

Question on Notice

No. 448

Asked on 2 April 2019

MR D PEGG ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise what action the Palaszczuk Government is taking to back banana growers?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

One of the biggest threats facing banana growers in Far North Queensland is Panama disease tropical race 4. Panama TR4 has had a devastating effect on banana crops worldwide and, if not managed, could do the same here.

Since the disease was first detected on a commercial banana farm in Far North Queensland, government, industry, research bodies and the community have all worked together to control and contain the disease.

This collaborative approach has contributed to Queensland having one of the most successful control and containment strategies in the world. Four years on, the disease has been contained to three farms all in close proximity of each other.

The industry bought out the first affected farm and shut operations down. Biosecurity Queensland continues to work with the owners of the two operating farms to meet their on-going biosecurity obligations with minimum disruption to their business operations.

The Palaszczuk Government recognises the banana industry as one of the region's main economic contributors and biggest employer. To date, the Government has invested over \$29 million to manage Panama TR4.

This funding has supported:

- Biosecurity Queensland's Panama TR4 Program to work closely with the peak industry body, the Australian Banana Growers' Council (the ABGC), to control and contain the disease;
- a coordinated feral pig management program on the Cassowary Coast; and
- research and development projects to help the industry manage the potential impacts of the disease over the longer term.

The Palaszczuk Government recently committed an additional \$12.089 million for the Panama TR4 Program to continue until 2022-23.

The funding supports a formal collaborative agreement between the Palaszczuk Government and the ABGC to help deliver long-term resilience and stability in this sector.

In an innovative approach to cooperative management, a working group formed between the Palaszczuk Government and the ABGC is currently developing that agreement to ensure the continued delivery of the Panama TR4 Program in Queensland.

Although much good work has been done to protect the industry, there is no room for complacency. Panama TR4 is a difficult disease to manage and, in reality, it is here to stay and will eventually spread. Planning for the future is critical.

For this reason, the Panama TR4 Response and Resilience Taskforce was established following the initial detection of the disease in March 2015, to advise the Premier and Minister for Trade and the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries on strategies that best support the economic and social well-being of banana producers in Queensland.

Queensland is leading a portfolio of research partnerships with industry, the Australian Government, universities and growers undertaking world leading research to improve our collective knowledge of banana production best practices, in the presence of TR4. For 2018/2019 alone, the total research, development and extension investment by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in bananas is \$2.37 million.

While there is no simple cure for Panama TR4, we have greatly improved our understanding of how the disease operates and the strategies industry can use to manage disease inoculum. This includes how to reduce spores being produced in infected plants and how to reduce spores in the soil before replanting bananas. Other research has a longer-term focus that aims to identify banana cultivars that are resistant to TR4, are suited to the Australian production system, and are appealing to consumers.

The approaches and outcomes to date have been well received by industry, and have been viewed internationally as a potentially positive model for adoption.