

Question on Notice

No. 531

Asked on 3 April 2019

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

QUESTION:

With reference to the importance of biosecurity—

Will the Minister advise of the progress in the battle against Panama disease tropical race 4?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

Biosecurity Queensland's battle against Panama disease tropical race 4 (Panama TR4), continues to defy the odds when compared to other countries dealing with the disease.

With only three infested farms in four years, all near to each other in Far North Queensland, the Panama TR4 control and containment program has been a very welcome success. Queensland's response has attracted international attention as one of the most successful Panama TR4 management strategies in the world.

This success is largely due to the combined efforts of industry, government, research bodies and the community all working together.

To date, the Palaszczuk Government has invested over \$29 million to contain the disease, determine the extent of the outbreak, conduct research and disease management projects to help industry manage the long-term impacts of the disease, and assisting the banana industry to implement on-farm biosecurity systems.

In addition, to maintain its investment in the region the Palaszczuk Government committed additional funding of \$12.089 million for the Panama TR4 Program to continue until 2022-23.

Since the first detection, Biosecurity Queensland surveillance teams have walked over 150,000 hectares looking for any further signs of the disease, and to date the disease has only been found on three farms.

The first farm was purchased by the industry and production operations were shut down. Biosecurity Queensland compliance officers are working closely with the two remaining operating infested farms to meet their on-going biosecurity requirements to minimise the risk to the broader industry.

Having good on-farm biosecurity measures remains a key way to be biosecurity ready to protect banana farms against Panama TR4.

To demonstrate the importance of this, both the operating infested farms had good biosecurity procedures in place and were trading within a few days of Panama TR4 being detected on their properties.

Banana farming in Far North Queensland continues to adapt in the presence of this serious disease.

It is promising to hear reports of growers putting on-farm biosecurity measures in place and self-regulating by not allowing dirty vehicles, machinery and equipment on to their farms. This is a great sign for the industry moving forward.

Biosecurity Queensland and the Australian Banana Growers' Council want to give growers a chance to have their say on the impact of Panama TR4 on them and their farms.

We have engaged an independent research organisation to talk to Far North Queensland growers to gain a better understanding of the barriers and motivations for implementing on-farm biosecurity.

This is to make sure we are doing the best job we can to assist them, and the broader banana industry, in implementing effective farm biosecurity plans to help control and contain the disease.

In an innovative approach to cooperative management, a working group formed between the Palaszczuk Government and the Australian Banana Growers' Council is currently developing a collaborative agreement to ensure the continued delivery of the Panama TR4 Program in Queensland.

The agreement will move towards a 50:50 shared funding arrangement over the next three to five years.

This type of agreement will be the first of its kind for Biosecurity Queensland and the industry and is a natural progression to formalise the collaborative working relationship that has been in place since the disease was first detected in 2015.