

NFFFC Communique

Meeting 30

Meeting 30 of the National Fruit Fly Council (the Council) was held on Wednesday 15th June 2022. The meeting was held in the Ecosciences Precinct, Dutton Park, Brisbane. Due to COVID-19 and its ongoing impact on interstate travel, some Council members attended virtually via Microsoft Teams.

State of Fruit Fly in Australia

Queensland

The Torres Strait exotic trapping and eradication program is progressing well with no significant issues reported. Queensland is currently negotiating a new 5-year contract with Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) utilising indigenous rangers, which has been proven beneficial for both Queensland and the rangers during the COVID response.

Despite COVID and flood impacts all fruit fly research projects are on track. The *Phenology, Demography, and Distribution of Australia's Fruit Flies- A Coordinated National Research Program*, led by Peter Leach have completed the field trials and is now in the writing up phase. Queensland's work is involved in the optimisation of bulk DNA extraction protocols and evaluation of DNA quality under the variable trapping and environmental conditions. Queensland led the development of new trap designs to enhance capability, and the new validator LAMP assay project for rapidly diagnosing *Bactrocera trivalis* (New Guinea fruit fly) is nearing completion.

Tasmania

The Securing Our Borders initiative is principally focused on mitigating the risk of fruit fly entry to Tasmania via importation pathways through high intensity inspections of fruit fly host produce across the high-risk season of October to May. This combined with required phytosanitary treatment has proved to be very effective in recent years in reducing the risk of fruit fly entry into Tasmania. Preparations are now underway for the 2022/23 season. Of course, inspections across commodities occur year-round but the intensity of those checks are adjusted to a lower level across winter in line with the level of risk posed by fruit fly.

To assist in communication and participation in fruit fly issues, Biosecurity Tasmania hosts the Tasmanian Fruit Fly Task force (TFFTF) which meets regularly during the high-risk season. The TFFTF is a committee consisting of government and industry representatives, providing an effective information exchange forum between government and industry. The final meeting for 2021/22 was held in April this year with the first meeting of the taskforce in this financial year to be convened in late September.

Victoria

Agriculture Victoria is progressing various projects under the Victoria Fruit Fly strategy (2021- 2025), with \$3 million over two financial years to fund area-wide management activities to three vital horticultural regions: Greater Sunraysia, Yarra Valley and the Goulburn Murray. Activities which are included, but not limited to, are monitoring programs for QFly, voluntary host tree removals, hot spot management and working with community to build capability.

Another project is the state's review of Victoria's trapping network, like New South Wales, revising on risk and evidence-based trapping model. In research and development, the biocontrol project incorporating parasitoid release is going well, with the over wintering studies and parasitosis being made available in regional Victoria and metro Melbourne. The accompanying biopesticide research program is yielding promising early results, with investigation of entomopathogenic fungi isolates in laboratory trials.

South Australia

A meeting was held in Loxton with industry and local government representatives about the spring plan for QFly responses to the recent outbreaks in the Riverland regions. Several beneficial outcomes stemmed from



the meeting including innovative ideas from industry to modify approaches for the remaining six months of the year to eradicate fruit fly from those areas.

In partnership, government and industry are generating a huge drive to increase the amount of SIT that South Australia could produce from the QFly facility. South Australia is investigating how they can increase capacity with the aim of doubling the number of flies produced per week. As part of the priority to maintain freedom from Medfly, and with the Western Australian Medfly facility likely to be closing, South Australia is exploring options for a new Medfly SIT facility, with funding and location to be confirmed.

New South Wales

The 11th International Symposium for Fruit Flies of Economic Importance workshop is being held over the 13-18th November 2022 in Sydney and preparations for this event are well under way.

Progress is advancing well with the Exotic Fruit Fly National Action plan, a Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) grant project. Another project, Phenology, Demography, and Distribution of Australia's Fruit Flies - A Coordinated National Research Program, which NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) is involved with is also progressing well.

NSW DPI are currently revising their trapping grid based on risk-based tracking rather than geolocation, due for completion in June 2022. The NSW DPI simulation exercise of Medfly incursion into the state that was recently delivered in Mildura is in report writing stage. Early results show the state is now better prepared for a potential incursion.

Western Australia

In research and development, there are three ongoing projects. The first project *The Phenology, Demography, and Distribution of Australia's Fruit Flies - A Coordinated National Research Program*, Western Australia is focusing on the Northern Territory fruit fly (*B. aquilonis*), with a project meeting in the week of June 20th, 2022, in Cairns. The second project is exploring biologically based entomopathogenic fungi to control Medfly (for area wide management), with field trials expected to commence shortly. The third project is centred on the cherry protocol under the *Developing a National Systems Approach for Leading Biosecurity Requirements to Access Key Asian Markets* (AM17001) project, led by CSIRO. This project has been considered by SDQMA (Subcommittee on Domestic Quarantine and Market Access) and will be discussed at AFFTAC (Australian Fruit Fly Tactical Advisory Committee) at their June meeting

It was also noted that the Mediterranean Fruit Fly (Medfly) SIT Facility and release program is due for closure in the near future.

Industry

The extreme climatic and rain events experienced over the past 18 months have increased concerns around pest and disease pressures. Despite these concerns, it was noted in Queensland mango orchards that low numbers of fruit fly incursions found in traps were likely due to the cooler winter weather. Over the previous summer season, trapping for fruit flies over the mangoes season yielded low results which is encouraging in relation to strong management reducing pest pressure.

Recent articles on fruit fly management in agricultural journals has increased across several commodities, resulting anecdotally in increased awareness around fruit fly control in endemic areas.

Despite strong overseas demand, the citrus sector is generally somewhat pessimistic regarding export for the next year or two. This is due mainly to the increased difficulties with exporting as a direct result from the fruit fly outbreaks in South Australia resulting in Pest Free Area (PFA) not being available to all growers in that area as well as broader logistics around shipping capacity.

Victorian summerfruit growers met in recent months to discuss issues such as Interstate Certification Assurance (ICA) 21 and abandoned orchards, with some growers exiting the industry recently. The key outcomes of the meeting were that growers are struggling to chart a path forward regarding ICA21, however the positives of potential market access around irradiation pathways into Vietnam provided some hope for the sector moving forward.

There was strong interest across industry regarding the upcoming Fruit Fly and Trade Hypothetical. The Council were encouraged to ensure engagement around this issue across all members of the supply chain over time.

Council Update



Progression of the *review of the operations and composition of the Council* has continued with the draft Terms of Reference finalised and ratified at this meeting, leading to the formation of a revised structure with immediate effect. The Council now consists of a larger Council that will meet at least twice annually. An Executive Committee is being formed that will meet at least four times per year and will comprise members of the Council to ensure the delivery of project outputs and the achievement of outcomes. Accompanying the Council and Executive Committee will be a number Working Groups comprised of members of the Council and other specialists from across the value chain as required. They will provide broader engagement across the national fruit fly system and the National Fruit Fly Strategy with initial focus on trade, research, and extension stakeholders.

Another short-term working group is being convened for the high priority area of agrichemical issues relating to fruit fly management. This group will work closely with the Council to identify and progress short to medium term issues and solutions to support industry in current and emerging agrichemical challenges as well as other more novel approaches for fruit fly management. A webinar was held on the issue on May 31 with key presenters being Kevin Bodnaruk from AKC Consulting, David Daniels from the citrus industry (and Council) and Prof Neena Mitter from the BioClay / Whitefly novel technologies project led by QAAFI.

2021-22 Implementation Report and 2022-23 Implementation Plan

The *2021–22 Implementation Report* is being finalised. This report summarises progress and achievements from 1 July 2021 to 31 June 2022. Progress in each of the eight key result areas from the National Fruit Fly Strategic (NFFS) 2020-25 is tracked against the strategic framework and objectives within the NFFS. The Implementation Report is finalised in June of the previous financial year and published along with the next financial year's Implementation Plan.

The *2022–23 Implementation Plan* is also well developed. This plan collates key fruit fly activities that have been developed and resourced by stakeholders from 1 July 2022 to 31 June 2023 and maps them against priority areas in the NFFS. This is then used to monitor progress against the NFFS and identify gaps that need to be addressed in the national system. The implementation plan acknowledges the many different stakeholders' considerable and ongoing contributions to fruit fly management in Australia. Importantly, it provides an opportunity to collectively consider potential gaps in this system as guided by the Intergovernmental Agreement on Strengthening Australia's Fruit Fly Management System.

Fruit Fly Projects

DAFF Engagement and Extension (E&E) project

Plant Health Australia, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture of Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) will be conducting a fruit fly hypothetical in July 2022 to help explore potential impacts on industry and trade if there were a change in Australia's fruit fly distribution. It has been developed under Theme 2 of the project and includes consideration of preparedness activities that could help to minimise those impacts identified above. The hypothetical will centre on a change in recognition of Medfly distribution in eastern Australia – with the expectation that the key learnings could be extrapolated across any potential change in fruit fly status.

The project has also recently commenced a series of workshop sessions under Theme 1 of the DAFF E&E project aimed at further developing a national approach to fruit fly management as a system. The purpose of these sessions is to build a common understanding of Australia's complex and interdependent fruit fly system: what is at stake; what the critical factors for success are; where we are most at risk; and how to influence the system. The sessions also provide the Council with broader input, helping to shape the story around this and the agenda for national fruit fly priorities.

These activities are a direct result of feedback on priority issues developed by participants of the National Fruit Fly Symposium held in May 2021.

Council Meetings

The next Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 20th and Wednesday 21st September in Canberra.

