North Queensland, alongside usual pre-cyclone preparations, growers now have another important consideration — Panama disease tropical race 4 (TR4).

While some things are beyond anyone's control, there are many steps growers can take to minimise the risk of spreading TR4 during and after a cyclone. These tips can apply to other pest and disease threats too.

Plan to have planting material

One of the biggest biosecurity risks after a cyclone is planting material. Access to clean, safe material can be limited. To reduce risk:

- Plan ahead – establish a tissue-culture sourced nursery on your own property, ideally in a quarantined area away from flood-prone sites.
- Avoid sourcing bits or suckers from other properties.
- Be cautious when buying potted plants after a cyclone. Sterile potting mix may be in short supply and some components (like river sand or council compost) can contain contaminated banana material.
- Protect your bananas before a cyclone by removing the canopy and bunches where possible- this helps protect stools and young suckers from wind damage. More information on this process is available at abgc.org.au
- Rehabilitate rather than replant damaged plantings where possible.

Plant waste and soil movement

After a cyclone, large volumes of banana plant waste will need to be managed. Avoid dumping plant material outside your farm wherever possible.

While floodwaters can move soil and debris beyond our control, we can manage the movement of people, vehicles, machinery and tools that might carry contaminated soil:

- Expect an influx of recovery workers, utility crews and volunteers after a cyclone.
- Make sure biosecurity signs and contact details are clearly displayed at all entry points and that disinfection facilities are ready and operational.
- Plan for power outages.
- If required, designate someone to control access at your farm entry.
- Restore barriers (like fences or gates) as soon as possible after the cyclone, even if they're only temporary. This also helps reduce feral animal movement.
- Before a cyclone, identify areas of your farm prone to flooding or run-off. Always work in these areas last and decontaminate machinery before it leaves.

Stock up early on essentials such as fuel, cartons, fertiliser and irrigation supplies. Reducing the number of off-farm deliveries minimises risk and helps ensure continuity of operations during recovery.

For more information on preparing for cyclones, or extreme weather, visit abgc.org.au

To discuss biosecurity on your property, contact growersupport@abgc.org.au

MANAGING FARM WASTE RESPONSIBLY

During extreme weather, and all-year round, it's important to stay on top of farm waste by:

- Securing and storing loose bags and materials on-farm.
- Disposing of waste through the correct channels.

Waste Services Available

On the Cassowary Coast, Cassowary Coast Regional Council provides waste disposal options for local businesses. You can find information on their waste transfer stations online. Call 1300 763 903 or email enquiries@ccrc.qld.gov.au for assistance.

For all other regions, contact your local Council for appropriate disposal information.

Reporting Illegal Dumping

- **Call the Pollution Hotline on 1300 130 372**
- **Email pollutionhotline@des.qld.gov.au**

QBAN SCHEME FACILITIES

QBAN QUALITY APPROVED BANANA NURSERY

Mission Beach Tissue Culture Laboratory and Nursery	07 4068 8553	sdlavis4@bigpond.com	Lindsay Road (PO Box 326), Mission Beach QLD 4852
Lowes TC Pty Ltd Laboratory and Nursery	02 4389 8750	Greg@lowestc.com.au Patricia@lowestc.com.au Natasha@lowestc.com.au	202 Tumbi Rd, Tumbi Umbi NSW 2261
SIVAL FARMING TISSUE CULTURE NURSERY	07 4068 8559	sdlavis4@bigpond.com	Dati Road, Walkamin QLD 4872
Yuruga Laboratory and Nursery	07 4093 3826	admin@howefarms.com.au	5970 Kennedy Highway, Walkamin QLD 4872
Ausplant Nursery	07 4662 4934	brady@ausplantnursery.com.au	72 Winton St (PO Box 766), Dalby QLD 4405

ABGC'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

As the year drew to a close, the Australian Banana Growers' Council AGM provided an opportunity to reflect on key areas of focus throughout 2025, including:

- **Advocacy and Membership**
- **R&D Coordination**
- **Supply Chain Engagement**
- **Biosecurity & Sustainability**
- **Grower Support (Biosecurity)**
- **Communications**

Members in attendance, both in-person and online, heard several important updates, including on the 'No Banana Imports' campaign.

A big thank you to Queensland's Food Farmers' Commissioner, Rachel Chambers, for presenting on how she'll be supporting farmers in her new role. You can read more about the office of the Commissioner to the right.

Congratulations to Barry Lowe, for officially receiving his Life Membership Award, after it was announced at Banana Congress earlier this year.

And finally, a shout out to Peter Spagnolo who took home the lucky door prize of a giant Yeti!

FOOD FARMERS' COMMISSIONER

Why was 'the office' of the Food Farmers' Commissioner established?

- Originally established in 2024 on the back of the QLD Supermarket Inquiry to support Queensland's farmers' and consumers, and to provide reports to the minister on issues or matters affecting Queensland farmers and consumers.
- There was an identified need for an independent body to be established as any 'real or perceived' lack of independence would negatively impact the ability of the commissioner to be as effective as possible at carrying out their support and advisory functions.

Who is the Commissioner?

Rachel Chambers is the Commissioner, bringing a wealth of experience to the role, including time as CEO of Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers and Mayor of North Burnett Regional Council.

What does the Commissioner do?

- They safeguard fairness, farming viability and long-term food security.
- They connect farmers, industry and government to resolve issues, improve policy, regulations and legislation.
- If you're treated unfairly, they help you through to a resolution.
- They are Queensland's experts on ACCC supermarket inquiry recommendations.
- They advise nationally on Queensland's food security issues.

How to get involved

- If you wish to remain anonymous – please lodge complaints or insights confidentially through our online portal: offcq.qld.gov.au/report
- If you would like support on any food farming matter:

> **rachel.chambers@offcq.qld.gov**
> **henry.waller@offcq.qld.gov.au**
> **offcq.qld.gov.au**

PROTECT WORKERS, PROTECT INDUSTRY

If you see or hear about illegal recruitment practices, migrant worker exploitation, or any activity that undermines fair employment in our industry, it's important to report it. You can do so confidentially, and even anonymously – search 'Border Watch Online Report' to go to the Home Affairs website. By reporting concerns, you are helping safeguard workers, protect your business, and uphold the integrity of the banana industry.

Drainage fluxmeter installation at Howe Farming, Fred Holden and excavator worker, May 2025 (Credit: Emma Carmichael)

BASALT ON BANANAS: PIONEERING TRIALS IN FNQ

Howe Farming and James Cook University (JCU) are leading research into Enhanced Rock Weathering, exploring how basalt can improve soil health, boost banana yields, and capture carbon.

In nature, silicate rocks slowly break down when they are exposed to water and CO_2, forming bicarbonate in dissolved form. The bicarbonate leaches into groundwater and eventually reaches the sea, where it is durably stored as dissolved bicarbonate or carbonate, or settles out as solid carbonate (limestone). This natural weathering process has been happening for millions of years but is very slow.

To speed up this process, crushed basalt, a byproduct of mining, is applied to agricultural soils. The increased surface area allows greater interaction with water and CO_2, speeding up the weathering reaction.

Over just months to years, enhanced rock weathering (ERW) may capture CO_2 and provide multiple co-benefits to farmers. These co-benefits include improved soil structure, supply of essential nutrients such as phosphorus, magnesium and calcium, reduced soil acidity, and better water and nutrient use efficiency.

After receiving the Mort Johnson Scholarship in 2023/24, Fred Holden completed his Honours with Distinction at JCU and was awarded a university medal, for a project on ERW. "The scholarship enabled me to focus on publishing and sharing my high-impact findings quickly, which was useful because ERW research is extremely competitive and fast-paced," he said. In early 2025, Fred was appointed Senior Research Associate on a project investigating how ERW could boost soil health and capture carbon, managing field trials across a range of cropping systems in Queensland.
A collaboration between JCU, University of South Australia and Carbonaught, this project is supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust.

This world class research collaboration has partnered with Howe Farming at their Atherton Tablelands banana farms. Basalt was spread in a replicated trial in July 2025, and the JCU team will now measure the resulting carbon dioxide removal, soil health and yield benefits over three years.

Three farm managers from Howe Farming were closely engaged in all phases of the trial establishment and are instrumental in ongoing operations in the trial. Howe Farming is one of the largest and most diversified farming enterprises in Far North Queensland and a leading producer of sugarcane, bananas and avocados. Principal Farm Manager James Howe has given ongoing support and access to their farm during establishment of the trial.

"Howe Farming Enterprises is privileged to be involved with Carbonaught and JCU in this exciting project," James stressed. "We have high hopes for enhanced rock weathering as a sustainable solution for agriculture's long-term contribution to reducing carbon emissions."

The operational scale of this farm trial provides the ideal platform for ERW research to be conducted under real industry conditions. "Howe Farming and the farm managers have been excellent to work alongside. Research trials with this level of collaboration are what really deliver on targets and genuinely guide industries," Fred added.

The project team's commercial partner Carbonaught is working with researchers and farmers to assess the technical and commercial viability of basalt application. Andrew Pedley, co-founder stressed the right mindset is important. "We've been fortunate and grateful to work with Howe Farming's leadership, first Dennis and now with James and the new leadership team. Their strong history of credible innovation means they know there's no

silver bullet and are willing and able to help bring new ideas to life."

"Producers should view ERW as an infrastructure upgrade (road, sheds etc), not just a soil additive," he explained. "It's not a fertiliser, lime replacement or carbon removal project...it's all of them happening at once. Spreading is only 10% of the equation. The hard part is building a project that holds up commercially and technically."

Carbonaught is committed to helping clients win in a new global trading environment and it all starts with a high level discussion. Andrew Pedley and team can be reached at rocks@carbonaught.io.

Professor Paul Nelson, overall project leader, said the banana trial builds on their experience evaluating the costs and benefits of ERW in Far North Queensland.

"We've operated the longest running ERW field trial in Australia since 2018, in sugarcane at Gordonvale, and we're applying those learnings into this one in bananas.

"ERW is expanding rapidly around the world, with large projects on every continent. We believe the banana industry is among the most likely to benefit here in Australia."

With this trial the project is at the forefront of obtaining the agronomic, environmental and commercial information needed to give farmers confidence about how it might work for them.

"It will take a few years to accurately detect changes in soil health, crop productivity and CO2 removal. Then farmers will be able to use the results to see if and how basalt application might be incorporated into their farm management."

Soil coring at Howe Farming banana trial site. Dylan Murphy, Shubham Jindal and Ben Krause. (Credit Fred Holden)

Drainage fluxmeter installation at Howe Farming, Fred Holden and excavator operator. (Credit Emma Carmichael)

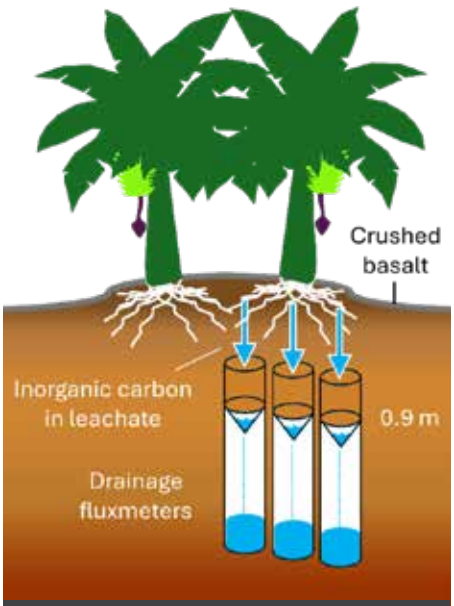


Figure 1: How CO_2 capture is measured at the trial site.

The field team at the Howe Farming banana trial site. Ben Krause, Dylan Murphy, Mia Beki, Shubham Jindal, Mahesh Mihiranga and Fred Holden. (Credit: Ben Krause)

EXPLORING NEW OPTIONS FOR AUSTRALIA'S LADY FINGER GROWERS

Katie Robertson, Jeff Daniells, Sharan Muthukumar and Carole Wright, Queensland Department of Primary Industries

The agronomic performance and taste of several Lady Finger-like varieties were evaluated over a plant crop and first ratoon at the South Johnstone Research Facility. The semi-dwarf Lady Finger selection, SCS451 from Brazil, looks promising with its high yield, short stature, pendulous bunch and desirable eating characteristics. On-farm trials are currently in progress on the Atherton Tablelands, examining the Fusarium wilt Race 1 resistance of several of these varieties.

As Fusarium wilt Race 1 continues to spread across Lady Finger production areas in Queensland and New South Wales, the search is on for alternative, disease-resistant varieties which could help reinforce this small, yet important share of Australian banana production. Under the project BA21002 'New varieties for Australian banana growers', the agronomic performance of several Lady Finger-like varieties (Lady Finger selections, Lady Finger hybrids, Silk hybrids) with purported resistance to Fusarium wilt Race 1, were evaluated over a plant crop and first ratoon at the South Johnstone Research Facility. In-house taste panels were also conducted to gain preliminary feedback on the fruits' eating quality and see how they align with consumer taste preferences. Staff were asked to rate their overall eating experience of the fruit on a scale of 1 – 9 (dislike extremely – like extremely) and leave any comments to further explain their rating.

The plant crop results are summarised in the August 2024 edition of *Australian Bananas* (pp. 22 – 23), which highlighted and explained the offtype issues identified in the control Lady Finger plants. This problem subsequently left only one plant for comparison with the new varieties. However, earlier studies on the research station suggest the data from this plant is agronomically similar in terms of height and finger length, but cycle time was more rapid than what has previously been observed (which would be more comparable to SCS451).

Some key findings from the completed trial are as follows:

- Japira, Pacovan Ken, Pacovan and SCS451 produced the heaviest bunches, with the latter three yielding the highest across a 12-month average (cumulative yield) when cycle time was accounted for.
- SCS451 was shorter than the other varieties at 3.5 m, followed by Platina at 4.0 m. Princesa and Tropical were comparable to Lady Finger at 4.3 m, while the remaining varieties were taller (the tallest was Japira at 5.4 m). As was noted in the plant crop, the increased height made several aspects of crop management more challenging.
- Japira had the longest fruit, measuring 24.6 cm on the third hand, while Princesa and Tropical had the shortest fruit (16.8 cm).
- Despite Tropical bunches emerging in winter in the first ratoon, it had the shortest fruit filling period of 107 days. However, it took longer to reach bunch emergence, resulting in it having the slowest cycle time overall.
- Bunches of the SCS451 threw well clear of the throat which contrasted with the related Santa Catarina Prata that often exhibits various degrees of choke-throat symptoms. Pacovan and Pacovan Ken also exhibited more pendulous bunches than Lady Finger.
- The taste ratings improved for all varieties in the first ratoon compared to their relatively poor performance in the plant crop, except SCS451 which maintained a consistent score of 'like moderately'. It was enjoyed for its balanced sweetness/acidity and firmer texture.
- In the case of Princesa, it jumped from having a rating of 4.1 (dislike slightly) to being on par with SCS451 in the first ratoon with a 'like moderately' rating. One explanation for this is that fruit in the plant crop contained several mature seeds which negatively impacted the eating experience (although comments were also made on it having an unpleasant flavour). However, no seeds were present in the first ratoon fruit, and the texture was positively described with words like 'soft' and 'creamy'. Several comments were made about its 'unique' and 'unusual' flavour with some describing it to have notes of passionfruit or papaya.
- In the first ratoon SCS451, Princesa and Pacovan achieved comparable taste scores to Lady Finger ('like moderately').
- Pacoua and Pacovan Ken remained the least favoured varieties out of those tasted, primarily attributed to their softer, 'slimey' texture.

Several of these varieties are being screened to confirm Race 1 resistance in two on-farm trials on the Atherton Tablelands. Look out for an update on plant crop results from those trials in a future issue of Australian Bananas.

From left to right, fruit from Santa Catarina Prata, Pacoua, SCS451, Pacovan, Sugar (not included in the agronomic analysis) and Platina lined up for taste-testing.

The yield and plant characteristics along with the score of the fruit's overall eating experience are presented in the table below. Mature bunches from the varieties Japira and Tropical were unavailable at the correct time to include in the taste panelling for the first ratoon.

	Lady Finger hybrids
	Sugar hybrids
	Lady Finger selections

Variety	Weeks from planting to R1 harvest	Bunch wt. (kg)[excludes stalk]	Cumulative yield (P + R1) kg/plant/yr	Finger length 3rd top hand (cm)	Pseudostem height (m)	Plant crop taste score (1 – 9)[2]	R1 taste score (1 – 9)[2]
Pacovan Ken	84.1	21.2	24.6	22.2	4.7	3.9	5.6
Platina	83.7	16.9	19.5	19.1	4.0	5.5	6.1
Pacoua	82.5	19.2	20.9	21.4	5.0	3.5	5.2
Japira	91.7	21.4	20.6	24.6	5.4	6.5	-
Princesa	85.2	13.3	15.7	16.8	4.3	4.1	7.1
Tropical	100.8	11.3	11.4	16.8	4.3	5.2	-
SCS451	80.7	20.8	22.9	19.9	3.5	7.0	7.1
Pacovan	85.8	20.7	24.4	21.6	5.1	5.5	6.5
Lady Finger[1]	67.9	16.6	24.4	18.0	4.3	5.6	6.9

1 Only this single plant was true-to-type

2 Where: 1 = dislike extremely; 2 = dislike very much; 3 = dislike moderately; 4 = dislike slightly; 5 = neither like nor dislike; 6 = like slightly; 7 = like moderately; 8 = like very much; 9 = like extremely.

SCS451 is shorter in stature and has a more pendulous bunch than Lady Finger

A mature, first ratoon Princesa bunch.

ENABLING CHANGE: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Reflecting on the last 5 Years of the National Banana Development & Extension Program

Tegan Cavallaro, Department of Primary Industries

Since 2013 the industry has supported extension and development programs through the R&D (research and development) levy, managed by Hort Innovation.

Over the years, these programs have also benefited from valuable in-kind contributions from the Queensland and NSW governments. The programs have played a crucial role in facilitating the sharing of knowledge and outcomes from various RD&E (research, development and extension) projects and initiatives that support the banana industry. They have also been instrumental in exploring practical applications of some of the R&D and helping fill short term knowledge gaps on high priority issues like bunch pest and disease management. The most recent program has just wrapped up. Here, we reflect on the main activities and achievements of this program over the past five years.

Wind back the clock 5 years. We were at the start of the COVID pandemic, and this program had just kicked off. Providing in-person extension services proved challenging for a time, and travel—particularly to places like Western Australia—was simply not an option. The program team forged on and in the first 12 months undertook an initial consultation with growers in FNQ and NSW. This allowed the team to listen and understand growers' priority issues which has helped shaped the program to deliver meaningful activities.

One-on-one extension: The program had an increased focus on one-on-one contact with growers in FNQ and NSW. This has been hugely beneficial to the program team in delivering the current program. It has helped inform activities, allowed the team to offer personalised information and advice and fostered open discussion which has offered valuable insights on industry issues as well as collaboration on research trials.

Roadshows: The Roadshow events are a series of technical information updates showcasing the latest banana R&D in a fast-paced, interactive manner delivered in the main growing regions around Australia. Throughout this program, 16 Roadshow events were held in FNQ, NSW, and WA, attracting nearly 420 growers and industry stakeholders.

Mareeba Roadshow 2022

NSW Roadshow event in 2023

Field days: Three field days were held in FNQ, drawing nearly 150 growers and industry stakeholders. Additionally, two field days were organised for growers in NSW. The field days have offered the opportunity to see plants and research in the paddock. Grower panels were a great way to share experiences firsthand, including during Bunch Spray Forum in FNQ.

Program team with growers who shared their experiences at the Bunch Spray Forum in 2024

Ingrid Jenkins & Tegan Cavallaro presenting at the 2023 Field walk

NSW Field Day at Tropical Fruit World in Duranbah, May 2024.

Australian Banana Industry Congress & Scientific Symposium: Over the course of the program, three Congress events were held. The program team facilitated a booth in the exhibition at all three events and showcased a total of six posters, with two presented at each Congress.

In collaboration with R&D Manager Rosie Godwin, the program successfully integrated the Scientific Symposium into the 2023 Congress and co-facilitated the event again at the 2025 Congress. The symposium proved to be popular, attracting 118 researchers, growers, and industry stakeholders in 2023 and over 180 registrations in 2025. The program team also contributed to the symposium by delivering two 10-minute presentations in 2023 and one in 2025.

Did you know? The program schedules roadshows in alternate years to the Australian Banana Industry Congress, ensuring a consistent and ongoing flow of R&D information to growers and stakeholders via events.

FNQ program team and booth in the exhibition area at the 2023 Congress

NextGen: The NextGen initiative aimed to promote innovative thinking among growers. While activities were disrupted by COVID-19, particularly in FNQ, two events were held early in the program before resources were redirected to address higher-priority issues like bunch pest and disease management. In NSW, two larger activities were conducted later in the program.

NSW grower Study Tour to QUT Bioeconomy Labs 2025

Innovation trials: What are they, you might ask? These trials were a component of the program, designed to explore practical aspects of applying innovative research to assist growers in adopting and implementing new practices. In FNQ, many growers would be familiar with the team's efforts, which included a series of field trials conducted both at the South Johnstone DPI and on growers' properties. These trials focused on elements of bunch pest and disease management practices, a critical issue for the industry following the removal of chlorpyrifos, the primary insecticide previously used to control bunch pests. Recognising the significance of this challenge, the program allocated more time and resources to address knowledge gaps. As a result, a total of 20 innovation trials were conducted in FNQ, with 17 investigating elements of bunch pest and disease management—far exceeding the program's original target of seven trials. In NSW, innovation trials have included the investigation of silicon amendments to increase tolerance of Lady Finger to Panama disease race 1, the application of predatory mites to manage mite flares and activities in consumer tasting of potential new varieties.

Photo op vs reality - The FNQ team undertaking bunch pest trials in FNQ. In one of the trials, they assessed rust thrips damage on every finger in every bunch in the trial – over 12000 fingers!

NSW Silicon Amendment trial 2022

BAGMan meetings: It's more than just a funny name. The Banana Agribusiness Managers' network brings together the people that support growers including agronomists, consultants, resellers and other service providers in FNQ. The program typically aims to host two meetings per year, with agendas shaped by the participants. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity to present and discuss new and emerging topics, as well as address industry issues as they arise.

BAGMan meeting in March 2025 – No surprises that bunch pest and disease management was the topic of discussion

Better Bananas website: The team manages all aspects of the Better Bananas website, which hosts banana R&D information. The team surpassed its target of 65 updates, delivering 100 updates, including 6 videos.

Did you know? When there is new info put on the Better Bananas website it's promoted via the industry e-bulletin. If you have clicked on one of the links in the e-bulletin you might have visited the Better Bananas website without even knowing it.

A glimpse behind the scenes of a video being made for the Better Bananas website

Australian Bananas magazine articles: The program has contributed 43 articles into all 14 editions published throughout the program.

Did you know? This is the industry's 75th edition of the magazine! Currently delivered to your mailbox 3 times per year it's a great way to keep across what is happening in the industry. If you're not receiving a copy you're missing out. Contact the Communications Program team to get on the mailing list – communications@abgc.org.au

As you can see by some of these activities the program works collaboratively with other industry initiatives, such as the Banana Industry Communications Program, so there is no duplication of efforts.

Looking forward The Queensland Government, Hort Innovation and industry's Strategic Investment Advisory Panel (SIAP) value banana development and extension programs, supporting ongoing investment. We aim to provide an update on the new program in the next magazine. If you would like to find out more about the program or have suggestions for a new program, we encourage all growers and stakeholders to get in touch with our team directly, Tegan Cavallaro on 0459 846 053 or Ingrid Jenkins on 0497 801 980.

The National Banana Development and Extension Program (BA19004) has been funded by Hort Innovation, using the banana research and development levy, co-investment from the Department of Primary Industries, New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and contributions from the Australian Government. Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture.

CONGRESS, CARNARVON-STYLE

Tegan Cavallaro, Department of Primary Industries

It has been a few months since growers and industry stakeholders gathered on the Gold Coast for the 2025 Australian Banana Industry Congress.

Recently, we caught up with two Western Australian growers, Chris Collins and Les Ball, who attended the event, to reflect their key takeaways and insights gained from stepping away from their farms to participate in the three-day event.

It didn't take long for these growers to express how valuable they found attending the event. Les, who has been growing bananas in Carnarvon for three years, shared, "I'm relatively new to the industry, so it was fantastic to listen to all the presentations—I thought it was all really insightful." Chris added, "One of the main takeaways for me was being reminded that many of the challenges we face are the same across different growing regions. TR4, for instance—it was helpful to learn how it's being managed and to be reminded about the threat it poses."

When asked which sessions, speakers, or presentations stood out, Les shared, "I really enjoyed it all. The Science Symposium was great. For me—I found the soil health and phosphorus presentations interesting. It was also valuable to be reminded about TR4 and gain an international perspective on it. It certainly reinforces the importance of on-farm biosecurity for us in WA." He also added "Jana Pittman was a great guest speaker, very inspiring."

Chris said, "I really enjoyed the soil health panel session with the growers. It was fantastic to hear a practical perspective on what growers are doing in this space. The variety session was also great, and the presentation by Naomi Abbott from NQ Banana Research was excellent. I now have a much better understanding of the importance and challenges of maintaining other plant characteristics, like yield and eating quality, while developing a plant with resistance to TR4." Chris also mentioned "The snake guy, Billy Collett - what a character! He was a great opening guest speaker."

Both Chris and Les also noted that, while they don't face the same challenge of managing leaf diseases in WA, the event reignited their interest in exploring the use of drones for applying foliar nutrients.

Both growers agreed that a key highlight of attending was the opportunity to connect and network with other growers and those who support the industry. Chris shared, "The growers I spoke with, no matter where they're from, were like-minded and great to talk to. While many things are different for us growing bananas in Carnarvon, most challenges are the same—we all face similar issues." Les added, "It was also valuable to reaffirm connections with the DPI and ABGC staff that support the industry."

When asked what they would recommend to others, particularly WA growers considering attending a future Congress, Les said, "It's definitely worth going. You always pick up one or two things that can make a difference. Things are always evolving and changing, and attending is a good way to learn about new things."

Chris added, "If you get the chance to go, go! It really opens your eyes to a lot of things we aren't exposed to in WA.

"It's a fantastic week—very social and a good opportunity to see what's going on in the world of bananas."

Both growers were partly supported to attend Congress by the National Banana Development & Extension Program with support from ABGC. They are happy to continue to share their experiences and knowledge gained from attending the event with fellow Carnarvon growers.

Tegan Cavallaro (DPI), Chris Collins, Les Ball, Rosie Godwin (ABGC).

Chris Collins was also recognised with an industry Award of Honour at the Banana Ball.

The National Banana Development and Extension Program (BA19004). This project has been funded by Hort Innovation, using the banana research and development levy, co-investment from the Department of Primary Industries and contributions from the Australian Government. Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture.

YES, WE HAVE MORE BANANAS

NEW BANANA HYBRIDS MOVE INTO TRIALS WITH RESISTANCE TO TR4

A banana breeding consortium has taken a significant step toward securing the future of one of the world's most consumed fruits, with several disease-resistant varieties now entering pre-commercial trials.

Musa Breeding Company (MBC) has used conventional, non-GMO breeding methods to identify banana hybrids showing resistance to Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4), one of the most destructive diseases affecting global banana production.

Bananas have been among the most widely available and stable fruits on supermarket shelves for more than a century, but TR4 has increasingly threatened their future. The disease originated in Asia and has severely affected production in major banana-growing countries, including China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam. Over the past three decades, TR4 has continued spreading westward, reaching Colombia in 2019 and later being confirmed in Perú, Venezuela, and possibly Ecuador.

MBC, a consortium based in Honduras, has been conducting conventional breeding work to address TR4 since 2017. Its members include North Queensland Banana Research (NQBR), AgroAmerica, and Dole Food Company, working with the Honduran Research Foundation (FHIA), which has more than 50 years of experience developing non-GMO plantain and banana varieties. The goal is to produce a variety that resembles the Cavendish banana, which has dominated the market since the 1950s, but with improved resistance to TR4.

Over the past eight years, more than 15 million individual flowers have been pollinated using several sources of resistance. Thousands of plants have been evaluated. The selected hybrids are now undergoing trials to assess disease resistance, yield, taste, and overall quality. They will be made available once field evaluations are complete.

The breeding effort is beginning to produce results, with several hybrids in advanced development and others now in pre-commercial testing. Some of these hybrids show resistance not only to TR4 but also to black Sigatoka or exhibit other traits of potential value for future production.

MBC states that the work aims to support long-term stability in global banana supply chains by providing growers with viable alternatives to current varieties that remain vulnerable to TR4.

Story courtesy of NQ Banana Research

Naomi Abbott, NQBR, with a TR4 infected sentinel plant at the MBC TR4 field trial in Australia.

TR4 internal infection in a susceptible control banana variety.

Cavendish fruit (right) compared to an MBC Hybrid (left) during productivity trials in Honduras.

Cavendish fruit (right) compared to an MBC Hybrid (left) during productivity trials in Honduras.

Dr. Roberto Young, Dole (left) and Dr. Marlon Lopes, FHIA (right), evaluate a Sigatoka resistant hybrid at Dole's Research Facility.

OPTTIMO IQ:
THE KEY TO DRIVING SUCCESS ON BANANA FARMS

The Australian banana industry needs a data-driven shift to keep pace with the current business environment and support more effective, efficient farm management. This is where Opttimo IQ becomes essential - a national benchmarking project designed to equip growers with the tools to boost productivity, profitability, and industry resilience.

Welcoming Jack Cresswell, Aglytica's National Business Development Manager

Aglytica is excited have Jack Cresswell on board as National Business Development Manager. Jack is the creator of the popular Farms Advice Podcast, sharing practical insights with Australian farmers. Jack brings a deep understanding of the challenges growers face, and a clear passion for helping rural enterprises thrive through data, innovation, and collaboration.

"When you're at the coal face each day it's hard to find the leaks and opportunities. Now you can," Jack said.

Contact Jack directly by emailing jack@aglytica.com or call 0438 976 910.

Strength in numbers for banana farms

Opttimo IQ helps banana growers peel back their business performance by comparing anonymised data across key metrics like costs, labour, yields, turnover per hectare, and on-farm fruit rejection. These comparisons are about greater insight for making better decisions.

The 2024 Benchmarking Report revealed:

- Wide variability in farm performance even across similarly sized operations.
- Persistent stagnation in inflation-adjusted sale prices, despite rising costs in labour, compliance, and packaging.
- Opportunities for smarter input use, labour allocation, and pricing strategies.

These findings empower growers to identify blind spots, adjust strategies, and improve returns.

Grow your farm, grow the industry

Banana farming is facing tightening margins, growing compliance costs, and more pressure to innovate. *Opttimo IQ* gives you the context to act decisively—not just with your own numbers, but with real comparisons from across the industry. It's also designed to feed back into broader industry advocacy, policy, and R&D (research and development) opportunities. Measure the return on your investment of time and resources.

The *power* of benchmarking increases with every new dataset. What is *powerful* is benchmarking against yourself, following the trends and being proactive.

Pass the message on to the farms in your area and get them to contact Eric (details below) because we're on the right track, but we want to go further.

Never too late to join

If you haven't participated yet, now is the time. It's never too late to join.

Submitting your data is confidential, straightforward, and valuable to your business. You'll receive:

- Your own tailored benchmarking report
- Access to CashPeek budgeting and cashflow forecasting platform for life of the project using "**Bananafarms**" coupon (Valued at $1260)

You'll be contributing to a stronger future for the whole industry.

Sign up through Aglytica's Project Manager, Eric Schluter at eschluter@aglytica.com
Ph: 0400 707 352

Know your numbers and grow your margins!

To support growers participating in the *Opttimo IQ* project, Aglytica is offering a free trial of its cashflow and budgeting tool, CashPeek. Specifically designed for farms and integrated with platforms like Xero and MYOB, CashPeek provides real-time visibility of your cash position, budget forecasts, and what-if scenario planning.

The platform not only helps manage day-to-day financial decision-making, but also supports streamlined transfer of data into the Opttimo IQ project, making participation easier and more efficient. Contact Eric or Jack to start your trial or learn more.

BANANA NUTRIENT RATE TRIALS

Project Update and November Field Walk

The largest replicated, multi-rate nitrogen and phosphorus trial ever established in Queensland bananas has reached another milestone, wrapping up its second full year of growth.

Planted at the South Johnstone Research Facility in October 2023, the trial continues to offer valuable insights into how nutrient rates influence plant development, productivity and soil health — and researchers say the results highlight the value of repeating the work on a commercial farm with a different soil type.

Two years in: strong growth and clear differences

The trial plants are now two years old and growing well, showcasing the strength of the project's design and management. During a recent field walk, growers could clearly see the differences between plants grown under varied nitrogen rates — some subtle, others striking.

This visible contrast has been one of the trial's most powerful communication tools, demonstrating how nitrogen inputs shape canopy development, plant stature and ultimately bunch characteristics.

Behind the scenes: how the science happens

Throughout the year, DPI researchers have been guiding growers through the complexity behind the trial's factorial design and monitoring systems.

Alex Lindsay, Senior Research Agronomist, has been leading visitors through the layout of the nitrogen trial and its dedicated fertigation system, explaining how the carefully controlled design allows reliable comparisons between nutrient treatments. During the Field Walk, Alex also introduced growers to the phosphorus trial, highlighting the regular sampling of soil, leaves and other plant tissues used to build a complete nutrient picture.

Catherine Chung has been central to measuring plant performance, demonstrating how growth rates are tracked and how leaf samples are collected for nutrient analysis. Catherine also showed how samples of soil water are drawn from buried lysimeters — a key part of understanding nitrogen movement and environmental losses.

Andrés Morera guided growers through the crop-management protocols used to keep the trial uniform, including bunch protection, harvesting procedures and detailed bunch assessments. He also outlined the different patterns of water use emerging from the network of soil-moisture probes across the replicated blocks.

Tony Pattison shared insights into how soil health and biology are assessed, and how these indicators shift under different nitrogen rates — an increasingly important piece of the nutrient-management puzzle.

Grower interest from across the region

Growers from Innisfail, Tully and the Tablelands attended the November field walk, many eager to see the contrasting nitrogen-rate plots firsthand and to better understand how the findings might apply to their own farms. Detailed assessment of bunch characteristics proved a particular area of interest, especially as growers look to optimise both yield and fruit quality.

Next steps: expanding the research to commercial farms

While the South Johnstone site has provided an exceptional research platform, DPI is now looking ahead. One of the key messages shared with growers is that the team is keen to establish a new nutrient-rate trial on a commercial banana plantation with a different soil type. This would allow direct comparison with South Johnstone's results and help validate recommendations across the diversity of Queensland's banana-growing environments.

Growers interested in partnering on a future trial are encouraged to reach out.

Want to know more?

For further information, please email:

alex.lindsay@dpi.qld.gov.au

The Banana Nutrient Rate Trials project is funded by the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program and delivered by DPI.

UNLEASHING PADDOCK POTENTIAL

Gavin Eilers from Tropicana Bananas on his journey to becoming a Future Farming Award winner.

RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN BANANA BMP

The Australian Banana Growers' Council introduced the Future Farming Award at the Australian Banana Industry Congress in 2021 to recognise Outstanding Achievement in Banana Best Management Practice.

This industry has always known that the land, the environment, is our livelihood, and we all value the waterways of our Far North Queensland region that flow into the Great Barrier Reef.

The award is given in recognition of commitment, innovation, willingness to share information, and contribution to the improvement of long-term water quality whilst achieving a productive farm.

By Skye Orsmond

Gavin Eilers is proud of the premium fruit produced on the farms he manages, but his favourite part of banana farming is the blank slate at the very start of the production journey.

"Land prep is my favourite, starting with a bare paddock and getting it into a prime position. I can go to a grassy paddock and then contour it – I know what will work."

Gavin started in the industry as a banana picker in his late teens, then worked his way up the ranks as a banana picker's foreman, paddock foreman, managing farms, share farming and now in his current position as North Queensland Operations Manager at Tropicana Banana.

Over the years, through mentorship from other growers he's worked for and with, training courses and self-guided interest – he has fine-tuned his abilities and harnessed his talent in land preparation.

"I'm good at what I can do with my eye, I can look at a paddock and see where roads and cross drains should be built, instantly. Doing it all, seeing it from the start to the end, I love it. Give me a blank slate – I'll work it."

The Knowledge Journey

There's a quote my father likes: "If they tell you you're crazy, you're probably on the right path." It rings true for the forward-thinking growers who influenced Gavin early in his career.

"Malcolm Buchanan was so advanced — ahead of his time. People were calling him mad, but back when I was 16, he was already contouring and building concrete drop structures. He was doing it long before it became common practice."

Gavin also credits Gary and Graham Grima for helping shape his approach to farming. "They were great to work for, and I learnt a lot from them," he said.

Among all the training he's undertaken, Gavin says one course in particular has stood out and helped him get ahead — understanding personality types.

"When you're a foreman, you expect a lot from your team — that's your job. But as I moved into management, I learnt how to treat everyone differently, based on their personalities. It helped me understand myself too, and how to work better with others."

Gavin was also part of a Young Growers' Group that gave up-and-coming growers a voice and helped build connections among what are now many of the industry's leaders.

Mentoring New Growers

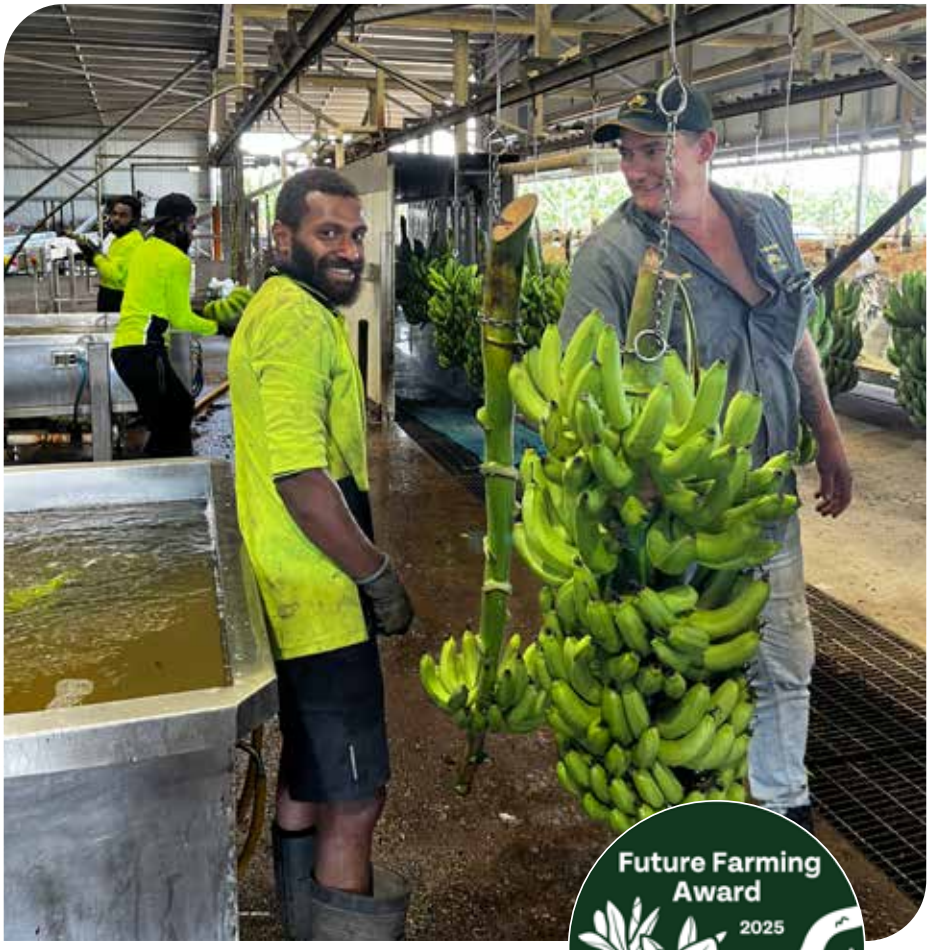
Gavin has played an active role in mentoring new and existing growers in the Innisfail region — a relationship he says benefits everyone involved.

"It works both ways, we learn from each other."

Gavin has been working with growers to demonstrate how farming using best practice achieves great results. While initially people are sceptical, the results speak for themselves.

"In terms of paddock design... It can be daunting because it's an investment and a big shift in practice."

"Gavin has been instrumental in helping growers see the benefits of Best Management Practice and has been a valuable source of information and wisdom to the BMP Team," Amelia Foster, BMP Coordinator, said.



Nutrient Management Trial participation

Gavin has been an important part of the DPI Banana Nutrient Rates Trial project, hosting a trial on his farm and sitting on the grower advisory panel.

"I see the project as a benefit to the industry. If we know the best rates – we will know what happens if we go over and under," he explained.

"It was a big job to get right, and I wanted to be involved to help. I'm happy to ask the questions others might not — it's better to be upfront and ask what everyone's thinking."

"Farming has a lot of variables – it wasn't perfect, but we've learnt a lot from the initial trial," he said.

'Playing in the dirt'

When I ask Gavin what he enjoys most about farming, he directs me to his wife, Misty.

"He loves playing in the dirt, looking at a paddock," she responds.

"My job these days is a lot different from what I grew up doing, which is a good thing because I've done it all, so I know what's involved in getting a banana from a plant onto a truck."

"Some days I'm fried - 90% of my time is managing people and operations - but playing in the dirt is what fixes me up."

Shared Success

Gavin is thankful for the support and trust that Pat Arcella and his family and his wife Misty have given him.

"They can see the results, see that it's working. I also want to thank the farm managers I work with for taking my lead and trusting me – and anyone I've worked with over the years, because I think we've all learnt a lot from each other."

Gavin's willingness to learn, adapt, and share knowledge has been key to his success -and it's clear that same approach has helped him become the award-winning farmer he is today.

The Banana BMP Best Practice Fund is funded under the Banana Best Management Practice (BMP) Project (2023-2026). The Banana BMP is funded through the Queensland Government's Queensland Reef Water Quality Program and delivered by Australian Banana Grower's' Council's in partnership with growers.

ARE YOU SET FOR THE WET?

This dry season has been a busy time with new banana plantings going in across the Wet Tropics.

As we move into the wet season, banana growers are reminded that this period is the highest risk for soil erosion and the loss of your precious topsoil. While we don't know when the wet season will arrive, we can be assured that it will come at some point.

The Queensland Reef protection regulations came into effect in December 2022 and have conditions that apply to plant blocks aligning with industry best practice.

To comply with the Reef protection regulations for plant blocks, you must ensure that all plant blocks have at least 60 percent covered ground in the inter-row by the start of the wet season, except when undertaking renovation works to remove wheel ruts. This will ensure that the inter-row is protected during the wet season when there is a high risk of nutrient and sediment run-off. Where there is limited trash from the young banana plants to provide inter-row cover, it's recommended that a rapidly establishing grassy cover, such as 'Jap' millet be planted, or the previous fallow crop is sprayed and left intact to provide a layer of mulch on the soil surface.

If you'd like some advice on keeping your topsoil give the BMP Team's Eleanor a call on 0447 000 203.

CULTIVATING THE FUTURE

THE QUIET WORK SUPPORTING THE BANANA INDUSTRY

Important work isn't always visible from the nation's banana paddocks. From ensuring fair regulations to advocating for practical government policies, foundations for a strong and sustainable industry are not only built on the ground, but also far from the farm gate.

For the past decade, Michelle McKinlay, Industry Strategy Manager, has been a dedicated behind-the-scenes advocate for the banana industry. Her project applies a strategic lens to agricultural development, ensuring banana growers' voices are carried into policy rooms where long term settings are shaped.

"When policy works well, it's like preparing the soil before planting," Michelle explained. "Farmers can focus on what they do best, and the conditions are right for growth. My role is to make sure decisions made in Brisbane and Canberra reflect the realities of the paddock."

This is why the recent meeting with the Queensland Environment Minister, Andrew Powell MP, was so important.

"We have the BMP project coming to the end of its contract and I want to make sure that the Minister understands the excellent work of the team and the amazing improvements that growers are making to their farms to reduce fertilizer and soil loss," she said.

The Government is also undertaking a review of the environmental regulations. "I wanted the Minister to know how growers are responding to the regulations because they have applied for 5 years now. There are elements of the regulations that need changing and I was able to explain this to him and senior departmental staff."

Unlike traditional on farm trials or R&D projects, the outcomes of this project aren't always immediately visible in the day-to-day work of growers. But its influence is steady, strategic, and deeply aligned with grower needs.

A different kind of impact

Michelle noted that most people see change when it's on the farm.

"My work happens a few steps earlier, shaping the policy and regulatory environment so that farm businesses can operate efficiently and sustainably."

This work includes:

- Influencing critical government policy through submissions on matters such as the closure of the Cape York Biosecurity Centre and review of environmental regulations.
- Collaborating with researchers and government to influence the direction of future funding to get answers to growers' questions about optimal nutrient application rates and soil loss.
- Shaping government policy and managing expectations about how growers can reduce soil loss from farms (when farming with 4 metres of annual rainfall!).
- Building relationships with key players across government to strengthen the banana industry's voice and to be able to have the tough and honest conversations when needed.

ABGC's Industry Strategy Manager Michelle McKinlay, left, with CEO Leanne Erakovic and Andrew Powell MO, Queensland Environment Minister.

In a way, success can be measured by what you don't hear.

"When we prevent an unnecessary regulation, secure support for an industry priority, or influence a government policy to reflect real farming practice — growers may never hear about it. But they benefit every day."

Staying connected to growers

Despite working largely in strategic and policy spaces, staying grounded in the realities of farming is core to the role.

"I'm constantly in touch with growers and industry leaders – both directly and indirectly through my ABGC colleagues. My credibility with government comes from understanding what's really happening on the ground."

It is the connection between paddock, policy makers and researchers that is essential. "I bring people together to align priorities and create a shared vision. Often my work is about joining ideas and making sure projects are heading in the same direction."

A decade of advocacy

After 11 years in the role, Michelle's enthusiasm hasn't dimmed.

"The banana industry is full of passionate people. Knowing that my work helps ensure growers' voices are heard and their operations are supported — that's incredibly motivating."

"Farmers shouldn't have to engage in policy debates on top of farming. My work ensures they can focus on what matters most, while government systems are aligned to support them."

With steady leadership and a strategic view, this project continues to quietly cultivate the conditions for the banana industry to thrive — ensuring farm businesses can grow strong and the industry operates with confidence and support long into the future. "My goal is the same as most growers: a strong, profitable resilient industry now and for the next generation. We're just striving for it in different ways."

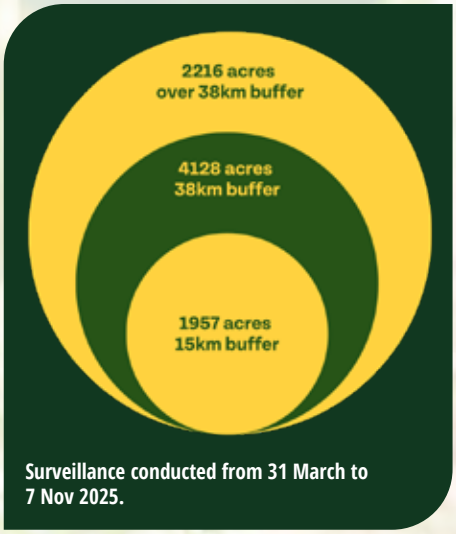
2025 GROWER SUPPORT (BIOSECURITY): END-OF-YEAR WRAP-UP

Glenn Johns, Communications & Engagement Officer

A year of progress and partnership

It's been a milestone year for the management of Panama TR4 within our industry, marked by renewal, collaboration and optimism. From the recommencement of surveillance operations to the rebranding of the TR4 Program, 2025 has been all about shaping a more proactive future for growers.

After a period of review and realignment, surveillance officially recommenced on 7 April under the new banner: **ABGC Grower Support (Biosecurity)**. This program builds upon years of industry experience while placing growers firmly at the centre of every activity. Supported by Biosecurity Queensland (BQ), the renewed approach focuses on early detection, education and practical support - helping every grower take strong, confident steps to protect their farms.



Surveillance conducted from 31 March to 7 Nov 2025.

Name change reflects renewed focus

In 2025, the Panama TR4 Control Program became **ABGC Grower Support (Biosecurity)**. While the focus on TR4 remains central, the new name reflects a shift in mindset - from fear and crisis management to empowerment and proactive prevention.

As Grower Support (Biosecurity) Manager, Elisha Farmer put it, "Our new name reflects who we are and what we stand for - supporting growers, building confidence and taking practical steps to protect our industry's future."

Science, Strategy and Surveillance

Throughout 2025, surveillance operations followed a carefully structured, science-based plan, starting with high-risk zones in the Tully and Innisfail regions and expanding outward to the Tablelands, Mareeba and Lakeland.

Routine sampling is no longer required on properties where the disease is present. Trained Field Officers visually inspect up to 80% of plants on all other farms, focusing on early detection and rapid response. If symptoms are identified, samples are collected and tested through Queensland's Plant Biosecurity Laboratory using molecular diagnostic techniques.

This data-driven approach ensures resources are focused where they are most needed. By introducing a risk-based surveillance strategy, ABGC has made monitoring more efficient and precise - targeting potential disease hotspots while minimising disruption to unaffected farms.

Taking the team forward

Behind every successful surveillance program is a dedicated team. This year, ABGC's Field Officers (FOs) underwent extensive training to prepare for their vital role in monitoring for Panama TR4 across Far North Queensland.

From mastering Queensland's Biosecurity Act requirements to hands-on sessions in the paddock, every officer received comprehensive instruction in disease recognition, sampling, decontamination and on-farm biosecurity protocols.

New directions: exploring alternative crops

Ten years on from the first detection in the Tully Valley, Australia remains a world leader in containment, thanks to the discipline and commitment of growers. In collaboration with Biosecurity Queensland, and following thorough risk assessments and consultation, sugarcane became the first approved alternative crop for land with TR4. Each case will be assessed individually, ensuring that new uses do not increase the risk of disease spread. This initiative offers impacted growers a path to maintain productivity while protecting the broader industry - proof that, even in the face of adversity, innovation and adaptability continue to thrive.

OUT AND ABOUT

The team thoroughly enjoyed interacting with many of you on-farm, at various events and through emails, e-bulletins and on the phone.

We attended the bi-annual Mareeba Field Days in FNQ in May, Banana Congress on the Gold Coast in August and various local grower meetings including a seminar to explain the Grower Support (Biosecurity) program to Punjabi growers in Innisfail.

We also met with the Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) in September to discuss critical biosecurity concerns for the region's banana industry and community.

Council representatives joined us on a farm at Innisfail where they saw firsthand the biosecurity practices used to protect against Panama TR4. The visit highlighted the value of the banana industry on the Cassowary Coast – and the importance of a united effort to protect it.

We also took the opportunity to meet the Biosecurity Queensland leadership team when they visited FNQ in October. The team had travelled to hear your perspectives and discuss any concerns or challenges you may be facing. It was also a chance to introduce Emma Atkins, the new Regional Biosecurity Director for the North.

We will be out and about next year and always encourage you to contact us at any time.

A word from Elisha Farmer, Grower Support (Biosecurity) Program Manager

As we look toward 2026, one thing is clear, biosecurity is a shared responsibility. Every grower, worker, supplier, and community member plays a role in keeping our farms and the industry safe.

This year, we've focused on practical, risk-based approaches to support growers, from targeted surveillance and guidance on managing TR4, through to investigating the risks of growing alternate crops on land where the disease is already present. It's been about working together, sharing knowledge, and making sure you have the tools and advice you need.

Thank you for your ongoing care and attention throughout 2025. The Grower Support (Biosecurity) team will continue to be available over the holiday period if you need assistance or have any questions.

As always, for the most up to date information and resources, your go to is our website: abgcgrowersupport.com.au

We look forward to working with you in 2026, keeping farms and industry strong, and hope you can enjoy some down-time throughout holiday season.

ALL-IN SURVEILLANCE – WHAT IT REALLY MEANS

Panama TR4 surveillance is delivered by the Australian Banana Growers' Council, under the Grower Support (Biosecurity) program.

It's a program that puts you – the grower – first, aiming to help protect your farm and the banana industry more broadly. Early detection is key to containment and, in a worst case scenario, it buys you valuable time to get back to business.

Our trained team will work with you to find the best time to visit and provide you with any information you require. They're also happy to chat with you about your biosecurity plan, ideas around TR4 management and more.

It's important to remember though, that due to a change in the Biosecurity Act, this program is no longer 'opt-in' – it's all in. We will always work with you and seek consent for entry.

But what happens if you say no?

1. If it's poor timing, we can work with you to reschedule a visit. Our team is happy to assist.
2. If it's more than this, we'll seek to understand your concerns and reasons for saying no. You may wish to speak with our Program Manager, CEO or even a member of the ABGC Board as part of this process.
3. In rare occurrences, where an agreement cannot be reached and all options are exhausted, Biosecurity Queensland will step in to ensure General Biosecurity Obligations, and requirements under the Act, are being met. This is a last resort and one we want to avoid.

Industry has said, time and again, that surveillance is an effective way of monitoring this disease – but it only works if everyone is 'in'. We understand that it can be daunting and want to make sure it's as smooth as possible. Our sincere thanks to everyone who has been part of efforts so far.

A WORTHY PLACE FOR BANANA WASTE

Bananas that have a blemish, or don't make the cut for a carton, are travelling to school breakfast and food relief programs across the nation.

Foodbank National Supply Chain Manager, James Trickey, recently visited banana farms in North Queensland.

"It's always good to get out to the farms, and check-in with farmers who are supporting us."

Australian Banana Company's General Manager Steve Morice, said that the process is very simple and flexible, and they're happy to give back to those in need.

"Our packers put fruit that doesn't meet spec into a bin. We contact Blenners Transport when we have bins ready to go – generally we'll fill about 3 to 6 bins a week.

"We also donate about a dozen boxes of bananas a week to local schools in the area.

"It's great to see the fruit not going to waste and being utilised in school programs and offered to those who are doing it a little tough at the moment."

Foodbank are seeking more banana growers to supply fruit.

"Food security is a big issue and at Foodbank we help fill a gap that is growing each year."

Bins, road transport (of the growers' choice) and logistics is covered by Foodbank. They are a not-for-profit, non-denominational, federated organisation operating in every state and territory in Australia.

If you're interested in donating, get in touch with James Trickey on 0433 328 779 or james@foodbank.org.au

FOOD BANK

Get in touch

James Trickey:

0433 328 779

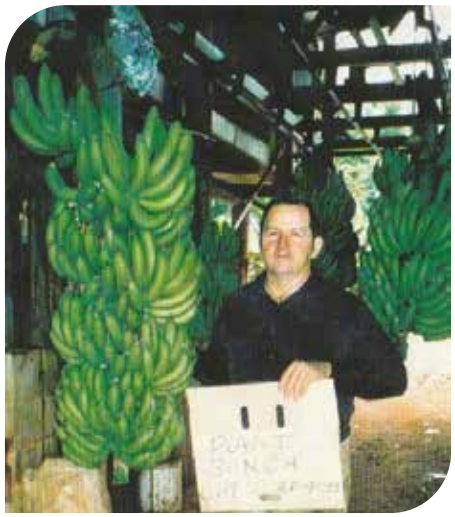
james@foodbank.org.au

Got bananas to spare?

Help Foodbank Feed Aussie Families

- ✓ Give Foodbank a call
- ✓ We'll pick up the produce and handle the transport
- ✓ We'll also manage any product treatment
- ✓ Your bananas fuel Aussie kids' breakfasts

A LEGACY ETCHED INTO THE INDUSTRY: REMEMBERING LACHIE RICK OAM



The name Lachie Rick resonates across the Australian banana industry - a grower, innovator, leader, and mentor whose influence spanned more than six decades. Lachie passed away in October, leaving behind a remarkable legacy and a large, loving family including children, grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Lachie's family were among the early pioneers of banana growing in North Queensland. In 1951, his grandparents purchased their first farm at Euramo, before expanding to Tully and Mission Beach.

More than a grower, Lachie was an innovator. His family helped drive practical improvements that changed the way bananas were produced. Among these achievements was the invention of the first bagging machine. Originally designed for harvesting banana bunches, the machine was retro-fitted and modified by Lachie into a purpose-built bagging system, paving the way for a technique now commonplace across the industry.

Lachie's story can't be told without Lyn, his wife, partner and backbone of their family and farming life. Lyn supported every aspect of the operation and, as she liked to say, did "every job on the farm except carrying the bunches." Though even that came with an exception: she once carried a single bunch as part of a bet. The prize was accompanying Lachie on a work trip to NSW. She won, and off they went for a Coffs Harbour getaway.

A Life in Bananas

Through the decades, Lachie saw the industry at its toughest, cyclones Winifred (1986) and Joy (1990), extreme price downturns, and the constant physical demands of farming. In 1957, when low prices hit hard, he worked at the local plymill during the week and tended to bananas on weekends. It was there he met Lyn, and the pair married in 1963 before returning to full-time farming in Mission Beach.

Lachie quickly became active in industry leadership, beginning as secretary of the Mission Beach–Bingil Bay Fruit Growers Association. Soon he was working with the Banana Sectional Group, joining the board in 1973.

Over the next 16 years, Lachie played a central role in strengthening national unity across Australian growers. He represented Queensland nationally, served as ABGC chairman for two terms (1989–90 and 1991–92), and earned both an ABGC Award of Honour and an Order of Australia Medal for his service.

Innovation in the Family DNA

The Rick family has long been associated with forward-thinking farming. Lachie's youngest brother, Charlie, designed the A-Frame trailer, an innovation that removed the need for one person inside the trailer to receive bunches. Though never patented, it spread rapidly across Queensland, WA and NSW.

Brother Frank contributed his own chapter in industry history, growing a world-record banana bunch at El Arish weighing 236 pounds and four ounces (about 107 kilograms). Some bunches were so large they required electric winches just to lift.

A Lasting View of the Industry

Lachie stepped back from all committees in 1992, but remained a close observer of the industry he devoted his life to. He often reflected on how far things had come since the days of growing bananas among stumps and logs, before bulldozers, before mechanisation, before modern growing systems.

Despite the challenges faced by growers today, including Panama TR4, Lachie remained optimistic.

"I do think the banana industry is one of the best for researching and keeping up-to-date," he said, a sentiment that speaks to his belief in progress, innovation and the people who continue the work he helped shape.

AUSTRALIAN BANANAS TAKE CENTRE STAGE AT EKKA

Following the success of the activation at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, the Marketing Strategic Investment Advisory Panel endorsed taking the Australian Bananas stand to Queensland's largest and most loved annual event - the Royal Queensland Show (Ekka). From 9-17 August, Australian Bananas delivered a memorable and engaging experience.

The activation brought Australia's favourite fruit to life with a mix of fun, flavour and education. Visitors had the chance to meet banana growers and learn firsthand about the growing process, while enjoying delicious banana samples – from banana pieces, to smoothies and banana oat yoghurt bowls.

The stand was also featured on the popular Ekka Learning Trail, included in the official Ekka Passport and Teacher's Guide, giving school groups an engaging, educational farm-to-plate experience. A specially produced video took children on a visual journey to see how bananas are grown and harvested.

Other interactive elements such as smoothie bikes, where visitors pedalled to blend their own banana smoothies, a banana bunch guessing game and temporary tattoos for children kept visitors entertained.

With more than 425,000 attendees, the stand attracted high foot-traffic, served more than 38,000 banana samples, and even welcomed a surprise visit from the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese. Impressively, 91% of surveyed visitors said they were more likely to eat bananas after the experience, making this activation a great success.

BANANA GYM PASS RETURNS FOR NATIONAL BANANA DAY

Driving demand and celebrating Australian Bananas

On National Banana Day, for one day only, the country's favourite meal-in-a-peel became an all-access gym pass.

People across Australia were encouraged to buy a banana and take it to a participating gym near them, where they could use it to gain free entry. This initiative, now in its second year following a highly successful debut in 2024, is a key activity in the levy-funded banana marketing program.

Endorsed as part of the Strategic Investment Advisory Panel workshop in July, the Banana Gym Pass campaign was designed to drive both consumption and awareness of Australian bananas. It supported the shared goal of growing demand and the vision to be the #1 natural energy source for all Australians.

What was new in 2025?

More than twice as many gyms were participating nationwide, including major chains like Virgin Active, Fitness First, and Anytime Fitness.

Australians could unlock a free workout at more than 900 gyms simply by purchasing a banana from any local supermarket or grocer and presenting it at a participating gym.

The campaign continued to hero the natural energy-boosting properties of bananas, packed with nutrients to fuel active lifestyles.

The activity was effectively promoted through an integrated media campaign spanning OOH, radio, influencer collaborations, in-mall activations, and a robust point-of-sale presence. More than 3000 posters were displayed on shelves across Australian retailers. Furthermore, the impact was amplified by teaming up with ambassadors as spokespeople across media. Fitness coach and television personality Tim Robards helped spread the message about the importance of staying active and fuelling your body the right way. Grower and TikTok creator Miki Buchanan brought a sense of authenticity and a strong connection to Australian bananas.

Results

The campaign generated 101 pieces of earned media coverage and approximately 47.6 million opportunities to see the banana key messages. Coverage landed across a broad mix of national online and broadcast outlets, including Concrete Playground, 10 News, 2GB Sydney and 7 News Melbourne. Paid media across radio and out of home generated over 52 million impressions, while influencer-led social media content reached 654,000 people and delivered 3.5 million views.

BANANA RACE DAY

30 AUGUST 2025

Thousands gathered at Innisfail Turf Club for the ever-popular Banana Race Day in August.

We love to see the touches of yellow – and even some fruity fashions – but more importantly, it was a great chance to kick back and have a good time.

ABGC BOARD IN NSW

1-4 SEPTEMBER 2025

The ABGC held a quarterly board meeting in Coffs Harbour in September, taking the opportunity to catch up with Mid North Coast growers.

Thank you to those who made time to discuss key issues facing the local banana industry, and to share a few laughs at dinner.